

HISTORICAL PROFILES / Qatar

The pearling industry in Qatar

Qatar first appeared on the international stage as a result of overseas interest in the pearling industry during the second half of the 19th century. At this time, the demand for pearls was rapidly increasing in Europe, North America and India with increased wealth from industrial (Europe and North America) and social (India) revolutions. Travellers from Europe also came to the region during this period, seeking trade fortunes and adventure. Many remarked on the rich pearl beds and the importance of the industry to the local area. The natural abundance of high-quality pearls, and the industriousness of the people of Qatar in gathering them, placed the peninsula on the global map. This increased Qatar's economic and political presence in the region, and drew the attention of local and international powers.



Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammed Al-Thani and the Ottomans in Qatar

Sheikh Muhammad ibn Thani was the first official ruler of Qatar. After his retirement, his son Sheikh Jassim bin Muhammad Al-Thani, became the ruler of the State of Qatar on 18 December 1878. Sheikh Jassim truly united and founded the nation of Qatar. He deftly managed the complex political situation, allowing the Ottomans to station themselves in Doha in return for recognising his authority in Qatar. Tensions with the Ottomans were ever-present, and came to a head in 1892–93 when an Ottoman force entered Qatar over taxes and the non-implementation of Ottoman reforms. Sheikh Jassim, whose charisma and strong leadership had won over the people of Qatar, rallied the Qatari people and won a decisive victory at the Battle of Al-Wajba in 1893. This was a key moment in Sheikh Jassim's rule and the nation's history.



Al-Zubarah, an important trading port

Qatar has always been considered to be one of the main fishing, pearling and trading ports in the Arabian Gulf. During the 18th century, Al-Zubarah emerged as a prominent trading district in Qatar due to its immense number of pearl beds. The resources of the sea were used by the people of Al-Zubarah, with pearling, fishing and maritime trade playing a vital role in the founding and flourishing of this town. Al-Zubarah had the added advantage of being tax-free, which resulted in the success of its trading port. The successes of pearling and trading created an economic surplus that permitted the rapid development of Al-Zubarah. It is thought that the population reached its peak during the 18th century.



Al-Zubarah

5th millennium BC; 18th century settlement; abandoned probably at the beginning of the 20th century