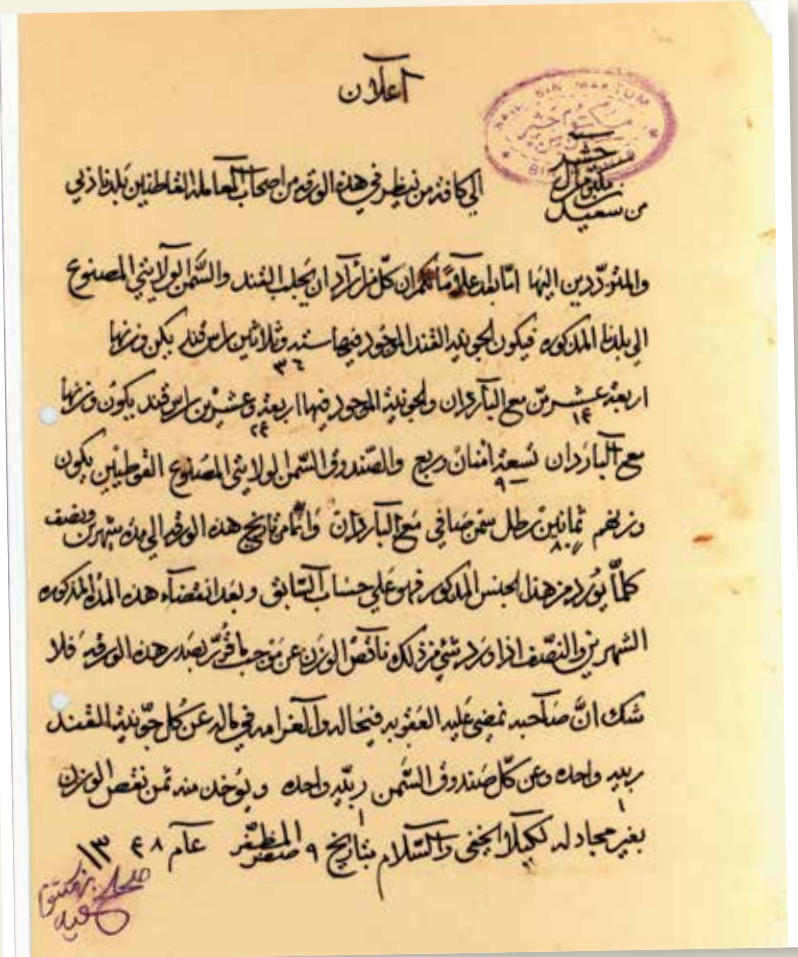


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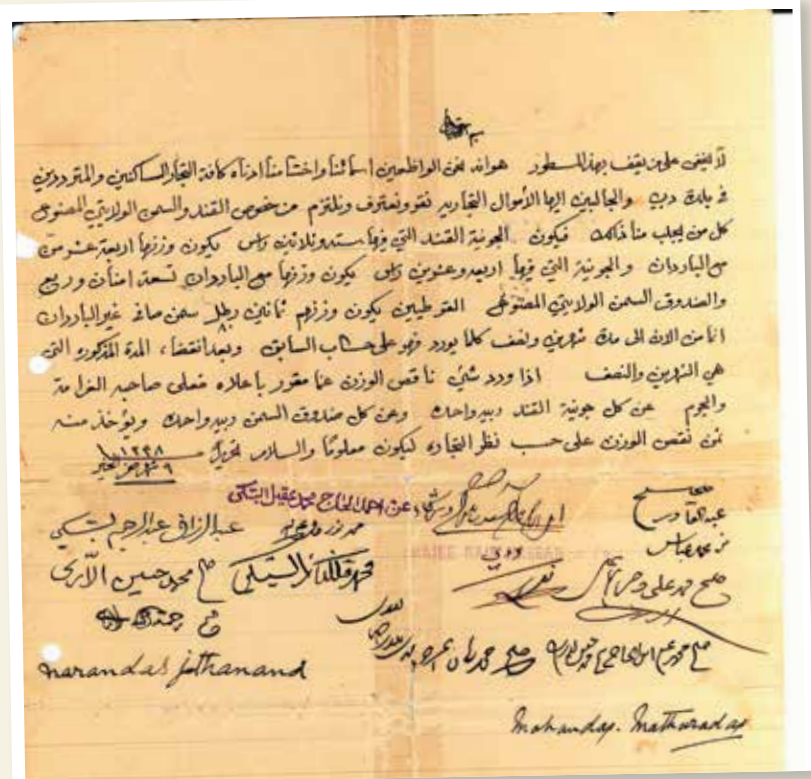
Pages from history



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Ruler's Decree

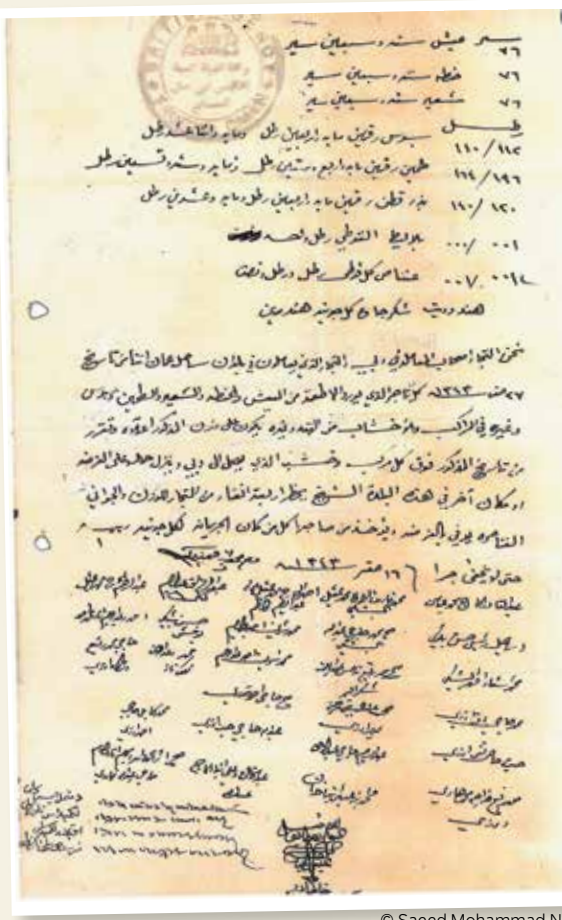
A Ruler's Decree dated November 2, 1919, issued by Shaikh Saeed addressed to merchants who import specific goods, which also stipulates the fine to be paid per kilogram for any violation of the order.



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Merchants' pledge

A letter signed by a number of merchants in Dubai saying they will abide by weights specified in the document (top). The document is dated November 2, 1919, the same day the Ruler's Decree was issued.



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Rules of trade

A document listing the allowed weights for certain products such as rice, wheat, barley, animal fodder, flour, cotton-seeds, vermicelli and pineapple. Merchants' signatures can be seen on the bottom half of the document. It is dated 16 Safar 1343 Hijri, which corresponds to September 15, 1924.

Dubai: A tale of trade and tolerance

Documents dating to the 1920s that were handed down by Abdul Kareem Bin Mahmoud Bin Haj Qasim, who was the Hamal Bashi, or head of Dubai's port authority, to his grandson, tell us a story of the emirate's roots – a multicultural hub

DUBAI

BY NOORHAN BARAKAT

Staff Reporter

ABDUL KAREEM

Head of Archives

The roots of Dubai's reputation as a trade hub that attracts people from across the world can be traced back to the late 1800s. Dubai has always had a history of being a cosmopolitan trading hub that is tolerant of people of all races and religions.

Dubai, the multicultural hub as we know it today, started flourishing in the 1930s when Shaikh Saeed Bin Maktoum Al Maktoum was the Ruler from 1912 to 1958.

Saeed Mohammad Noor, Head of the Coordination and Follow-up Department at the Dubai Ruler's Court, was given documents by his grandfather Abdul Kareem Bin Mahmoud Bin Haj Qasim, who was the Hamal Bashi (head of port authority) at what was then the first Dubai port, called *furdhah*.

The word *furdhah* is classical Arabic for berth, where small ships would come and dock, and bigger ships would anchor mid-stream. Smaller boats would transport people and goods back to *furdhah* as it was difficult for bigger ships to get through, Abdullah Bin Jasem Al Mutairi, Adviser of Museum and Heritage Affairs and chairman of the Board of Directors office at Dubai Culture, told *Gulf News*. This port was located near the Ruler's Court back then on Dubai Creek. The Hamal Bashi was the person in charge of *furdhah* – he executed all Customs regulations.

The documents

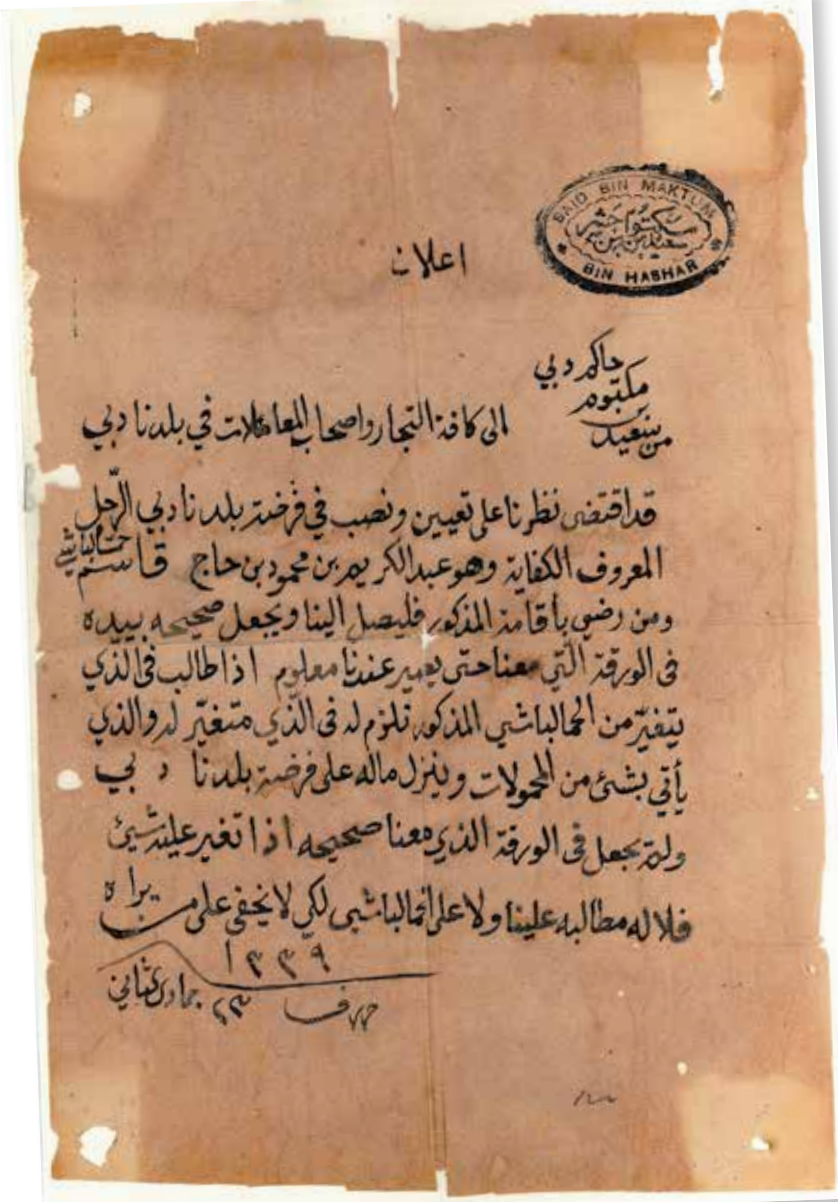
Al Mutairi, who is also an expert on UAE history, said the documents that were handed down by the Hamal Bashi tell us about Dubai's rich history as a multicultural trade hub. The documents in Arabic, English, Persian and Urdu date back to the 1920s.

"There are a few main themes or points that these documents highlight, which is that the port was organised and not random. Many of the documents detail regulations and tariffs for work at the port," Al Mutairi said.

The most interesting document is a letter by Shaikh Saeed appointing Abdul Kareem Bin Mahmoud Bin Haj Qasim the Hamal Bashi and asking the traders if they agree to the appointment by signing a paper.

"This showed that there was some sort of democracy and that the Ruler cared about what people thought, and did not want to force someone on them," Al Mutairi said. He said the majority of the traders accepted the appointment of the Hamal Bashi and signed their names. The title Hamal Bashi was given by Shaikh Saeed in the decree appointing him in 1920.

Another interesting document de-



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Official appointment of Hamal Bashi

An announcement signed by Shaikh Saeed Al Maktoum appointing Abdul Kareem Bin Mahmoud Bin Haj Qasim, Hamal Bashi (head of Dubai's port authority). The document is dated 23 Jamadi Al Thani 1353 Hijri, which corresponds to March 3, 1921.



Saeed Mohammad Noor

tails the porters' tariff for transporting each type of goods. Documents list transactions and items that were traded at the port. They included products such as rice, barley, wheat, tins of pineapple, vermicelli, flour, animal fodder, cotton seeds, coal and sugar. Spices such as turmeric, fenugreek, saffron and ginger were traded. Other products included ghee, raisins, sesame seeds, sage, rose water, lentil, henna, nails, paints, wax, leather, smoking pipes, thread, cloth, oudh and coffee. Old Indian weights such as "seer", and currency such as "rupee" and "anna" were used. Traders also used "pounds" to measure weight.

"There is also a document that says that traders who cheat on weights will be punished," Al Mutairi said.

Dubai today, under His Highness Shaikh Mohammad Bin Rashid Al



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Official signature

The official signature and stamp of Shaikh Saeed Bin Maktoum Al Maktoum, (left), the Ruler of Dubai from 1912 to 1958.



DUBAI CREEK: 1940



DUBAI CREEK: 2016

Ahmed Ramzan/Gulf News



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Stamps of authority

Above: British India Steam Navigation Company, one of the leading ship owners.

Far left: A postage stamp from the time of King George V, the British monarch from 1910-1936.

Left: The stamp of Abdul Kareem Mahmoud, Hamal Bashi of Dubai's port authority.



Dubai today, under Shaikh Mohammad Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, is regarded as a key global player and a trading centre.

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Bill of lading

A document establishing that trade was flourishing in Dubai as businessmen and companies from neighbouring nations flocked to the multicultural hub.

A hub that connects the world

Dubai has been the main entrepot in the Arabian Gulf and the busiest trading port since 1920, with commerce being the main source of revenue for the emirate. This resulted in the emergence of Dubai as the premier re-export business port, whereby goods are imported into a duty-free port and immediately exported to another market.

His Highness Shaikh Mohammad Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, has said, "This land connected ancient civilisations and will continue to be a hub that connects the world." Expo 2020's theme reflects Dubai's deep roots of diversity and tolerance. The international trade which flowed from Dubai's cosmopolitan nature in the 1920s was the basis of its prosperity. This gave the city a very early start in development before the beginning of oil production in the late 1960s.

Tolerance

Dubai was not only geographically well placed but it also provided a liberal commercial climate under Shaikh Saeed Bin Maktoum Al Maktoum who welcomed foreign merchants, craftsmen, traders and pearl divers. By the turn of the 20th century, Dubai's facilities for trade and free enterprise were enough to make it a natural haven for merchants who came from Mumbai, Karachi, Kuwait, Manama and Lingeh.

A flourishing cosmopolitan population had also settled in Dubai and was particularly active in the shops and alleys of the souq. Dubai's pluralism and tolerance began to attract other foreign merchants too. On International Tolerance Day, Shaikh Mohammad said that the Anti-Discrimination Law preserves our legacy of tolerance. It is indeed a legacy that the nation has inherited from previous generations.

The successful early development was due in large part to the foresight of Dubai's rulers. During the 20th century, the city benefited from the stabilising influence of two exceptionally long rules: that of Shaikh Saeed Bin Maktoum Al Maktoum from 1912 to 1958, followed by his son, Shaikh Rashid Bin Saeed Al Maktoum.

Today's Dubai Ports Authority was then one of the earliest government departments and known as *furdhah*, a classical Arabic term for 'berth' – the designated location in a port or harbour used for mooring ships when they are not at sea. Firmly established, the port authority was called "the Mother of Government Departments", particularly because the Ruler's office and most other departments were based at the Customs old building and financed through the revenue collected by customs. Under Shaikh Saeed's rule, Dubai port grew rapidly and became a regular port of call for steamers from 1912.

The Hamal Bashi

During Shaikh Saeed's time, the head of the port authority was Abdul Kareem Bin Mahmoud Bin Haj Qasim. The title 'Hamal Bashi' was given by Shaikh Saeed in the decree appointing him in 1920.

Qasim played a crucial role in the development process and in enhancing the management facilities. As a result, the port authority gained a wide regional reputation in the 1930s and Dubai became a destination of choice for investors and businessmen. There was a liberal tax policy. Initially there was no tax, but later there were low customs duties. Customs duties were collected on each consignment as follows: Rs2 as port charges on each package; half a rupee as handling charges; and a quarter of a rupee as government money. Imperial Airways Ltd, today known as British Airways, operated from Sharjah's 'station superintendent' in 1935. Goods that arrived at Dubai's port were also sent to other regions via air cargo. This enhanced the port's position as the region's entrepot and a midpoint between the Indian subcontinent and Europe.

The British Political Agency, headed by 'Khan Bahader' Eisa Bin Abdul Latif Al Serkal, the British Consular Agent, acted as a regulator and, in many cases, a mediator between merchants and the Hamal Bashi in case the merchants defaulted on paying customs duties.

Pearl traders such as Mustafa Bin Abdul Latif, who had offices in Mumbai and Karachi, used to collect pearls from merchants and acted as an intermediary to sell in the international market in India and Europe. On the other hand, merchants came from all around the world in search of real pearls. Newcomers brought their pearl business with them and, as a result, local markets grew.

Gray Mackenzie and Company (a subsidiary of British India Steam Navigation Company, a company incorporated in England) acted as a shipping agent for British India steamers plying between India, the Gulf ports and Europe. Gray Mackenzie established a branch in Dubai in 1916 and operated until 1983 when it started trading as MMI. It organised lighterage (the process of transferring cargo between vessels of different sizes) and other facilities like insurance and ship repair.

The British India Steam Navigation Company (BI) ran services from Mumbai to Basra and the Suez Canal through Dubai, where it had a representative office. In 1972, Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company (P&O), the fourth largest ports operator in the world, took over BI. Interestingly, in March 2006, DP World, a merger between Dubai Ports Authority (DPA) and Dubai Ports International, completed its acquisition of P&O for \$7 billion (Dh25.71 billion).

Today, DP World has a portfolio of 77 operating marine and inland terminals supported by over 50 related businesses in 40 countries across six continents. Dubai's 'spirit' of trade and tolerance is not a new phenomenon. It runs in its veins.

■ Ahmad Ayoub is a law graduate from the University of Exeter in the UK.