

The *Sultana* in New York: A Zanzibari Vessel Between Two Worlds

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In late April 1840 an unusual vessel arrived in New York City flying a red standard never before seen on American shores. The vessel was the *Sultana*, the flagship of Sayyid Sa'īd bin Sultān Āl Busa'īdī, Sultan of Oman and Zanzibar.¹ It had sailed from Zanzibar, the emergent entrepôt of East Africa, stopping only at St. Helena before docking in Lower Manhattan. The *Sultana* was under the command of an Arab emissary and African and Persian officers with an English captain. The crew was South Asian and East African. The ship carried iconic Indian Ocean products, including Zanzibari cloves, East African ivory, Yemeni coffee, Omani dates, and Persian carpets. At port in America's burgeoning metropolis, the *Sultana* was a microcosm of mid-nineteenth century Zanzibar and the wider Western Indian Ocean world. Just as important, it evidenced Zanzibar's direct engagement with world regions well beyond the Indian Ocean basin.

¹ The ship was alternatively referred to as the "Sultanee" or "Sultané" in the American press and "Sultana" in the British press as well as in other correspondence of the era. Ahmed bin Na'aman's references to the ship have been translated as "Sultani," but in academic and popular literature the ship has subsequently been referred to as the "Sultana". For continuity with earlier scholarship, I will use the latter rendering. See, for instance, Hermann F. Eilts' definitive account of the voyage, "Ahmad bin Na'aman's Mission to the United States in 1840, The Voyage of Al-Sultanah to New York City," *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 98, 4 (1962): 219-77. This essay is taken from a book manuscript in progress, coauthored with Jacob S. Dorman, on the *Sultana's* 1840 journey.

American ships frequented Zanzibar and Muscat, but the *Sultana* was the first ship of the sultanate to reach the United States. New Yorkers had seen nothing like the *Sultana*, and it quickly became a spectacle. Indeed, the sultan's flagship would make headlines right across the United States. More than a week its arrival in New York the crew was "still the curiosity of the city."² Crowds amassed to see the vessel, and a brass band even visited the docks to serenade the ship.³ Though the *Sultana* did not visit Washington, DC, its journey had positive implications for diplomatic relations between the sultanate and America. Vice President Richard Mentor Johnson called on the ship and President Martin van Buren wrote to Sayyid Sa'īd that it was "a source of lively satisfaction for me, in my desire that frequent and beneficial intercourse should be established between our respective countries, to behold a vessel bearing your Highness's flag enter a port of the United States."⁴

The primary focus of both diplomatic and popular attention was the chief of the mission, Ahmad bin Na'aman (al Hajj Ahmad bin Na'aman bin Mushin bin Abdulla El Kaabi El Bahrani). Na'aman's career was emblematic of the historical shifts of the nineteenth century Western Indian Ocean region. Born in the Persian Gulf, Na'aman studied at an English school in Bombay, gained fluency in English, and served as secretary to Seyyid Sa'īd as well as his successor, Sultan Majid. Na'aman lived much of his life in Zanzibar and acted as the sultan's envoy not only to the United States but also to England, Egypt, and China.⁵ In New York, Na'aman would

² "The Arabs," *Morning Herald* May 9, 1840.

³ "Ahamet Ben Aman," *Niles National Register* May 23, 1840.

⁴ "To His Highness Seyd bin Sultan, Imaum of Muscat, Martin Van Buren, president of the United States of America," *New York Spectator* June 4, 1840.

⁵ US Consulate, Zanzibar, National Archives, Washington, DC (microfilm, hereafter USCZ) Roll 2, Vol. 4-5, Speer, "Report on Zanzibar, 1862."

act as bridge between the worlds of the Western Indian Ocean and the North Atlantic. He would captivate New Yorkers during his stay, giving speeches and sitting for the portrait featured in the *World on the Horizon* exhibition and in this volume. Such was the interest in Na'aman that very soon after the arrival of the *Sultana* the New York Common Council voted to commission the portraitist Edward Mooney to paint the emissary. Mooney choose to depict the minute details of Na'aman's appearance and apparel, and he included the famous vessel *Sultana* in the background. For many years thereafter the portrait would be displayed in New York City Hall.

This essay offers context to the portrait of Ahmed bin Na'aman by reconsidering the *Sultana's* historical voyage, a journey that represented the ambitions of the Omani-Zanzibari state. More precisely, the *Sultana* was a richly symbolic vessel that reflected the new material and political interests binding Zanzibar to distant world regions. In this respect, its journey offers an extraordinary window on the interface of the Swahili Coast with both the wider Indian Ocean and Atlantic basins. Additionally, the *Sultana* reflected Seyyid Sa'īd's interest in strengthening ties with America as an emerging economic power. The ship, its mission, cargo, and crew were each emblematic of Zanzibar's outward projection, the cultural economy of the Swahili Coast, and the wider economic trends that were remaking the nineteenth century world. Moreover, they stand as testament to the role of Zanzibaris in shaping emergent global relationships.

To better illuminate these points, I begin by offering a historical background to the *Sultana's* voyage. Then, I will address the vessel's reception and sojourn in

New York. By way of conclusion, I will trace some of the legacies of the voyage for the sultanate and the Swahili Coast generally.

The Indian Ocean World of the Sultana

From the end of the eighteenth century the fortunes of the Sultanate of Oman and Zanzibar rose significantly. Increased commercial activity dramatically transformed Zanzibar, a burgeoning city that after 1840 would be the de facto capital of the transoceanic sultanate.⁶ After the 1837 fall of Mombasa, Zanzibar's greatest regional rival, Sayyid Sa'īd exerted influence over the East African seaboard, limiting the political autonomy of Swahili polities but encouraging greater regional and transoceanic trade.⁷ The concentration of economic activity at Zanzibar reoriented the Swahili world, facilitating or strengthening ties with the East African interior, southern Arabia, South Asia, Europe, and the Americas while drawing diverse residents and travelers. In the 1830s merchants from across Eastern Africa, Southern Arabia, South Asia, North America and Western Europe traded in Zanzibar. The rise of plantation agriculture on Zanzibar, Pemba, and later in the coastal belt also had significant social and economic consequences for Zanzibar. Zanzibar's enslaved population increased substantially, and the production of cloves and other commodities for export were incrementally more important to the island—and by

⁶ Abdul Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices, and Ivory in Zanzibar: Integration of an East African Commercial Empire into the World Economy, 1770-1873* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1987); M. Reda Bhacker, *Trade and Empire in Muscat and Zanzibar: Roots of British Domination* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

⁷ Randall Pouwels, "The Battle of Shela: The Climax of an Era and a Point of Departure in the Modern History of the Kenya Coast" *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* 31, 123 (1991): 363-389; Beatrice Nicolini, "The Myth of the Sultans in the Western Indian Ocean during the Nineteenth Century: A New Hypothesis," *African and Asian Studies* 8 (2009): 239-67.

extension the sultanate's economy.⁸ By the time the *Sultana* sailed for New York, Zanzibar had become the primary conduit for diverse East African consumer demands and extra-African demands for regional products.

East African, South Asian, and Southern Arabian merchants dominated Zanzibari markets, but in the early decades of the nineteenth century Americans also found an economic niche. American demand for East African ivory, Yemeni coffee, Persian rugs, and Sumatran pepper, among other commodities, fueled a wider American trade in the Indian Ocean. But The East African market was particularly attractive to merchants from Salem, Massachusetts, both because they could operate free of competition from larger Boston and New York firms and because it supplied two commodities essential to New England industries: hides for regional leatherworks and high quality gum copal, a resin necessary for the varnishes used in the furniture industry. As a result, Salemites dominated the American trade with Zanzibar, and Salem merchants fiercely defended this niche. By end of the 1830s, American vessels, primarily from Salem, made up the majority of Western ships visiting Zanzibar.⁹

East Africans consumed a great diversity of American manufactures. American cargoes bound for Zanzibar frequently included cloth, beads, and brass

⁸ Frederick Cooper, *Plantation Slavery on the East Coast of Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); Jonathon Glassman, *Feasts and Riot: Revelry, Rebellion, and Popular Consciousness on the Swahili Coast, 1856-1888* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1995).

⁹ Jeremy Prestholdt, "On the Global Repercussions of East African Consumerism," *American Historical Review* 109, 3 (2004): 755-81; Anna Arabindan-Kesson, "From Salem to Zanzibar: Cotton and Cultures of Commerce, 1820-1861," in Patricia Johnson and Caroline Frank, eds. *Global Trade and Visual Arts in Federal New England* (Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire Press, 2014), 288-303; P.L. Simmonds, "The Gums and Resins of Commerce," *American Journal of Pharmacy* March 1857: 80, 134; H. Northway, "Salem and the Zanzibar-East African Trade, 1825-1845," *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 90 (1954): 123-53, 261-73, 361-88, and Cyrus Brady, *Commerce and Conquest in East Africa* (Salem: Essex Institute, 1950).

wire as well as gunpowder, sugar, muskets, flour, furniture, and clocks. Much of the cloth, beads, and brass wire were sold to caravans heading into the interior, while American furniture, clocks, and agricultural goods appealed to coastal consumers.¹⁰ Among these items, however, industrially produced Lowell unbleached calicos, popularly referred to as *merekani* (American) in Swahili, would become the bedrock of America's economic relationship with East Africa from the 1830s until the American Civil War. Cloth was the single largest category of imports in East Africa and therefore regional interest in American cloth was a boon to Salem merchants. By the mid-1830s, the popularity of American unbleached cottons had begun to challenge that of *kaniki*, the Surati- and Kutchi-made indigo cotton cloth with the longest history in the East African market.¹¹ A few years after the *Sultana's* sojourn to New York, the British Consul at Zanzibar wrote that *merekani* had come into "universal use" in East Africa and Arabia, in no small measure because of its durability. By the late 1840s East Africa was importing more *merekani* than any other variety of cloth.¹²

In the 1830s the US-Zanzibar trade was of growing import for both states. This precipitated an official treaty of free trade between the two nations in 1833. When the commercial treaty went into effect the following year, it granted the

¹⁰ Jeremy Prestholdt, *Domesticating the World: African Consumerism and the Genealogies of Globalization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

¹¹ Prestholdt, "On the Global Repercussions"; Arabindan-Kesson, "From Salem to Zanzibar"; Pedro Machado, *Ocean of Trade: South Asian Merchants, Africa and the Indian Ocean, c. 1750-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Edward Alpers, "Gujarat and the Trade of East Africa, 1500-1800," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 9, 1 (1976): 22-44;

¹² Zanzibar National Archives (hereafter ZNA) Hamerton to [obscure], March 26, 1847, AA1/3.

Sultanate of Oman and Zanzibar 'most-favored nation' status.¹³ Thereafter, the sultan's relationship with American merchants became increasingly complex. For instance, Seyyid Sa'īd chartered American ships to deliver cloves and ivory to Bombay and Calcutta under the sultanate's flag.¹⁴ The sultan saw the potential of other trade initiatives as well, and he wished to take full advantage of the treaty's tariff allowances. Specifically, he wished to augment Zanzibar's unidirectional relationship with the United States by sending his own vessels to America. Such a measure had the potential to turn Zanzibar's global economic relationships to the greater benefit of his realm.

The early nineteenth century saw the robust development of the sultan's multidirectional trade initiatives. This was an extension of a wider vision both to exert greater control over the sultanate's global economic relationships and raise its international profile. In 1838, for example, the sultan sent Ali bin Nasser, the Busa'īdī Governor (*Liwali*) of Mombasa, to London to attend the coronation of Queen Victoria and to encourage direct trade with England.¹⁵ To a great degree, Seyyid Sa'īd's vision was contingent on the sultanate's maritime capabilities. The sultan had a substantial navy, which had assisted state expansion in Eastern Africa and had begun to raise the profile of the transoceanic sultanate. For instance, Seyyid Sa'īd used his the Bombay-made, seventy-four gun vessel the *Liverpool* to perform the hajj. In a calculated diplomatic gesture, he subsequently gifted the

¹³ "Edmund Roberts to John Forsyth [Sec of State], Bombay, October 23, 1835", 161. Bennett and Brooks.

¹⁴ ZNA AA3/18 Hardinge to Bombay, n.d. (ca. 1842).

¹⁵ "Her Majesty," *Morning Post* August 25, 1838.

Liverpool to the English East India Company.¹⁶ In the late 1830s the sultan's navy included a corvette, brigs, and frigates, the most impressive of which was the eleven hundred ton *Shah Allum* (King of the World).¹⁷ In addition to commissioning vessels from Bombay, the sultan would order ships from Cochin and even the United States.¹⁸

After the defeat of Mombasa the sultan's need for a substantial naval fleet lessened considerably. From this point, many of his vessels of war were converted into vessels of trade and diplomacy.¹⁹ In addition to sending missions to London and New York, Sultan Seyyid Saïd would send ships and envoys to Mauritius, Bombay, Calcutta, and Canton. As the American captain Sandwith Drinker wrote in 1840, these former men of war were "engaged in commercial voyages, mostly to Bombay and Calcutta from whence they import sugar, rice, cloths, cutlery & in exchange for spices, ivory and drugs."²⁰ In 1856, Sayyid Sa'ïd died on his frigate, the *Queen Victoria* (Sw. *Kitorie*). The sultan who had reigned over a transoceanic state fittingly passed away on the high seas whilst riding from Muscat to Zanzibar.²¹

¹⁶ The *Liverpool* later served in the British Royal Navy as the *Imaum*. Joseph B.F. Osgood, *Notes of Travel; or, Recollections of Majunga, Zanzibar, Muscat, Aden, Mocha, and other Eastern Ports* (Salem: George Creamer, 1854), 59; W.S.W. Ruschenberger, *A Voyage Round the World; Including an Embassy to Muscat and Siam, in 1835, 1836, and 1837* (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea & Blanchard, 1839), 85.

¹⁷ James Kirkman, "The Zanzibar Diaries of John Studdy Leigh, Part I," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 13, 2 (1980): 287-8; British Library, India Office Records (hereafter IOR) R/15/1/89 Atkins Hamerton to L.R. Reid, Bombay, June 7, 1840.

¹⁸ Richard F. Burton, *Zanzibar: City, Island, and Coast. Vol. 1* (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1872), 268.

¹⁹ Abdurrahim Mohamed Jiddawi, "Extracts from an Arab Account Book, 1840-1854," *Tanganyika Notes and Records* 31 (1951): 26.

²⁰ Historical Society of Philadelphia, Henry Drinker Papers, "A Private Journal of Events and Scenes at Sea, at the Cape and in Zanzibar by Sandwith Drinker, Commencing August 9th 1840. Sultanee, New York to Zanzibar," 88.

²¹ Emily Ruete [Sayyida Salme bint Saïd], *Memoirs of an Arabian Princess* in E. Van Donzel, ed. *An Arabian Princess between Two Worlds: Memoirs, Letters Home, Sequels to the Memoirs, Syrian Customs and Usages*, (New York: E.J. Brill, 1993): 231; ZNA AA1/3 Hamerton to Clarendon, November 10, 1856.

Like other vessels of Seyyid Saïd's navy, the *Sultana* was a product of the Western Indian Ocean world. It was a three mast, three hundred ton sloop of war built in 1833 at Bombay's Mazagaon docks.²² In its early years the *Sultana* regularly traveled between Western Indian Ocean ports, including Zanzibar, Muscat, and Bombay. In 1835 the *Sultana* even rescued the crew of the USS *Peacock*, which foundered on a reef and was subsequently attacked by pirates some two hundred miles from Muscat.²³ The *Sultana* likewise visited Calcutta and Mauritius, and in 1839 it sailed the Atlantic for the first time on a mission to London. While the *Sultana's* voyage to the United States recalled earlier missions, the vessel would enter uncharted waters. Salemites dominated the Zanzibari market, but representatives from New York firms were keen to trade with Zanzibar and thus approached the sultan in 1839.²⁴ Potential links with New York provided an opportunity to inaugurate a much wider trade with the US, which the sultan pursued. As a result, the *Sultana* sailed to America's commercial heart, New York, avoiding Salem and the Boston area entirely. The sultan also wished, according to the American pilot who captained the vessel back to Zanzibar, that the *Sultana* "make quite a display" in New York.²⁵ Seyyid Saïd therefore not only sought to take

²² *Bombay Gazette* September 4, 1833; Rai 1979: 5; "Edmund Roberts to John Forsyth [Sec of State], Bombay, October 23, 1835," in Bennett and Brooks, 160-1. For a further description of the *Sultana* in 140, see Cape Town Archives CC2/15 1839 July-1843 May. It was alternatively referred to as a bark and corvette.

²³ "The Arabian Corvette Sultani," *New York Spectator* May 14, 1840.

²⁴ Eilts, "Ahmad bin Na'aman's Mission."

²⁵ "A Private Journal," 29.

advantage of free trade with the America but also impress upon New Yorkers the diversity and quality of goods available in East Africa.²⁶

The sultan chose Ahmad bin Na'aman to be the chief envoy for the *Sultana's* mission to America. Abdullah, who was Persian by birth, would serve as his first lieutenant and Muhammad Juma, who was Swahili from Zanzibar, would be his second lieutenant. However, before departing for New York the *Sultana* traveled to Bombay to hire an experienced crew for the long voyage. In Bombay, Na'aman recruited several dozen Muslim Indian sailors. On the *Sultana's* return to Zanzibar he augmented the crew with his slaves and those of his lieutenants.²⁷ The officers and fifty seven crew thus represented a cross-section of Western Indian Ocean backgrounds, languages, and statuses, both slave and free. Finally, the sultan commissioned a captain, William Sleeman, formerly of the British Navy, who was familiar with the course for North America. However, the journey's beginnings were inauspicious. Sleeman proved a drunkard and was often incapable of piloting the vessel. In a stroke of luck, whilst in St. Helena Na'aman overheard other captains discussing the best course for New York. When Sleeman later became too inebriated to pilot, Na'aman drew on his memory of the discussion to guide the *Sultana*. Thus, for eight days the ship sailed northwest without Sleeman at the helm.²⁸

²⁶ Both American and European merchants in Zanzibar voiced concerns that sultan's Atlantic ventures might undercut their own exchange at Zanzibar. See for instance ZNA AA1/3 F.R. Peters and J. Pollock to Sultan Sayyid Said, February 20, 1847, Zanzibar.

²⁷ "A Private Journal," 106.

²⁸ "A Private Journal," 30.

The Sultana in America

After eighty-seven days at sea the *Sultana* arrived in New York. The weathered ship made an incredible display, though not precisely as the sultan intended. It was neither the character nor condition of the ship that impressed audiences but rather its crew and cargo. Americans perceived the *Sultana* as a kind of menagerie under the command of an exotic ambassador who delivered treasures from unfamiliar lands. Between April and August of 1840 the *Sultana* captivated New York. As word spread of the extraordinary ship New Yorkers flocked to the wharf on the North River to get a glimpse of the ship and her crew. Soon after the ship arrived Na'aman gave a speech to those congregated at the docks, which intensified popular interest. Newspaper reports noted that during the *Sultana's* first days in the city the pier was so overcrowded that the sailors were "almost killed by the pushing, and pressing, and squeezing of the mobs." Crowds also followed the crew as they navigated the streets of New York.²⁹ Ultimately, the police had to be called in to protect the ship and its crew from the curious throngs.

Na'aman had no trouble disposing the *Sultana's* cargo. Within three days most of it had been sold, including nearly twelve tons of Mocha coffee and a large consignment of cloves, likely from the sultan's own plantation in Zanzibar.³⁰ For the return voyage, Na'aman ordered nearly ninety thousand yards of merekani cloth.³¹ He also purchased broadcloth, beads, guns, gunpowder, china, sugar, music boxes,

²⁹ "Arrival of an Arabian Ship – Trade Between the United States and Muscat," *Morning Herald* May 5, 1840; Jiddawi, "Extracts," 30.

³⁰ Eilts, "Ahmad bin Na'aman's Mission," 250.

³¹ Jiddawi, "Extracts," 29.

glassware, chandeliers, crockery, and looking glasses.³² But the *Sultana* was not in New York just to trade. In an effort to cement diplomatic relations with the United States, Na'aman presented President Van Buren with two Najd studs, from the prized breed of Arabian horses. To these gifts he added a gold bar, string of pearls, two large pear-shaped pearls, two silk Persian carpets, six cashmere shawls, rose essence, and a gold mounted sword.³³ The opulent gifts received national attention. They also sparked a congressional row.

The president reciprocated the sultan's gifts with American pistols and rifles along with two large mirrors, the largest manufactured in the US.³⁴ But the White House also explained to Na'aman that, as a public servant, the president could not personally accept the gifts. Na'aman responded that he could under no circumstances return to Zanzibar with the sultan's gifts. From this quandary a congressional battle quickly ensued as lawmakers debated the fate of the invaluable collection. Van Buren was seeking reelection and his opponents seized upon the gifts as a means to attack the incumbent president. They argued that receiving gifts from a sultan was akin to monarchical behavior. At the same time, other lawmakers passed a bill to authorize the president's acceptance of the gifts. The elderly former-president John Quincy Adams then led a counteroffensive to overturn the bill.

Only after considerable political wrangling did the factions reach a resolution. The president would accept the gifts, but they would be deposited at the Department of State. Those gifts that could not "conveniently be deposited or kept"

³² "Trade with Muscat," *Morning Herald* August 10, 1840; Eilts, "Ahmad bin Na'aman's Mission," 252.

³³ Eilts, "Ahmad bin Na'aman's Mission," 255.

³⁴ *ibid*, 263.

there were to be sold and the proceeds given to the Treasury.³⁵ As a result, most of the gifts remained in Washington, DC, while the horses were sold off to Virginia and Tennessee.³⁶ In 1841 several of the gifts went on permanent display at the National Gallery.³⁷ The pearls, however, would temporarily remain in the White House. The First Lady, daughter-in-law of the president Angelica Singleton Van Buren, wore the pearls, including for her 1842 portrait by Henry Inman—a painting that yet adorns the White House’s Red Room.

In New York locals were more interested in the representatives of the sultan than in the politics of the sultan’s gifts. New Yorkers were particularly fascinated with Ahmed bin Na’aman and his lieutenants Abdullah and Juma. Newspapers described their appearance and dress in minute detail, taking particular note of second officer Muhammad Juma’s shoes, which were manufactured in Lynn, Massachusetts. Reporters similarly commented on the emissaries’ rings, overcoats (*joho*), and even their facial hair. Juma, for instance, “wore moustaches but no whiskers,” the *Morning Herald* reported, while the other two did the opposite: “whiskers and imperials, but no moustaches.”³⁸ So fascinated were New Yorkers with Ahmed bin Na’aman that soon after his arrival the New York Common Council commissioned his portrait with the intention of displaying it for public viewing.

The city offered portrait artist Edward Mooney the considerable sum of \$500 to capture Na’aman visage, though Mooney would not complete the portrait until

³⁵ *ibid*, 256-60; *Pittsfield Sun* August 20, 1840.

³⁶ *Raleigh Register and North Carolina Gazette*, August 21, 1840.

³⁷ “Correspondence”, *The New-England Weekly Review* July 31, 1841.

³⁸ “Our Arabian Visitors,” *Morning Herald* May 20, 1840.

nearly two months after the *Sultana's* departure.³⁹ Mooney's portrait depicts a regal Ahmed bin Na'aman seated on a crimson sofa. Wearing a Muscat turban cloth of blue, gold, and red, he sits with his right hand resting on his thigh, his white glove off to highlight the ring that so fascinated New Yorkers. Na'aman also wears a richly embroidered black *joho*, which though of Omani provenance had gained popularity in Zanzibar. Na'aman's long white shirt (*kanzu*) features red cutouts, and he wears another fine Muscat cloth around his waist. Mooney thus faithfully captured the elite fashion of 1840 Zanzibar and juxtaposed it with the image of the *Sultana* in the background, albeit framed by a fanciful neoclassical window. Mooney's rendition is not only faithful; it is positively romantic. Na'aman and the *Sultana* are presented with sympathy, even dignity, a mode of representation that would be unusual in later Western representations of Zanzibaris.⁴⁰ Mooney's portrayal of Na'aman reflects the relatively positive light in which New York's elite viewed the envoy, his vessel, and its mission.

The Board of Aldermen of New York and the city's Common Council were keen to host and entertain Ahmad bin Na'aman during his sojourn. On the *Sultana's* arrival a committee was hastily formed "to tender to [Na'aman] the civilities and accustomed hospitalities of the city."⁴¹ These hospitalities would entail a full schedule for Na'aman. He was taken to ride the Harlem Railroad and visit Bellevue hospital. He was treated to a formal dinner at City Hall and taken on a tour of the Brooklyn Navy Yard where he inspected several ships, including a steam frigate

³⁹ "Portrait of the Arabian," *The North American and Daily Advertiser* October 3, 1840.

⁴⁰ Prestholdt, *Domesticating the World*, ch. 6.

⁴¹ "Arrival from Arabia," *The North American and Daily Advertiser* May 7, 1840.

under construction.⁴² Na'aman's hosts showed him the Naval Lyceum and portraits of former presidents.⁴³ And he met both the mayor and members of the Brooklyn Common Council. On other outings Na'aman was taken to the Institutions for the Blind as well as the Deaf and Dumb. The President of the Long Island Railroad similarly invited Na'aman and his first officers, along with the mayor and naval Commodore Renshaw, to ride the length of the railroad. Na'aman, Abdullah, and Juma were shown the operations of the engine, and the train stopped several times to allow the envoys to visit towns along the way.⁴⁴ The envoys were, in short, treated as honored guests.

After three months in New York disaster struck the *Sultana*. In early August a terrible storm swept through the city and lightning struck the "celebrated Arab ship."⁴⁵ The vessel's damages were extensive, including a shattered mast. Soon thereafter the Navy received orders from Washington, DC to refit the *Sultana* at the government's expense. The *Sultana* was therefore towed to the Brooklyn Navy Yard and its crew became official guests of US Navy. While hosted by Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt, Na'aman met the Governor of New York and Vice President Johnson. The US government spent a considerable sum to refit the *Sultana*.⁴⁶ Even so, many urged the government to do more. For instance, an Ohio Congressman

⁴² *Morning Herald* May 15, 1840.

⁴³ Eilts, "Ahmad bin Na'aman's Mission," 243.

⁴⁴ "The Arabians on the Long Island Railroad," *Morning Herald*, May 25, 1840; "Ahamet Ben Aman," *Niles National Register* May 23, 1840.

⁴⁵ "Additional Damage done by the Terrible Storm on Monday," *Morning Herald* August 5, 1840.

⁴⁶ "News from England," *Morning Herald* August 1, 1840.

announced his intention to introduce a bill to Congress that would authorize the government to present the sultan with an entirely new sloop of war.⁴⁷

While the new ship did not materialize, the US Navy fully refitted the *Sultana* with a new mast, rigging, sails, and much else. After hiring a Philadelphian captain, Sandwith Drinker, to pilot the *Sultana* back to Zanzibar, the vessel readied for its homeward journey. On August 9, 1840 the famous ship departed New York for Cape Town en route to Zanzibar.

Conclusion: Zanzibar and the World

The repercussions of the *Sultana's* journey were multifaceted and long ranging. New Yorkers drank Yemeni coffee and East Africans wore the American-made cottons and beads the *Sultana* delivered to Zanzibar. The First Lady of the United States wore Persian Gulf pearls and the elite of Zanzibar dressed their homes in American chandeliers and mirrors procured by Ahmed bin Na'aman. While the sultan's gifts provided political fodder in the months prior to the 1840 presidential election, the *Sultana's* visit helped to cement Oman-Zanzibar's diplomatic and commercial relationship with the United States. For years New Yorkers would recall the *Sultana's* visit and admire Edward Mooney's portrait of Ahmed bin Na'aman in City Hall.⁴⁸ Na'aman too would be remembered in Zanzibar and Oman for his remarkable journey. In 1990, for example, the Omani government released a

⁴⁷ Eilts, "Ahmad bin Na'aman's Mission," 260.

⁴⁸ See for instance remembrances of the *Sultana's* visit as late as 1887. "An Old Brooklyn Event: Muscat Man of War at the Navy Yard," *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* May 1, 1887.

postage stamp commemorating the *Sultana's* journey. The stamp featured an image of Seyyid Sa'īd and Mooney's portrait of Ahmed bin Na'aman.

Seyyid Sa'īd would never send another vessel to the United States. Nevertheless, the *Sultana's* journey represented an extension of the sultanate's efforts to cultivate trade and diplomacy with distant states. In 1841, for instance, the sultan would send a vessel to London, captained by an American.⁴⁹ In 1842 the *Sultana* again sailed the Atlantic, this time with horses and other gifts for Queen Victoria.⁵⁰ Later missions to London and Marseilles would similarly cultivate deeper relationships with those Atlantic and Mediterranean ports.⁵¹ Ahmed bin Na'aman would also continue to represent the sultan, including in Bourbon (Réunion).⁵² After his return from New York, Na'aman was a staunch supporter of favorable relations with the US. He became a key member of the 'American faction' of the sultan's advisors, a position that he likely maintained until his death in 1870.

Seyyid Sa'īd's successors would continue to dispatch ships to London, Marseilles, and Bombay. They would also venture to new ports such as Hamburg and Istanbul.⁵³ Seyyid Sa'īd's son, Sultan Barghash, even visited England himself in 1875. Much like earlier envoys, Barghash capitalized on the attention his visit received to raise the profile of the East African sultanate and promote investment in and trade with Zanzibar. Sultan Bargash also expanded on his father's commercial vision by purchasing German and Scottish steamships in the 1870s. He used these

⁴⁹ John Gray, *History of Zanzibar from the Middle Ages to 1856* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 209.

⁵⁰ Jiddawi, "Extracts," 30; "Presents for Her Majesty," *Illustrated London News* June 18, 1842.

⁵¹ USCZ Roll 1, Vol. 1-3, Ward to Buchanan, March 13, 1847; Burton, *Zanzibar*, 267; ZNA AA1/3 Hamerton, January 3, 1847.

⁵² On Zanzibari missions in Reunion and Mauritius see, for instance, Burton, *Zanzibar*, 324.

⁵³ IOR L/P&S/9/49 Kirk to Wedderburn, March 9, 1871.

to initiate his own steamship service between Zanzibar and Bombay. This regularized transoceanic traffic—freeing travel from the rhythms of the monsoon—and brought more revenue into Zanzibar’s coffers.

The nineteenth century was therefore an era of substantial growth for Zanzibar and a period of global integration on the Swahili Coast generally. It was a time of opportunity for the Sultanate of Oman and Zanzibar as well as significant industrial and agricultural output for the US. In both cases, it was also a period of profound inequality and exploitation. Indeed, the relationship between the United States and Zanzibar was to a great degree built upon slavery and industrial labor exploitation. The world was becoming more completely integrated in the years before and after the *Sultana*’s sojourn, and this was in no small part a consequence of expanding networks of trade and economies of industrialization and human exploitation.⁵⁴

At the same time, the *Sultana* was a ship laden with possibility. Perhaps more than any single vessel, the *Sultana*, in its journey to the United States, evidenced the sultanate’s initiative and investments in charting its own economic course in an era of increasing interdependence and imperial expansion. More precisely, the *Sultana* explored the possibility of multidirectional trade wherein Zanzibari vessels delivered African, Arabian, and Asian products to foreign shores. In this way, the *Sultana* was part of a wider and highly ambitious strategy of global projection. These efforts did not fundamentally change Zanzibar’s global economic

⁵⁴ Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Vintage, 2015); Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A History of the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014); Christopher Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004).

relationships. Yet, the *Sultana's* voyage was one of the earliest attempts by the Sultanate of Oman and Zanzibar to expand economic relationships with states well beyond the Indian Ocean region while bolstering diplomatic ties with those distant nations.

Additionally, the *Sultana* evidenced the East African seaboard's emergent cultural economy. It was a richly symbolic vessel that reflected the new material and political interests that bound Zanzibar with distant world regions. The ship, its mission, cargo, and crew were each emblematic of the historical changes affecting the Swahili Coast and the socioeconomic trends that were remaking the world of the nineteenth century. These crystallized in the portrait of Ahmad bin Na'aman. Much like the man and the ship under his command, the painting captures the interface of oceanic basins and illustrates their integration. Nearly one hundred and eighty years after the *Sultana's* journey, Edward Mooney's painting stands as a testament to the historical relationship between the Swahili Coast and other world regions. Just as important, it highlights the role of Zanzibaris in shaping emergent transoceanic relationships in an era of increasing global connectivity.