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# John Malcolm AND THE BRITISH COMMERCIAL BASE IN THE GULF 1800



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## I

### PREFATORY NOTES

The present document is an extract from a letter from Captain Malcolm to the Earl of Mornington, the Governor General of India, dated 26 February 1800. It was almost by accident that I came across this document, which had so long lain hidden among the family papers of Captain Wainwright R.N. and was presented to me by my friend Jeremy Carver. I asked Mr. Carver to tell me about the documents he had found and he wrote the following letter :

"I found the documents at Maggs Bros, the long-established specialists in rare travel books, in Berkeley Square. This was in September 1983. To my question whether he had any 19th century books about the Gulf, I was told that they had that day discovered an old and dusty box of documents in their basement. They did not know what they contained; and offered them to me to look at. It did not take me so long to realise what I was seeing; the private papers of Captain Wainwright, who led the British expedition against your forefathers in 1809.

The documents were contained in an old cardboard box, which had once contained a new hot water bottle! This hot water bottle had been sold around 1900, which probably meant that the papers had arrived with Maggs Bros some eighty years earlier. They thought that they had been sold to them by the great granddaughter of Captain Wainwright. Given the passage of years, the exact provenance could not be known. Nevertheless, there seems little doubt that they were family papers of Captain Wainwright, sold by his great grandchildren little realising the significance they would have for your subsequent studies. "

The family papers of Captain Wainwright contain fifty nine documents, dated 1800-1820. Wainwright had been appointed the naval commander of the British expedition against the Qawasim of Ras al-Khaima (charged falsely with

piracy) in 1809 and was well placed to collect important documents. The text of the present document has been printed here exactly as it is found in the manuscript and I believe that this is the first time a full and accurate text of John Malcolm's important letter on the choice of British base in the Gulf has been published. The version to be found in J.A. Saldanha, *Selection from State Papers, Bombay regarding the East India Company's Connection with the Persian Gulf, with a Summary of Events, 1600-1800* (Government Printing Press, Calcutta 1908), is incomplete and error-ridden while J.B. Kelly, in *Britain and the Persian Gulf 1795-1880* (Oxford at the Clarendon Press 1968), quotes only a small part of it. .

In conclusion I have to express my grateful thanks to Mr. Jeremy Carver for his valuable present.