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Investing in Research: Teaching the History of Qatar as An Example

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The author of this presentation has mentor Undergraduate Research Experience program (UREP) projects. The projects' topics were directly related to social, political and commercial history of Qatar. Although, the main outcome of these projects were to engage undergraduate students in research. However, the author was able to incorporate the material of the project no. UREP 16-020-6-003 entitled "A Story of a Stamp: A Historical Study of the Qatari Stamps", awarded a grant in the sixteenth cycle by Qatar National Fund Research, to fit perfectly in teaching the history of Qatar. The author will use the stamps issued during the reign of Sheikh Ahmed Bin Ali to fill in the literature gap of the history of Qatar, while highlighting his relationships with the globe and his politics inside and outside Qatar. Stamps were created as a mechanism to collect tax, facilitate and improve postal communications. Stamps have evolved tremendously since its creation in 1680 for recording anniversaries events, boosting political agenda or celebrating national or international events. In this sense stamps are historical documents and the study of stamps known Philately—a field of knowledge that studies postal stamps and all forms of postmarking used in the postal service—is undoubtedly supplementary field to the scholarship of History. The first world stamp was possibly introduced in 1680 by a British merchant and entrepreneur. William Dockwra established London Penny Post, where mails were hand stamped to confirm postal payment, However, the stamps as we know it today was first introduced and developed in Great Britain. Appreciation of the importance of the gulf sheikhdoms had made the British to develop and establish infrastructures conducive to their colonial interest in this strategic region. After the second World War, Britain began its exploration for oil in Qatar where the postal services were issued from Qatar and was transferred to Bahrain to be located in its post since 1884. Then from Bahrain it can be sent all over the world, thus the origin of the letter—from Qatar—was hidden, but retains the name and address of the sender on the cover. In 1916 Qatar signed a treaty with Great Britain, through which Qatar entered under the British protectorate where one of the terms of this treaty was to establish Qatar post. The first post office inaugurated in Qatar was in 1950 which was available to the public. The first Qatari stamps were issued in 1960; it included depictions of several themes as the image of the ruler Sheikh Ali bin Abdullah bin Qassim Al-Thani, a ship, petroleum excavator, a mosque and special

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symbols associated with the Qatari environment such as: the Falcon— symbol of freedom and pride—. The stamps also contained both Arabic and English texts. In this paper the author will use the stamps issued during the reign of Sheikh Ahmed Bin Ali to understand, explain, analysis and compare information extracted from stamps' reading in preparation for analysis and shedding light on the political, economic and cultural history of Qatar during Sheikh Ahmed Bin Ali. The outcomes of this research paper is vital in defending part of the political history of Qatar, especially that linked to the previous ruler sheikh Ahmed bin Ali Al-Thani, who ruled Qatar from 1961–1972. Almost always most of historians agreed in criticizing his political period. For example, Rosemary Zahlan described the ascendancy that led to Sheikh Khalifa Bin Hamad, to become ruler on 22 February 1972, as Sheikh Ahmed's rule was criticised as failing to lay the foundations for a modern state, despite the discovery of oil. Through analyzing the stamps that were established and used during Sheikh Ahmed's reign, various stamps were discovered that document the development planes that Sheikh Ahmed was undertaken. Such as the establishment of relationships between Qatar and many global countries and the participation of Qatar in global occasions as well as the consideration that Qatar paid to some important global occasions. For instance, in the occasion of murdering John Kennedy, Qatar established an especial stamp that spotlighted such incident. Probably this was an attempt to link the Qatari community with the global news and opening them to the international world as an active participant in the globe, rather than being isolated and passive. This might be true especially if we consider also the analysis of a stamp that Qatar established about first world astronaut. Sheikh Ahmed had very much supported and encouraged different international activities, such as the activities of Russian Centre for sciences and culture, when he established a special stamp that depicted the first world astronaut. As such, studying of stamps may have been introduced to the possibility of making a narrative of Sheikh Ahmed bin Ali's political role visible, understandable and tangible through the stamps. These pieces showed that Qatar underwent a further period of development following its independence from British protection on 3 September 1971, after the economic crisis in Europe in the 1960s. Soon after gaining independence and during Sheikh Ahmed period, Qatar joined important global organisations such as the League of Arab States on 11 September 1971 and the United Nations on 17 September 1971. Thus, Qatar began to manage itself and its oil revenue. Consequently, the country witnessed major developments in its health, education and social services. Therefore, the author was able to introduce the reign of Sheikh Ahmed bin Ali in teaching the history of Qatar and to explore the political narrative in Qatar since the 1961 to 1972 and to understand how these stamps were driving and changing the previous political narratives that were built around the era of Sheikh Ahmed bin Ali since his dethrone in 1972, in an attempt to rewrite the history of Qatar.