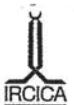

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The Role of Traders and Muslim Scholars in the Spread of Islam and Muslim Culture in Zanzibar and East Africa

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The East African coast, especially between Dar es Salam and Bagamoyo, was strongly influenced by Islam since the seventh century. However, though Islam continued spreading on the coast for centuries, it did not penetrate inland.

The rise of the Yarubi state in Oman and its struggle against the Portuguese in the 17th century led to Arab immigration to East Africa. The role played by the Imams of Oman in the liberation of their co-religionists and their joint struggle with the local population led to the final expulsion of the Portuguese from the East African coast. Certain extracts from a local reliable source confirm the close ties between Oman and East Africa to the extent that Swahili and African tribes found themselves represented in a delegation to Oman to seek support.[1] The fall of Fort Jesus of Mombasa, the last formidable stronghold of the Portuguese, meant their final explusion from the whole of the East African Coast. Thus the year 1698 was a turning point in the history of Arab Muslim-East African relations. This was the year in which Sayf b. Sultan al-Yarubi, İmam of Oman, succeeded in overpowering the Portuguese in Mombasa and the Yarubi Imams of Oman considered themselves overlords of all the coast. Fearing another Portuguese attack, the inhabitants of the coast recognised and welcomed this overlordship.[2]

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[1] I. E. Soghayroun, "The Arab and Swahili Culture in Historical Perspective," *Sudanic Africa: A Journal of Historical Sources*, vol. 12, Bergen, 2001, pp. 20, 21.

[2] Soghayroun, "Uman and East Africa: The Historical Significance of an Arabic Manuscript by Shaykh al-Amin b. Ali al-Mazrui," *Seminar For Arabian Studies*, vol. 29, London, 1999, pp. 171, 172.

The Reign of Sayyid Said Ibn Sultan (1804-1856) and the Rise of the Muslim Sultanate of Zanzibar

The year 1832 inaugurated a new era in Arab Muslim-East African contact. In that year, Sultan Said transferred his capital to Zanzibar. This resulted in large immigrations from Oman and Hadramawt to Zanzibar, Pemba and other parts of the coast. Within a short period, Sayyid Said's business acumen and his liberal and far-sighted policies made Zanzibar the greatest single centre of commerce on the western shores of the Indian Ocean. It became the most important market on the East coast for ivory, cloves, gum-copal, cowries and agricultural products, and the greatest importer of Indian, American, and European manufactured goods.

The newly arrived Arabs with their commercial impetus and prosperity, initiated the process of opening up the hinterland of East and Central Africa. F.B. Pearce described this role in the following: "The Arabs who came from Oman with Sayyid Said were the pioneers of exploration in the Dark Continent, and the tales which they brought back of lakes and snow-clad mountains stimulated the interest of the western world in Africa."[3]

Thus, politically the Muslims in modern East African states generally still look with pride to their past record and achievement as part of the political heritage of the area. During the nineteenth century the Muslims, represented by the Sultan of Zanzibar, were the only indigenous people of East Africa with consistent political importance. Apart from their relations with the European powers, the Arab-Muslim influence was great amongst the tribal up-country Africans. There is an old saying: "When one pipes in Zanzibar they dance on the lakes."[4]

Traders and Trade Routes and the Spread of Islam into the Interior

Islam was the first monotheistic religion to reach the interior and up-country areas of east and central Africa, and this occurred around the middle of the

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[3] F. B. Pearce, *Zanzibar: Island Metropolis of East Africa*, (London, 1920), pp. 119, 120.

[4] L. W. Hollingsworth, *A Short History of the East Coast of Africa*, first edition in 1929, (London, 1981), p. 96.

nineteenth century. The expansion of Islam in these areas was largely the work of the Zanzibari traders of the east coast of Africa. To the historian, it is evident that these traders were more concerned with trade than proselytization. If they had used their full influence to inculcate Islam during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the result might have been the Islamization of most of east and central Africa.

The main routes through which Muslim influence reached the interior of modern Tanzania, Uganda, and the Upper Congo were:

a) The Central Route: from Zanzibar and the coastal towns opposite the island, to Tabora and from there towards the north to Buganda and across Lake Tanganyika to the Upper Congo.

b) The Northern Route: from around Mombasa towards the eastern side of Lake Victoria and Busoga.

c) The Southern Route: from Kilwa and across the Yao country to Lake Nyasa and modern Malawi.[5]

Islam penetrated the above-mentioned areas mainly via these three routes, but not simultaneously and not in equal strength. However, the earliest and most important influence which determined the character, the impact and the fate of Islam in these areas came by the central route.

The Role of a Trader: The case of Shaykh Ahmad bin Ibrāhīm in the spread of Islam in Uganda in 1844

Some of these Muslim traders must have been very remarkable men and worthy of respect. Among these Muslim traders the immense impact of Shaykh Ahmad bin Ibrāhīm will always be of special significance in the story of Islam in Uganda. He was an interesting Omani Arab trader, of a good social standing. He seemed to have won the confidence and impressed such Europeans like Burton and Stanley, the famous travellers of the Lake Regions of Central Africa. Henry Stanley gave the following account of Shaykh Ahmad: "He is a fine, gentlemanly

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[5] Soghayroun, *The Omani and South Arabian Muslim Factor In East Africa*, (Riyadh, 1405h/1984), p. 133.

looking Arab, of light complexion generous and hospitable to friends, liberal to his slaves and kind to his women. He has lived eighteen years in Africa.... and he knew Suna, the warlike emperor of Uganda."[6]

Those Arabs who had arrived in Uganda brought with them more than their cotton goods, metal work and firearms. Apart from their merchandise, they brought their religion. The local sources tell an interesting episode, when the voice of Ahmed bin Ibrāhīm was raised to good effect.[7] Like his predecessors, King Suna of Uganda frequently ordered large scale executions of his subjects in propitiation of the deities of the African traditional religion. Once this order was issued by the King in Ahmad's presence. Ahmad at once rebuked the King for killing his subjects: "My Lord, these people whom you are slaughtering everyday were created by God (Allah) who created you and gave you your kingdom." The King rejected the idea, stressing that his gods gave him his kingdom. But Shaykh Ahmad courageously repeated this idea about God until the King asked Ahmad: "Where is God that you keep talking about and who is supposed to be greater than me.?" Ahmad then explained to him that God was in Heaven and that he would resurrect all those who loved him. The African King became impressed by these ideas and requested him to teach him something of this religion, in which there is no room for the cult of personality. Shaykh Ahmad especially emphasized to the King the belief in one God and the concept of resurrection and paradise.[8]

Perhaps many of those present in the court who heard Shaykh Ahmad's speech expected to see him sharing the fate of the victims whose cause he had defended. To the contrary, the King appeared to have been impressed by the boldness of Shaykh Ahmad and asked to be taught the tenets of the Muslim faith. Ahmad bin Ibrāhīm expounded to Kabaka Suna some of the elementary principles of Islam and taught him sometime before the latter's death, four chapters of the Qur'ān.[9]

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[6] H. M. Stanley, *Through the Dark Continent*, (London, 1878), vol. 1, p. 453.

[7] A. Kagwa, *Ekitabu Kya BiKa Bya Baganda*, ' The Clans of Buganda,' (Kampala, 1949), p. 119.

[8] I. E. Soghayroun, *The Omani and South Arabian Muslim Factor*, p. 30.

[9] *ibid.*, p. 29.

Shaykh Ahmad bin Ibrāhīm was undoubtedly one of the prominent figures who brought about this great change. He is reported to have died in the latter part of 1885. He was only one among many of the Muslim traders who brought something more than their trading activities to the interior of East Africa. They were real pioneers both as creators of many markets in central Africa which gave stimulus to commerce, and proselytes of the Islamic faith. Sir John Gray, in an article on the role of Ahmed Ibn Ibrahim, commented as follows:

The man who risking his own life to save the lives of others.... Who once stood up to administer a bold rebuke to Suna. One feels that he should not be allowed to be numbered amongst 'Those who have perished as though they had never been borne', but should rather be remembered amongst those 'merciful men whose righteousness hath not been forgotten.[10]

Cultural Influence and Scholastic Contribution to the Muslim Scholarship in Zanzibar and East Africa.

Cosmopolitanism and Tolerance

According to Valerie Hoffman, Professor of Religion at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign, who is currently doing research on Muslim scholars in Oman and Zanzibar in the 19th and early 20th century, the empire that Oman's ruler Sayyid Said bin Sultan al Busaidi created in East Africa was one of the most cosmopolitan the world has ever seen.[11] The ruling Omani Arabs were Muslims of the `Ibādī sect, the "Swahilis" were Shāfi`ī Muslims; the Indians were of various religions persuasions – Hindus, Sunnis, Twelver Shī`ah, Ismāilis, Bohra, and Parsees, the army consisted mainly of Baluchis, who were Hanafī Muslims, and non-Muslim Africans came from many different regions. When Sayyid Said made Zanzibar the capital of Omani empire in 1832, scholars migrated to Zanzibar from various parts of the Swahili coast, and he appointed qādīs for both Sunnis and `Ibādīs in every large town. Sayyid Said and his

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[10] J. M. Gray, "Ahmed Ibn Ibrahim, the First Arab to reach Buganda," *Uganda Journal*, vol. 11 (September, 1947), pp. 80– 82.

[11] V. J. Hoffman, "Muslim-Christian Encounters, in Late Nineteenth-Century Zanzibar," *The MIT Electronic Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 5 (Fall 2005), p. 59.

successors were admired for their broad tolerance of all religions.[12] According to one source, Sayyid Said would not allow the slaughter of any cattle in predominantly Hindu sections of town, for fear of offending the residents.[13] When European travellers, diplomats and Christian missionaries arrived on the scene in the 1840s they were also impressed by the good-humored politeness of the Muslims.[14]

Scholastic Contribution to the Muslim Scholarship in Zanzibar and East Africa

This is a phase of Arab-Muslim history on an island that was not a prosperous trade terminus but also an entrepot for ideas and a significant hotbed of modern Arab-Islamic intellectualism.[15]

Brought under the formal rule of the Busaidis in 1832, Zanzibar became the capital city of the Omani dynasty. The ambitious plan of its founder Sayyid Said (1804-1856) to transform Zanzibar into a major economic centre and an international seaport opened the gates for a flood of migrants from Oman as well as Hadramawt and India. A number of those were *ulemā* whose presence in Zanzibar institutionalized the long presence of Islam on the Island and resulted in an unprecedented spread of Islamic institutions and of a literate Islamic

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[12] *ibid.*, p. 59.

[13] A. Al-Barwani, *Conflicts and Harmony in Zanzibar (Memories)*, (Dubai, 1997), p. 33.

[14] On August 31, 1864 the Reverend Bishop Tozer and Reverend Dr. Steere, the British Anglican missionaries of the Universities' mission to Central Africa, had arrived in Zanzibar. They started to prepare Swahili translations of the Gospels and Old Testament, Swahili language books, handbooks for other African languages, Swahili short stories etc., to service the missionary activities on the African mainland and for the small African Christian Community in Zanzibar. The missionaries were helped by local Muslim scholars in the preparation of the translations. Shaykh Abdul al-Aziz bin Abdul al-Ghani al-Amawi (1832 – 96), one of the leading *ulemâ* of the coast and a *qādī* in Zanzibar, was co-translator with Richard Lewin of the Gospel of St. Luke into Kiunguja (Zanzibari) dialect of Swahili, *Anjili ya Luka ilvyofasirika Kwa maneno Ya Kiunguja* (1872) and helped Bishop Streere with his translation of the Bible into Swahili and an Arabic Psalter. See Philip Sadgrove (ed.), *History of Printing and Publishing in the Languages and Countries of the Middle East* (Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 151 – 152.

[15] L. Rolingher, 'Constructing Islam and Swahili identity' in the *MIT Electronic Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 5 (Fall 2005), p. 10.

tradition that was Arabic in character.[16] They also brought ideas and ideologies, ties and connections, and along with the rulers, they changed the intellectual and political landscape of Zanzibar. Together they pulled Zanzibar closer to the Arab and Muslim world. Members of this elite were rulers, politicians, landlords, journalists, and *ulemā* and constituted the majority of Zanzibari literati.[17] The relationship between the Omani and Arab elites was governed by the ties of identity and ideological connections to pan-Islamic and pan-Arab movements and their contribution to reform and renewal movements throughout the Arab world.[18]

For the Muslim scholars of Zanzibar, however, it was the birth of a cultural renaissance in the Mashriq (Arab East) that was most engaging. That was an Arab literary renaissance which focused on the leading role of Arab culture, language, history and people. The Omani elite was exposed to that trend since its inception and the Sultans of Zanzibar financially assisted several of its vanguards.[19]

Sultan Barghash and the Printing Press and Links with Arab Intellectuals

The reign of Sayyid Barghash bin Said (1870 – 1888) was a period of reform and modernization in Zanzibar. In 1875 he had travelled to Europe on a state visit to England, stopping in Egypt en route. It may be during this trip that he decided his country needed an Arabic printing press. Egypt was, perhaps, the inspiration for his decision. Under Khedieve Ismail the Egyptian Arabic press had come into its own; publication of Arabic newspapers, public and private presses was multiplying, as was the printing of new and classical Arabic texts to respond to an expanding public thirst for new Arabic writing and access to the vast treasury

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[16] A. K. Bang, *Sufis and Scholars of the Sea* (London, 2003), see chapter 7 on 'Scriptural Islam in East Africa,' pp. 126 – 152.

[17] A. N. Ghazal, "The Other 'Andalus': The Omani Elite in Zanzibar and the Making of an Identity 1880s – 1930s," *MIT Electronic Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 5 (Fall 2005), p. 44.

[18] *ibid.*, pp. 44-45.

[19] *ibid.*, pp. 50-51.

of Arab intellectual history.[20] Barghash may well have been encouraged by his links with a number of Arab intellectuals and other foreign friends to acquire his own printing press. He brought back printing machines using Arabic and Roman scripts and recruited printers from abroad to run them. The presses were used to print books and other publications, most of which were `Ibādī religious texts. The publishing of `Ibādī texts began for the first time in the 1880s at presses thousands of miles apart in Algiers, Tunis, Cairo and Zanzibar.[21] Al-Matba'a al Sultāniyya (the Sultanate Press) in Zanzibar, the first Arabic press in East Africa, began its book-publishing activities in 1879-80. The works chosen for publication were significant for the `Ibādī community at large, which up to then had no access in printed form to the religious literature of the sect. The largest number of copies of the print were exported to `Ibādī communities in Oman and beyond. Though Oman had the largest `Ibādī community, there was no printing press there in this period and Omani writers had to have their works published further afield. In the spirit of this period of the Arab renaissance, in which many young Arab intellectuals, particularly in Syria and Egypt, were challenging accepted values, promoting new political and social concepts and experimenting with new literary genres, such as the theatre, the novel and short stories, the Sultan's press seems to have considered as one of its principle tasks the stimulation of contemporary `Ibādī scholarship by authors thousands of miles away in Oman and Algeria.[22] The very first publication of the press, appearing over the years 1879-80 to 1886-87, was a complete system of Islamic theology and law according to the `Ibādī school by a contemporary Omani scholar, Jumayyil Bin Khamis al Sa'di, the *Qāmūs al-Sharī`a*, written between 1844-63. In 1884 Barghash bought another Arabic press from the famous Jesuit fathers Press (Matba`at al-Abā al- Yasuiyyun) in Beirut and recruited Lebanese workers to run it.[23] As well as contemporary works of scholarship, the press printed a number of canonical works, considered as primary texts on the `Ibādī religious sciences.

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[20] P. Sadgrove, *History of Printing and Publishing*, p. 153.

[21] *ibid.*, p. 153.

[22] *ibid.*, p. 154.

[23] *ibid.*, p. 154.

Under Barghash's successors, Khalīfa bin Said (1888-90) `Alī bin Said (1890-93), Sayyid Hamād bin Thuwaynil (1893-96) and Sayyid Hamūd b Muhammad (1896 – 1902), the press continued its limited new publication projects and completed the volumes of works started in his reign. In 1898 it published another basic text at the Matba`at Jazit al-Shanba, *Madārij al Kāmil fi Nazm Mukhtasar al-Khisal*, by a leading contemporary Omani scholar and historian, Abd Allah b Humayd al Salīmi (1869/70-1914), a rhymed summary of the basic texts, *Mukhtasar al-Khisal* by Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm b Qays b Sulaymān al Hamdāni al Hadramī (1126-27). Another book published by the press was Abul-Abbās, Ahmad b Muhammad b Bakr's *Hādha'l-Kitāb al Musamma bi- Abi Mas'ala* in 1900-1.[24]

Barghash had close ties with a Syrian publisher and journalist, Luwis Sabunji (1838-1931), who gave publicity to Zanzibar in his Arabic journal, the Bee/ al Nahla, which was published in London. Sabunji wrote an Arabic account of Barghash's visit to England, depending on notes taken from the English newspapers and French publications, written by Zāhir b Said, Secretary to the Sultan. This work, *Tanzīh al Absār wal-Afkār, fi Rihlat Sultān Zanjibar*, which was published in London in 1879 contains a most amusing illustration of Barghash attending Ascot and Doncaster races, culled from some illustrated paper of the period. The drawing depicts Barghash with another Arab standing in an open carriage with conventional race-glasses in his hand, watching the finish of the race. Around the carriage the cream of London Society, including royalty, can be seen to be clustering.[25]

The Zanzibar and Omani Sultans funded the publication of a number of books in Cairo, not all by `Ibādī writers. Copies of books printed at their expense and with dedications to the Sultans on specially printed pages, often in expensive bound versions, were sent to the palace in Zanzibar. The Zanzibar Sultans also later subsidized a number of Arabic newspapers by taking out regular subscriptions and making other donations : Jarīdat al Iqbāl and Thamarāt al Funūn (Beruit), Jarīdat al Mirsād (Marseilles), al Tārīkh al Yawmī, al Basīr and al Fadīla (Alexandria), al Ma`lūmāt (Istanbul), Tarablus al Sham (Tripoli), al

[24] *ibid.*, p. 155.

[25] *ibid.*, p. 155.

Mahrūsa, al Hilāl, al Mu'ayyad, al Manār, al Diyā, Jarīdat al `Umrān, Jarīdat al Busta, Jarīdat al Ikhlās, Jarīdat al Rāwī, al Rā'id al Misrī, and al Sabah (Cairo), al Khilāfa (London), and Abu Nazzāra (Paris).[26]

The scholastic contribution of Zanzibar to the Muslim scholarship was evident from the cultural relations with the `Ibādī movement in Algeria. A document from the Zanzibar Archives, in the form of a letter to Sayyid Hamūd b. Muhammad (1896 – 1902) from Shaykh Sulaymān b. Nāsir al-Lamkī, clearly illustrates this connection.[27] In this letter Shaykh al-Lamkī describes to the Sultan his visit to Wādī Mizāb in Algeria and how he was warmly welcomed with utmost hospitality by the `Ibādī community there due to their strong scholarly links with Oman and Zanzibar. A considerable number of `Ibādī scholars were to emerge from this north African community. Shaykh al-Lamkī paid a special visit to the North African scholar and reformer Shaykh Muhammad Ibn Yusuf al-Attafayyish (1820 – 1914) whom `Ibādīs refer to as *qutb al-a'imma*, "Pole of the Imams." This remarkable Algerian scholar was in continuous correspondence with the Sultans of Zanzibar from 1896 to the early 1900 concerning the role that the press played in this period in diffusing the `Ibādī religious literature and Attafayyish's works in particular.[28]

The first work of this great Algerian scholar to be published at *al-Matba'a al-Sultānīya* , was his lengthy commentary on the Qur'ān , *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Musamma Himyān al-Zād ilā Dār al-Ma`ād'*, which was published in thirteen parts between 1887 and 1897. That was the reason why Shaykh Attafayyish enjoyed a lively intercourse with religious authorities in Oman and Zanzibar, and many Omanis were to acknowledge his knowledge and scholarly efforts. Shaykh `Alī Muhsin al-Barwāni, in his 'Memoirs' entitled *Conflicts and Harmony in Zanzibar* praised the scholarly efforts of Shaykh Attafayyish and

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[26] *ibid.*, p. 156, 157.

[27] Zanzibar Archives: ZA – AA5/1413 – 25, Letter to Sayyid Hammud b. Muhammed from Sulayman b. Nasir al-Lamky, Berlin, 18 Muhharam 1318 H.

[28] Zanzibar Archives: The letters from Attafayyish to Sultan Hamūd b. Muhammad are in no. 148, 149 and 150 dated September/October 1901 in file AA5/11, no. 213 in AA5/21 and no. 30 in AA5/24. For an informative article on the links of Zanzibar with Algerian `Ibādi scholars see: Sadgrove, P., 'From Wadi Mizab to Unguja: Zanzibar's Scholarly Links,' in chapter 7 of Scott Reef (ed.), *The Transmission of Learning In Africa* (Leiden, 2005), pp. 184 – 221.

its positive impact on the Muslim community in Zanzibar (both `Ibādīs and Sunnis) in terms of engendering enlightenment and promoting intermingling between the two groups by eliminating inter-sectarian misunderstanding through his publications. Shaykh `Alī Muhsin comments: "Thanks to the work of the distinguished Algerian `Ibādī scholar Shaykh Muhammad Yūsuf al-Attafayyish, in his commentary on the Qur'ān and his monumental *Sharh al-Nīl* on *fiqh* (i.e. jurisprudence) a great deal of inter-sectarian misunderstanding has been cleared."[29]

Zanzibar Cultural Relations with Arab Journals and Periodicals: Jurjī Zaydān and *al-Hilāl* Journal:

We have already mentioned in this paper that the Zanzibari Sultans and scholars had close ties with Arab publishers and journalists. This was confirmed by the Zanzibari elite through their correspondence and contribution and exposure to the cultural renaissance with the Sultans of Zanzibar financially assisting editors and journals through their donations and subscriptions.

One of those Arabists with whom the Zanzibari elite frequently corresponded was Jurjī Zaydān (1861 – 1914) an icon of Arab renaissance, "who did more than any other to create consciousness of the Arab past."[30] He was the editor of the Egyptian based journal *al-Hilāl* "Crescent"- a journal that enjoyed wide circulation among the Zanzibari elite- and author of many short stories and books including *Tārīkh al-Adab al-Islāmī* (History of Islamic Literature), a popular book in Zanzibar.[31] He communicated regularly with Sultans Hamūd b. Muhammad (1896 – 1902) and his son `Ali b. Hamūd (1902 – 1911) and his correspondence consisted primarily of formalities, notification to renew subscription, and replies to requests.[32]

Dr. Amal Ghazal of the University of Toronto, who specializes in modern Arab and Islamic intellectual history, considers Zaydān's interest in Zanzibar as

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[29] P. Sadgrove, "From Wadi Mizab to Unguja," *op. cit.*, pp. 185, 187.

[30] A. N. Ghazal, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

[31] *ibid.*, p. 51.

[32] *ibid.*, p. 51.

noteworthy. In a newly published article she gave this vivid appraisal and analysis of Zaydān's interest in the following :

It is testimony that for him, Zanzibar, despite geography, was part of the Mashriq (Arab East) and politically and ideologically integrated into the larger Arab world. Its Sultans were Arab and thus they symbolized the Arab (heroism) that Zaydan was seeking. Perhaps, it is the same (heroism) that prompted Nasir Ibn Sulayman al-Lamky to send al-Hilal a biography of the Omani adventurer Hamid al-Marjibi, otherwise known as Tippu Tip. The piece focused on al-Marjibi's adventures in Central Africa and his role in expanding Omani rule in this largely unknown territory."[33]

It seems that this valuable contribution by Shaykh al-Lamkī on the career of al-Marjībī impressed Zaydān so much that he wrote an introduction to the article evaluating the importance of this work. Amal Ghazal comments:

"The introduction to the article in al-Hilal, presumably written by Zaydan himself, was even more interesting than the article. The editor presented al-Marjibi as an Arab hero from among "the geniuses of the Sharq"(East)...who performed miracles in politics, in prudence and in leadership and whose efforts to discover the interior of Africa must be revealed to all."

The editor ended his introduction by thanking al-Lamkī for "his earnest concern to make known the achievements of the Shaqiyyin (Easterners)." During a period of Arab self-glorification and resurrection of a celebrated past, it is very significant that Zaydān chose Zanzibar to represent that golden moment when history witnessed the expansion of Arab rule in Africa. Al-Marjībī's achievements in East Africa, in Zaydān's eyes, were Arab 'heroic' achievements worth placing al-Marjībī among the greatest 'celebrities' Zaydān listed in his *Mashāhir al-Sharq*, and among those who helped build the Arab Legacy.[34]

The involvement of the Zanzibari Muslim scholars in this cultural renaissance of Arabs reflects their interest in the resurrection of the Arab heritage for the sake of promoting the legacy of Islam. It also reflects their awareness of their role as

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[33] *ibid.*, p. 51.

[34] *ibid.*, p. 51.

"Arabs" in encouraging all efforts that aim at cherishing Arab history and the Arabic language.

The Role of a Muslim Scholar and Reformer: Shaykh al-Amin b. Ali al-Mazrui (1890 – 1947)

Shaykh al-Amīn b. `Alī al-Mazrui was well known as one of the leading experts of Islamic law in East Africa. He was also the first East African of any social stature to fully embrace modernist Islam, to write about it, and to promote it publicly. Born in Mombasa in 1890, the son of Qādī Shaykh `Alī b. Abdullah al-Mazrui, he was trained in the Islamic sciences by his relative, Shaykh Sulaymān b. `Alī al-Mazrui who himself served as Chief Qādī under British colonial authority. Later Shaykh al-Amīn was sent to Zanzibar to study under the renowned scholar Sayyid 'Ahmad b. Sumayt (1859 – 1925) and Shaykh 'Abdallah Bākathīr al-Kindī (1860 – 1925). Indeed, it was probably in Zanzibar that he was first exposed to some of the Egyptian reformist writing already popular among an earlier generation of Zanzibari *ulemâ*. A later influence, which probably stimulated his interest in historical writing and the discussion and investigation of different sources and ideas[35], stemmed from his appointtment as a government *qādī* in 1932 and Chief Qādī from 1937 until his death in 1947. Through his experiences with the patchwork Indian Civil Procedure Code then in force in East Africa, and in sitting on cases alongside European judges, he was exposed to works and ideas concerning law which enriched his ability in historical analysis and polemics.[36] His son, A. A. Mazrui, recollected: "But although my father did have this solemn side to his career and temperament, it was solemnity which was often animated by intellectual liveliness. He was a gifted polemicist and great public debater in his day."[37]

Shaykh al-Amīn's personal contributions to East African Islam are beyond description. His study groups attracted scores of African Muslims who later

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[35] I. E. Soghayroun. "Uman and East Africa." *op. cit.*, p. 167.

International Journal of Middle East Studies, vol. 13 (1981), p. 331.

[37] Ali A. Mazrui, "The Making of an African Political Scientist," *International Social Science Journal*, vol. 25, (1973), p. 102.

went back to their villages to spread Islam. He traveled widely in East Africa preaching and encouraging the establishment of Qur'ān schools and mosques .The numerous textbooks on different aspects of Islam which he wrote in Arabic and Swahili have a lasting legacy. These were the first Swahili textbooks on Islam ever to be disseminated in East Africa, spreading the faith further and making it more understandable to Muslims in general and to new converts in particular.[38]

Shaykh al-Amīn thus established himself as a Muslim modernizer through his activities as an author, educator and reformer. In 1930–1931 he issued his first Swahili language paper, *al-Sahīfa*, followed sixteen months later (February, 1932) by *al-Islāh* (Reform).[39] This is the first venture into journalism by an Arab on the Kenya coast. It was printed in two sections, one Arabic and one Swahili, one being more or less the translation of the other. The first issue extolled the virtues of a newspaper especially amongst people who for too long had been demoralized politically and economically and who were then in the process of being exposed to social, cultural and moral dangers in a changing society.[40] His son reports on these activities: "I used to listen to all these discussions as a child, often admiring the passion which underlay my father's reforming zeal. Sometimes he used his 'newspaper' for more *ad hoc* issues, often coming into conflict with the local colonial officials of the day.... I saw in Charles Dickens a little of my father – the social reformer commanding a pen. That my father was primarily a pamphleteer, while Dickens was primarily a novelist, was to me a distinction without a difference. They both used words for great public causes."[41]

The Zanzibari Scholars and the Muslim Community of South Africa: Settlement of a religious controversy (1913 -1914)

The history of the transmission of Islamic knowledge involving prominent scholars in Zanzibar in the first quarter of the twentieth century had been

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[38] A. I. Salim. *Swahili – Speaking Peoples of Kenya's Coast*, (Nairobi, 1973), pp. 166, 167.

[39] *ibid.*, p. 167; Pouwels, op. cit, p. 332.

[40] A. I. Salim, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

[41] Mazrui, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

reconstructed to include many areas of the Swahili coast and beyond. Shaykh Abdullah Sālih al-Fārsī, a famous Zanzibari Muslim scholar and historian, was the first local source to provide information relating to Zanzibari influence in South Africa.[42] He claimed that Shaykh Abdullah Bākathīr al-Kindī travelled to Cape Town in 1913 to settle 'a big quarrel.' According to Anne Bang, this mission of Shaykh Bākathīr to South Africa could only be understood through the Hadramī network that he and his master Sayyid Ahmad bin Sumayt were already operating. The mission to South Africa can thus be interpreted as a transmission of knowledge extending via the Hadramawt – Makkah – Zanzibar axis.[43]

The background to this episode was a dispute which developed probably as early as the 1880s among the Muslims of the Bo-Kaap area in Cape Town. The small Muslim community had by then achieved some cohesion after a period dominated by ethnic divisions. The new controversy was of a religious nature and concerned the question of the Friday (*Jum'a*) prayer. Because of disagreement among *imam*s of the Shāfi`ī mosques, Friday prayers were being said in several mosques, thus resulting in small congregations. As a means to resolve the dispute a certain Muhammad Salih Hendricks organized a conference to which all the Shāfi`ī *Imams* of Cape Town were invited to attend.[44]

In 1912, Hendricks resolved to put the Jum'ah prayer dispute before his Makkan teacher 'Umar b. Abi Bakr Bā Junayd. The latter responded by referring the matter to Ahmad bin Sumayt (1859– 1925), the prominent Chief Qādī of the

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[42] A. S. Farsy, *The Shafi'i Ulama of East Africa*, translated from Swahili, edited and annotated by R. L. Pouwels, (University of Wisconsin African series, 1989), p. 132.

[43] A. K. Bang, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

[44] Muhammad Salih Hendricks, who was born in 1871 in Swellendam into a family of recent converts to Islam, is considered an interesting character from the point of view of the 'Alawī Tarīqa network. Hendricks travelled to Makkah to pursue his studies with two famous teachers who had very strong scholarly connections with Ahmed Ibn Sumayt and Abdallah Bā Kathīr, the most outstanding Shāfi'ī Ulamā' of Zanzibar, at the time. The two Makkan teachers who taught Hendricks were 'Umar b. Alī Bakr Bā Junayd and Muhammad b. Said Babseyl. After his return to Cape Town in 1903, Hendricks started teaching the religious sciences and emerged as an active member of Alawiyya brotherhood in South Africa. Hence when the Jumu'ah prayer dispute erupted in 1912, Hendricks resolved to put it before his 'Alawī Makkan teacher Bā Junayd. For further details, see Anne Bang, op. cit., pp. 114, 115.

Shāfi'īs in Zanzibar, who in turn decided to send his disciple (Shaykh Bākathīr) to mediate the controversy in Cape Town. Shaykh Bākathīr left Zanzibar some time in late 1913, accompanied by Rashīd bin Salīm al-Mazrui —who was to act as interpreter— and other members. This came to be referred to in South African literature as the "Ba Kathier Delegation."

This scholarly mission from Zanzibar was successful and the religious dispute was solved and a happy agreement was reached. Dr. Anne Bang comments:

The so-called Shafii Jum'a agreement was signed on 27 Safar 1332/24, January 1914, following a meeting attended by all but one of the Shafii imams of the Cape area. Here, the imams agree to hold one Jum'a prayer in one (specified) mosque, while the task of delivering the khutba (sermon) was to alternate between the imams who until now had led separate Friday prayers. For negotiating this compromise, Ba Kathir was offered a sum of money, which he refused to accept. On his advise, the money was instead spent to establish a *madrasa* in Cape Town, which was to be named Madrasa Ba Kathir.[45]

Recommendations for Future Research and Action

(1) The study of the history and culture of the Muslim peoples of South Africa and East Africa has been somewhat neglected by historians and social scientists. Local Muslim scholars of these areas especially in universities and centres of research have to take the initiative to adopt an organized programme of intensive study of this vital area.

(2) This field of study, so poorly known in so many respects, may still be pursued in the outlying regions on the Kenyan and Tanzanian coasts and particularly on the Comoro Islands.

(3) The top priority should be the collection of manuscripts and documents still scattered and kept in private and family libraries both on the East African coast and the islands and in Oman and Hadramawt. In addition to the rich manuscript literature in Swahili, there is known to be considerable heritage of Arabic writing in Zanzibar and Lamu, but so little of it has been accessible to the wider world of scholarship.

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[45] ibid, p. 115.

(4) Despite the disaster of the destruction and the loss of many valuable records as a result of the Zanzibar revolution of 1964, there are still enough historical fragments and documents and persons living who can give useful oral accounts to make a reconstruction of the preceding era both feasible and attractive. This can be done most effectively through the media of Arabic and Swahili, and should be attempted before much material is lost permanently.

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