THE ORIGINS OF CULTURAL HERITAGE
AND ITS
ROLE IN THE EASTERN COAST OF
AFRICA*

Dr. Saif Al Islam Badawi Basheer**

Trade, Migration & Consequences
The relation between the Arab Peninsula and the Eastern Coast of Africa began very early with trade caravans. So it is natural to notice an expansion of Arabic culture in that area after the advent of Islam in the early 7th century A.D. which is also considered as a new era in the history of relations between Arabs and Abyssinia (cf. Riyaad, 1976:333).

The Arab immigrants in Abyssinia were offered a distinctive position in the country. This privilege encouraged further Arab groups to arrive there. It is believed that the majority of them stayed there for sixteen years where Al-Najashi the king of Abyssinia welcomed them with great hospitality (cf. Ibn Saad, 1960:136-137).

On the other hand, political and economic situations have played a tremendous role in shaping the Islamic state in Arab Peninsula. That is, when many people migrated from their lands in Arab Peninsula. Some of those immigrants reached up to the Eastern coast of Africa. (cf. Kaamil, 1963:64-65).

*Translated by: Mubarak Mohammed Abdalmawla
**AlNeelin University Faculty of Arts - Dept. of History.
Then there were migrations continuity between whiles among whom are the Arab immigrants of 7th century A.D. who played a great role in shaping the history of that coastal area.

After the death of the Prophet Mohammed, (P.B.U.H.), political, economic and disasters befell the Umma such as : Famine year (Aam Al-Ramad) which occurred during the Caliphate of Omar Ibn El-Khatab. Those events had forced some Muslims to migrate to East Africa, seeking security and a better life. (cf. Al-Nageera, 1982:81).

After the assassination of Caliph Othman acceptance of Allah be upon him and during the Caliphate of Ali Ibn Abi Taalib, some Shia : (Ali’s descendants and supporters), fled and migrated from their original home lands to the Eastern coast of Africa. (cf. Zaki, 1955: 81).

The most significant motivations that led Arab Muslims to migrate, centered on religious and political conflicts, particularly during the Ummayad and Abbasid states. It was likely that, those Arab immigrants from Al-Ihsaa, Al-Bahrain, Oman, Hadramoot and Yemen carried aspects of their civilization to East Africa.

The countries that were mostly affected by the above mentioned migrations were: Eritrea, Somalia, Zanzibar and the coast up to the South Equatorial region (cf. Hamdi, 1950: 249). Consulting History references, you will find that the oldest Arab political migrations to Eastern Coast of African happened during the days of
Abd Al-malik Ibn Marwan the Umayyad Caliph (65-86 Hgr/685 – 705 A.D).

Late immigrants joined their companions in Eastern coast of Africa and began to establish towns built according to the Arab model such as: Laamo which later became a referential base for establishing additional Arabic towns along that coastal area. It is reported that Gaafar the son of Caliph Abd Al-Malik Ibn Marwan, immigrated to East Africa and governed the region of kewa Abo southern (Mogadishu) in (Arkhaeeel Laamo).

One of the most important Arab political immigrant groups that settled in Maafya Island, came from Oman during the years (75-85 Hgr/694-704 A.D) under the leadership of Suleiman and Saeed, the sons of Abbad Elljalandi, a sheik of Alazd tribe which ruled Oman during the age of Amawatic state. Although the Hadarma played a significant role in the Eastern Coast of Africa, their role was limited only to trade. It is claimed that, some of them settled along that coastal area in addition to the town of Shekhaya near Mogadishu in Benadir coast Eastern Somalia (cf.Al-Tabarri, :197-276).

Further immigrants from Yemeni Zidiya group came to this coastal area during the years (140-143Hgr/757-760). They settled in the area extending from Equatoria to the South East of Mogadishu. On the other hand, the Abbasid Caliph Haroon El-Rasheed (170 – 193Hgr/786-809 A. D) gave a special attention to the Eastern Coast of Africa and sent his people up to Zanibar and Bumba. In the 4th c Hgr the migration of the seven brothers from an Arab tribe called Bano Elharith in
addition to another non-Arab group called Shirawziya from Persia, considered as an important group to influence the history of that area.

Additional Arab immigrants from the Ihsaa region came there under the leadership of seven brothers who settled on the Benadir shore where they established Mogadishu and Brawa. Their authority extended to include the southern part of Mumbassa town. These Arabs of the Zidiya tribe intermarried with the indigenous tribes generating a new group called Alamozidij, which is a form for the k. Sawahili word (Alzidiya). Cf.Zaki, 1965:77.

By the second half of the tenth century A.D, a persian immigrants from (Sheraz) under the leadership of Al-Hassan Ibn Ali and his sons came to establish the state of Negroes ( Dawlat Elzing) and its capital is called (Kalwa), which authority extended to include several ports and Islands laying between Bamba in the North to (Safala) in the South. And it is considered the first Islamic state to be established in East Africa. It is probably that recent Zanzibar Sultanate traces back its historical origin to that state (Bawlat,Alzing).

By the begining of 5th c Hgr, the coastal towns were completely built in Arabic model. And the process went on to include towns such as (Mogadishu, Brawa, Kismayo, Bat, Lamo, Mogeh, Makwa, Muzambig and Safala. (cf.AISwaafi, 1985: 27)

Then migrations followed by migrations, particularly, in the beginning of 7th c Hgr when a mass group of Arab immigrants from Oman region arrived at Kalwa under the leadership of Suleiman Ibn Suleiman Ibn
Mazhar Alnabhani who later married the daughter of (Ishaag) one of the governors of Kalwa. Finally, Ishaag resigned from the throne for his in-law, Suleiman Ibn Suleiman.

The migration of (Bani Nabhaan), an Omani tribe, was the final mass migration to the Eastern coast of Africa. Since then, there were about forty towns built in Arabic example extending from Gulf of Aden up to the southern parts of that area including towns such as: (Kalwa, Zanzibar, Mumbassa, Lamo, Malindi, Brada, Batta, and kismayo (cf.Anmaliki, 1986: 130).

Preachers and traders contributed increasingly and successfully in spreading and deepening Islam in that area. That is. They converted people in great number to Islam with only little effort compared to that of those European missionaries who depended entirely on their power and other inhuman means in taking Africans to convert to their religion (cf.Mahmoud, 1998:37.)

It is worth mentioning here that Islam did not enter Eastern coast of Africa by force, but with forgiveness, justice, simplicity and rational justifications. These basic concepts to Islam were quite enough to attract and motivate people to enter into Islam. Islam brought dignity and equity to Africans regardless of colour or race., Africans were attracted to Islam for it calls’ for brotherhood and equality between people, although, the European worked hard to suppress Islam in the eastern coast, by portraying the Arabs as slave traders ,Islam was not affected.

293
The role of Sufi Tariqas in preaching Islam and Championing its calls

Sufism is a spiritual ideology rather than a doctrine. It has addressed the souls of Muslims and motivated them to preach the religion starting from the 9th c.Hgr.

In fact, the efforts of sufies preaching Islam in the Eastern coast of Africa, came late, that is, after Islam spread in the Arab Peninsula. The truth of this argument is borne out by the connections between the Arabs in the Eastern coast of Africa and those of Arab Peninsula (cf.Alhuwayyri, 1980:53). The relations between the two groups continue to this day. The reason for this is that the spread of Islam was peaceful through education and intimate preaching. The Sufies used to travel with the caravans to East Africa and stay long enough until they could make followers and adherents over all that area. They established Quranic schools(Zaawias) from which preachers graduated and sent to acquire further knowledge in Islam and its culture in Alharamain in Arabia, Alazhar University in Egypt and Mosques of Damascus in Mount Lebanon, in Gerwaan, and Faas in Morocco. Sufies sent their members all over the world to spread Islam and its principles, to enable people to convert easily to Islam (cf.Abdel Majeed, 1949:227-229).

Sufism also played a significant role in spreading Islam to the Eastern coast of Africa, particularly during the 19th c A.D. when Muslim’s political power declined
after the Europeans colonized the Arabs towns on the East Coast of Africa.

The Europeans worked hard to weaken Islam denying them access to them to the civil serves. This policy is reflected clearly in the shape of socio-cultural and administrational entities constructed. Sufism filled the void and provided an alternative to the previous Islamic institutions. Africans began to respond to their appeal and took advantage of social, economic and cultural opportunities made on their disposal. Gadriyya Sufis in Zanzibar, Idrisyya in Bagmo, Shaziliyya in Kilwa Kiswani came to spread Islam (cf. Othman, 2001:112). Sufism also confronted the European colonization in Eastern coast of Africa. And fought with it a good example of this is the confrontation between the Somali hero, Mohammed Ibn Abdallah Ibn ElHassan and the British. (cf.Dishaan, 1956: 135).

**The famous and common Sufi Tariqas are as follows:**

**Qadiriyya Tariqa**

It is the oldest Tariqa and the first one to appear in the Eastern coast of Africa. It founded by an Iraqi sheikh called Abd al-Qadir Aljailani (1077-1166). Qadiriyya Tariqa appeared in Eastern Coast of Africa with the advent of traders, who migrated from Yemen and Hadramout. It spread first in the coastal towns like Musawa, Zeela and Mogadishu through its religious and educational activities. Its school groomed future Muslim scholars who later carried Islam to the common people in big cities in Eritrea, Somalia, Tanzania and other parts
of East Africa. These towns became Islamic centers in their own right.

Shaziliyya Tariqa

It is founded by one of the descendants of Imam Ali Ibn Abi Talib (acceptance of Allah be upon him) called Abu Al-Hassan Ali Ibn Abd Eljabbar Elshazili who was born in Morocco in 1197 A.D. He toured a number of Islamic states and finally settled in Alexandria in Egypt and began preaching. As a result of his efforts many people responded to his Islamic call. He died in (Eizab) desert when he was in his way to perform pilgrimage in Mecca. It is said that before his death he had passed down the caliphate of the Tariqa to his successor Abu Al Abbas El-Mursi (cf. Mahmoud, 1967:47).

In as much as East Africa witnessed strong relations with Egypt and its scholars, then it is probably that those scholars (Ulamaa) brought the Shaziliyya to tropical Africa. Shaziliyya is most popular in Zanzibar where it is the one adhered to most of the population. In Tanzania it's the second largest Tariqa. It was thanks to the work of Sheik Hussein who operated from Kilwa than the Shaziliyya became popular in Tanzania. He opened a great school that acted as a center for practicing spiritual activities for people all over East Africa such as Uganda, Kenya, Malawi, Zambia and Mozambique. (cf. Othman, 2001:212)

The Tariqa of Al Ahmadiyya Al Idrisiyya

It belongs to the Moroccan Sheikh called, Ahmad Ibn Idris Al Fasi (1837AD). This Tariqa had contributed
to the religious reformation movement that appeared in
the 19th c A.D. Ibn Idris introduced himself as a sufi and
religious reformer. He was influenced by the Salafiyya
movement in Najd. This enabled him to purify sufism
from many innovations and anchor it to the Holy Quran
and Sunnah only. One of Ahmad’s followers called
Sheikh Mohammad Salih established a sub Tariqa called
Salihyya which later extended to cover all Somali land
and East Africa. Alshazilyya however became more
popular in that area, after it had been joined by
Mohammed Hassan the Somali Mahdi. Sheik
Mohammad is one of the national heroes of Somalia who
is also called( the savior of Somali people). It is worth
mentioning here that, Alsalihiyya played a significant role
in originating Islamic culture in Somali land. ( cf.

Rufaaiyya Tariqa

It is one of the oldest sufi Tariqas in Tanzania. It
appeared there with the advent of Hadramouti
immigrants. Among its famous Sheikhs are: AL Sharif
Alaidrus, the first to hold an anniversary festivity for the
birthday of prophet Mohammad (P.B.U.H). In addition,
Al-Rufaaiyya hymns are presented in K. Sawahili
Language.

Alalawiyya Tariqa

It belongs to Sheikh Mohammed Ibn Ali Alalawi
who died in653Hgr-1255A.D. Among the famous Alawi
sheikhs are Abdallah Mohammad Ibn Salim Ibn Baa
Katheer ALKindi, Abd Allah Ibn Mohammad Al Saggaf

297
and the descendants of Jamal El-leil. Sheikh Abdallah Baa Katheer brought the Tariqa to Zanzibar.

One of the Alwians remarkable deeds in Zanzibar is their Alnour Islamic schools which included a great number of students and adherents (cf.Othman,2001:126-127).

Sufism, represented in the above mentioned Tariqas played a significant role in Eastern Coast of Africa in both religious and educational aspects. These Tariqas have been establishing from which jurists (Fughaa) and scholars Ulamma graduate to steer Muslim societies away from Christians and pagan influence. The adherents and followers of these Tariqas also managed to organize themselves and oppose European colonizers in several historical battles.

Cultural Dimension and its Pioneers

It is paradoxical that the Portuguese invaders contributed indirectly to the propagation for Islam. Muslims who were forced to desert these East African coastal areas and take refuse in the inner parts of Africa, where able to interact with the indigenous tribes through intermarriages and subsequently propagate the principles of Islam among the inhabitants.

As a result of this interaction between Arabs and Africans there appeared a new civilization having a common Afro-Arab characteristics. Families of Arab immigrant such as: the Mazruians, Hannawians and Hadarmas in Mombassa began to occupy distinctive and high positions in the fields of jurisprudence, education
and culture. By the end of 19th c to early 20th c A.D. these families produced quite a number of great scholars who later contributed in propagating Islamic civilization in the Eastern coast of Africa. The most prominent of those (Ulamaa) were: Sheikh Ahmed Ibn Someet, Sheikh Ali Ibn Abdullah Almazrui, Sheikh Abdallah Ibn Mohammed Ibn Baa Katheer, Sheikh Abd Alrahman Ibn Ahmed and Sheikh Al-Amin Ibn Ali Ibn Nafi Almazrui. Beside, the Hadarmas who actively contributed in spreading Islam and its civilization, particularly in Lamo and in other places in North Kenya and around it.

One of the significant religious legacies in Lamo are Ribaat Alriyadah (zawiyas) in which spiritual activities are performed. These (zawiyas) were founded by one of the honourable men of Tariqua Al alwiyya called Habib Ibn Salih Ibn Habib AlAlawi (cf. Haj El Saifi, 1999. 118-120).

The civilizational role carried out by the Arabs of Oman in 19th C.A.D is reflected clearly in the missionary work for Islam. It is believed that it was the Bosaeedians who spread Islam further into East Africa to include places such as: Uganda, the Upper parts of Kongo river, Ruanda, Burundi and the inner parts of Tanganiga.

As for Zanzibar, it became a great Islamic enlightenment center during the days of Saeed Ib Sultan, later it acted as a center of Omani authority in East Africa in 1348 Hgr-1832 AD.

It is true that Islam spread there with the advent of Omani trade caravans before mid 19th C A.D. through the first Omani preachers. Amongst whom is Sheikh Ahmad Ib Ibrahim Al Amri whose missionary efforts reached
further into the inter or as far east as Uganda (cf. Sagiroon, 1994: 499),

The choice of Zanzibar town to be the capital of Bosaeedians in the Eastern coast of Africa reflected their economic and political ingenuity. This fact is borne out when Zanzibar finally turned into an economic and political revival center in the Eastern coast of Africa. As with the case with Mogadishu in the North up to Jado cape on the coast upto Uganda, Zaeer and upper parts of kongo river. (cf. Sagiroon, 1994 : 286-287)

At that time a student ( Taalib Alilm) should obtain a certificate signed by a scholar ( Fagheeh). That is the way through which scripts and knowledge traditions were transmitted in Zanzibar and East Africa.

In the 19th century when people began to specialize in Arabic, Quranic texts, poetry of Arabic and Sauwahili languages, Arabic books began appearing in Zanzibar.

After that, the Zanzibar towns turned into cultural centers and managed to attract students( Tullab Alilm) and Ulamaa from all over East Africa and even beyond. Those students came from Jawa, India, Hadramoot and Oman. ( cf. Kan breega, 1983:260-266).

Below are some of the ideal Ulamaa who lived in the Eastern coast of Africa :
Sheikh Ali Ibn Abdallah Ibn Naafi Al Mazroui(1825-1894 A.D) He is one of the Mazroui family which belongs to an Arab tribe called Baniyaas. This tribe had governed Mombassa and after the victory of the Bosaeed
in the war against them in 1837, they fled from Mombassa. Since then, sheikh Ali and his father migrated to Mecca. Ali traveled to Hadmoot in order to acquire knowledge from the Ulamaa there.

Finally, he returned back home to (Mombassa) where he was appointed as a magistrate.

Sheikh Abdallah Ibn Mohammad Bakatheer Al Kindi (1860-1925 A.D)

He was born in Lamo. He belonged to a famous family called Ba Katheer. Which is a sub-branch of the Kindi tribe stretching between Hadramoot and Oman.. He wrote several books of religious preaching and poems rendered Barzangi birth into the Sawahlili Language. Shiekh Abdallah also was the deciple of Said Ahmed Ibn Simyat the great Alim of Zanzibar. After that he traveled to Mecca in order to acquire knowledge under the great Ulama of Hijaz. He then traveled to Jawa in order to propagate Islam. After that he went to Cape Town to mediate a conflict that erupted between various Muslim groups. He settled in Zanzibar where he devoted himself to preaching and teaching. He became a popular Alim in the coastal area. His contributions to spread of Islam was made by mass several journeys he carried out to serve Islam. He also wrote poems besides he taught students (Tullab) who later became the famous Ulamas in East Africa. (cf. Kanbrega, 1968:269).
His prominent achievements are reflected in teaching Alshafiee doctrine, the regular sessions which graduating several students Tullab Alilm and compiling several books in opposing to Abadi doctrine) and its principles. This success encouraged many other Abadian groups to follow the steps of sheikh Ali, such people are: Bosaeedians, Maruians, Hannaus and Brwani families.

Sheikh Ahmad Ibn Simyat (1925 A.D)

He was one of the prominent and famous religious men in East Africa in the first half of 19th century. He belongs to the Hadarma and he was the disciple of Ebeed Allah Ibn Muhsin Alsaggaf, the Mufti of Hadramoot. He is also the student of the Iraqi Aalim Al Said Hussein Ibn Ali Al Marashi. And promoted until he became a magistrate. After that he traveled to Istanbul and Egypt where he joined Alazhar University then he traveled to Mecca and Zanzibar where he spent the rest of his life working as a magistrate and a teacher of religious science.

He held a distinctive position over all East Africa and Arab Peninsula. This led the Egyptians to view him as the best magistrate in that area. And they asked for his help whenever they experienced a complicated legal case. He compiled several books and volumes in various knowledge and science. He died and his age was sixty six that was in 1925 AD. (cf.Kanbrega, 1983: 267-268).
Sheikh Abd Rahman Ibn Ahmed (1844-1922)

He was born in the town of Siyoloh in the northern part of Kenya. He played a great role expand his education with the divine knowledge on the Eastern coast of Africa. He obtained his knowledge from the Arabian and Somali’s. He was appointed as a judge authority and was the first sheikh (Islamic scholar) in Mombassa. He also maintained strong relations with the scholars of Somalis. As the result of efforts of the these scholars Islam spread in every corner of Mombassa and Zanzibar. (cf. Haj Alsaafi, 1991:119-120)

THE CONCLUSION

We can conclude by emphasizing the existence of Arab-Islamic civilization in eastern coast of Africa until early nineteenth century as the origin of urbanization and cultural civilization in the area. This gave an added advantage to the understanding and solidarity between the large populations of people living in the whole coastal area.

Studies and researches about the origin of Islamic heritage, history and early Muslim efforts in the field of Islamic propagation (Da’wah) in eastern, coast of Africa need more efforts.

Invariably, we can say that the impact of Arab immigrants through intermarriages and preaching of Allah’s oneness in this area played a significant role in the intellectual, cultural and Islamic identities of the people of the area. This also characterizes their acceptability as a nation and their propagation of Islam.
the area. This also characterizes their acceptability as a nation and their propagation of Islam.

Accordingly, from the above information it becomes clear that the mix-up of cultural civilization of the Arab immigrants and the indigenous inhabitants of this area has a positive influence on the intellectual growth and purification of the soul, which are imbedded in the religious enhanced behaviors in the whole region east coastal Africa.

The study equally discloses the position of Islamic Sufism. Which aims at preparing powerful Muslim leaders capable of resisting all European colonialists' dominance in the region. In conformity with Allah's lay down rules and guidance, it also calls for the purification of the mind and codes of conducts.
References:


5- Hassan Ahmad Mahamoud; Al islam wal thagafah Alarabiya fi Afrigiya Al gahirah, 1998 AD. Daar Al fikr Alarabi.


7- Zahir Riyad: Al islaam Fi Ethyopia Fi Al usuur Al wstah, Algahirah Daar Al marifah.


11- Abd Elrahman Zaki, Al islaam wal muslimeen Fi sharg Ifrigiya Algahirah, 1965, madbaat yousuf
12- Abd Alzeer Abd Al majeed: Al tarbiyah Fi Alsudan Fi Awal Algarn Alsadis ashr Ilaa Nihayat Algarn Althanmin ashr, Algahirah 1949, Wizart Al maarif Alamumiya


14- Mohammad Ibn Saad (died in 230 Hgr.): Al tabagaat Ikubrah, Beroor, 1960 AD. Daar Saadir wa daar Beroor lil Tibaah wal nasr.


18- Hobber Deeshan: Aldiyanaat Fi Iffiriyya Tarjamat Ahmad sadig Hamdi, Algahirah 1956, D.N.