The Kingdom of Eifat Gabarte, the biggest kingdom on the Islamic style on Africa

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The first light of Islam that dawned on Africa was jetted in the eastern part and settled in Ethiopia as a third heavenly mission in Africa. This light carried forward with it the group of emigrants from the companions of prophet Mohamed (P.B.U.H) guided by Osman Ibn Affan, who was accompanied by his wife Rughia, daughter of the prophet; Gaafar Ibn Abi Talib, cousin of the prophet, and they found full security under the patronage of the ‘Nagashi’- king of Ethiopia who received them with hospitality and later embraced Islam at their hands.

Thus Ethiopia became the first land in the world generally, and in Africa in particularly, to accept Islam even before Al-Madina Al Monaw’wara.

Those first emigrants settled in peace and stability until time came for their return to ‘Makka Al Mukarrama’, which they returned to in another emigration. Up to that period Ethiopia became the destination of the Muslims for comfort and trade because of its fine weather and its just and nice people.

The beginning of the rise of the Islamic Kingdom in East Africa:

It was mentioned in history that the first Islamic state that rose in east Africa was in the region of Shawa in Ethiopia and was called the “Shawa state”. It lies between
the regions of the Amhara and the Tigrites, and only little information about it is known. It was discovered by the Italian scholar shiroly-1936, from a manuscript written by an unknown historian who witnessed the fall of the Islamic "shawa state" from 629Hgr- 688-1231-1289 a.d). He mentioned that the Shawa state existed since the epoch of Khalifa Omer Ibn AlKhattab (God bless him), and that its founders were Arabs from Beni Makhzoum, the tribe of Khalid Ibn Alwaleed and it fell down in that period after it reached its determined age and after the internal disturbances that hurried up with its down fall. That was in addition to the blows it received from the kingdom of Eifat Gabarte, which was able to annex most of its lands.

Then many petty states spread on the western coast of the Red Sea, the most famous of them were in the Ethiopian regions and in the land of present Somalia.

These kingdoms were established by diverse groups from the emigrant Arab Muslims from Arabia, after the end of the epoch of the 'rightly guided' Khalifs (Al Rashidin), and the beginning of the epoch of the Omayads and the Abbasids.

The Muslims used to immigrate to Ethiopia during the struggles of the Muslim rulers who used to fight against each other. Whatever dynasty gained power the other used to flee the country to some lands unreachable to guarantee their safety.

Ethiopia was the best place for that emigration. Therefore, the budding kingdoms of east Africa, which were normally adhering to one party of the Muslim Arabs of the emigrating groups, they belonged either to the Omayyads or to the Abbasids or even to the 'Zaydieen'
and some other diverse groups at the top of each kingdom was a king. At the beginning these petty kingdoms were weak and had little chances for collecting taxes and duties and therefore had poor wealth. In every kingdom were mosques for guma’a prayer and for group prayers. (gama’a). The people in these kingdoms were keen in preserving their religious duties and they were called Gabarte.

These kingdoms were overpowered by AL-Hotti, the king of Ethiopia to whom they used pay their taxes in the form of money, cloth and other forms.

These kingdoms transferred their struggle from Arabia to their new regions, they used to be engaged in war against each other and to cooperate with some against others, to the extent that some of them cooperated with Christian kings of Ethiopia against their Muslim folks and that these kings got much benefit from the results of these battles, in weakening these kingdoms, and sometimes the king could annex some of the weak kingdoms within an agreement of common defense.

Names and news of the famous Islamic kingdoms in east Africa:

We quote here the names of the seven most famous of the Islamic kingdoms, from the smaller to the greater and most famous kingdom. They come in succession as shown below:

1- The kingdom of Darah: Three days in length and three days in width. The weakest kingdom and it people are “Hanafites” and
they deal their transactions through barter trade

2- **The kingdom of Sharkha**: length three days and width four days and its people are Hanafites.

3- **The Kingdom of Arabini**: Its length is four days and its width is four days as well. The inhabitants belong to the Hanafi sect (Hanafites) and it comes after the kingdom of Duaru.

4- **The Kingdom of Bali**:
   
   Its length is twenty days and its width is six days. It embodies the most fertile lands among the kingdoms. Their transaction through the exchange of goods (bartering), e.g. goats against cows, cows against clothes etc. the inhabitants are hanafits.

5- **The kingdom of Douaru**:
   
   Its length is five days and its width two days. It people are Hanafite their currency in from Iron and is called Hanka. It is on the length of the needle and width of three needles. A cow is sold for five thousand Hankas and the goat three thousands. It is neibouring to Eifat.

6- **the Kingdom of Hadieya**:
   
   Its length eight was days and width nine days. Their king has soldiers more than any kingdom.

   Their uniforms and costumes were similar to those of Rabini Kingdom, and even the transaction services where the servants were brought from Egypt called the ‘Tawaish’ (pl.of Tawashin). The king of the Amhara used to forbid the castration of slaves and made restrictions for that. The thieves used to bring the slaves to the town of (Washlu) whose inhabitant were barbarians. They castrate them and bring them to Hadieya for medical treatment.
7- The Kingdom of Ofat or Eifat Gabarte:

Length fifteen days, width twenty days. The entire kingdom was rich in villages. The prices of goods were cheap, one hundred geese were sold for one quarter of an Egyptian pound, and thirty pounds of meat were sold with one and a half Egyptian Darhim. Most of its people were ‘shafiete’ and some were ‘Hanafiya’ (belong to Abu Hanifa). The people in Hadiya speak Arabic and Ethiopian languages.

There were so many towns in the kingdom. The king sits on a chair and he usually rides Algiter and he is followed behind by his musical instrument like drums and flouts. He rules the whole land of Zayla’a, where there was plenty of fruits and sugar cane. They have trees and bushes unknown to Egypt and sham. There is the ‘Gatt’ tree which has no fruit, but they chew its leaves which resemble the leaves of ‘Naring’ tree. It increases the intelligence, ‘reminds’ what is forgotten and give happy moments. It lessens the appetite for food, sexual intercourse and sleep. The people of these lands have great desire in eating (chewing) these leaves, especially the knowledgeable, and men of literature. Gold is brought to the kingdom from Diamont and siham- these are two minerals that came from Ethiopia where they normally transact with. The people of these kingdoms speak in more than fifty (tongues) dialects, and all of them write in Arabic letters and with Ethiopian letters which starts from right to left.

The rise of the kindom of Ofat or Eifat Gabarte:

After the ‘second immigration’ of the companions of the ‘prophet’ (P.B.U.H) they settled in Ethiopia and
intermarried there. In this atmosphere of peaceful coexistence with Ethiopian, they were able to build their Islamic states, the largest and strongest of which was the kingdom of Eifat Gabarte (its people called Gabarti) It was inhabited by most of Arab and Muslim emigrants.

Due to the wideness of its land and plenty-fullness of its general welfare because it represented a center for trade and a minaret for knowledge, always being visited by students and seekers of knowledge and trade and finally they used it for settlement.

The most famous of the kings of Eifat Gabarte was Omer, nicknamed as Omer AlShamia, who ruled for a long period and was famous with his strait forwardness and justice. He enjoyed a good reputation among all Muslims, and he was succeeded by five sons who inherited the kingdom of Eifat Gabrante after him. One of the descendants of Omer was Hug AlDin who was strong and could fight the king of Ethiopia, and the victory in the battle had been exchanged between them more than once.

The kingdom of Eifat Gabarte expanded in the time of Imam Ahmed Ibrahim Garran (or Garraye) and it means the 'left-handed,' who ruled Eifat after a number of battles and struggles with the king of Ethiopia where Imam Ahmed exerted a great effort in his Jihad against that king and gained a big victory. He was able in his time to annex most of the petty Islamic states, and his kingdoms comprised big communities from the Tigrat and the Amhara in addition to most of the Ethiopian and the Somalian tribes, and his army was normally composed from these tribes.
The origin of the Gabarte

The origin of the Gabarte is related to the emigrant Muslims and Arabs who took refuge in Ethiopia during the periods of struggle between the Islamic states in Arabia. Some of them were affiliated to the tribes of Khuzayma, and some to Osman Ibn Affan to Ogail Ibn Abi Tabib God bless them all. The conclusion is that they are affiliated and belong to the Gurashi tribes, and they are originally Arabs and not Ethiopians.

The Language of Eifat Gabarte:

The Gabartis speak the Arabic Language, together with the Ethiopian languages which prevail in the region. They used also to write in Arabic and Ethiopian letters.

The Economic Activities:
Trade was, and still is, the principal profession of the Gabarte, in addition to agriculture and some other professions like textile industry and the custom transactions. The kingdom of Eifat was controlling the trade route that links the interior with the port of Zailaa and the Red Sea.

Therefore it was the most prominent and flourishing kingdom. The kingdoms used to transact through barter trade and the exchange of goods except Eifat kingdom which used the Egyptian currency in its different forms of transaction.

The habits, features and doctrines:

The gabarte are famous for being pious and faithful to their religion. They belonged to the Shafite sect. Their traditions usually intermingle in the fields of life with those living in the area, and they have some of their own
traditions which they consider as religious laws which they abide by and apply as real laws. They are famous until now for being faithful in their religious practices, and for being honest in their transactions, and with their passive behavior and faithfulness in their work and activities.

Their features, in general, were fine and the colors of their faces and skins were brown a tainted with reddish color, their bodies have nearly equal heights. In their habits they marry their daughters to any good Muslim who presents himself for marriage. Therefore there are no old maids in their community; it is reduced to the least level and this behavior made them able to mix with all the tribes and thus far from dogmatism and tribalism. Their women naturally wear head-veils, and the tradition among them is to marry only one wife.

The army:

The army of Eifat Gabarte army is composed of fifteen thoudan horsemen, followed by thirty thousand or more from the infantry soldiers.

The Kingdom of Eifat Cabarte had become the chief of the movement of the Islamic Jihad against the Christians of Ethiopia, as it was the first of the Islamic Kingdoms to break away form the king of Ethiopia. That took place in the epoch of king Hugg Al din after the annexation of many of the other kingdoms to it. The war was a frequent practice between Eifat and the Kingdom of Ethiopia.

The Eifat king could in a short period impose his supremacy over most of the petty Muslim sates and was able, in the time of Imam Ahmed Ibrahim Garraie to

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destroy the Ethiopian kingdom of Amhara and that continued to a considerable period of time.

The Fall of the Kingdom of Eifat Gabarate:

The supremacy of the kingdom of Eifat Gabarte in the region of eastern Africa continued and imposed its name on all the kingdoms, and the name Gabarle became common among all the Muslims of the region after it was assigned only for Eifat and the kingdom sent Ethiopian captives of war from Ethiopia as slaves to the lands of Yemen, Hijaz, Egypt, Syria and Iraq.

The king of Ethiopia then appealed for the help of the Europeans whose presence in Africa was recent then and told them that his country, Ethiopia, became an Island amidst an ocean of Muslims. He used to have strong relations with Europe through the Coptic Church in Egypt which received the news of the region at first hand because of its strong religious ties.

The European reinforcement reached to the Ethiopian king under the leadership of Christopher Degama, who introduced the fire-arms for the first time to the region and the rescue armies were received by the armies of Ethiopia who were prepared for their arrival.

The Muslims waded in harsh attacks against the fire-arms which led to their defeat and the Mujahid Imam Ahmed ALGarraye, who led his armies in person, lost his life in the decisive battle which led to the downfall of the kingdom of Eifat Gabarte.

The groups of Mujahidin were dispersed when they received the news of the death of their martyr Imam, and they retreated to the highlands and far places in their habitations away from the oppression the Ethiopian king
and to preserve their religion. The king of Ethiopia could hardly give them the chance to regroup again. Since then the kings of Ethiopia began to oppress the Muslims and disperse their ranks up to this day. They even reached the extent of giving them the choice between embracing the Christian religion or accept the option of death. So big numbers of Muslims fled from the area to all corners of the world.

The spreading of the Gabarte in eastern Africa and other countries:

The Muslim Gabarte continues to immigrate away from the rule of the Ethiopian for centuries up to this date. They inhabited in places far away from the Ethiopian ruler and his administrators. They spread in most of the Islamic and Arabic lands and their kinship to Gabarte was changed, except for few of them, their distribution and disperses in other lands, past and present was as follows:

Ethiopia (the present Ethiopia):

The Gabarte are spread in most of the towns and villages of Ethiopia, with majorities in the lands of Tigré Amhara, ougaden, Jala and Kafa. The successive Christian governments played a big role in the disperse and the changing of the name of their regions, their genealogy and their personal names. Therefore they called them according to the name of their regions, Tigrac in the lands of Tigré and Amhara in the land of the Amhara. By that Ethiopia thought that it had changed their genealogy. But they still say that they are Gabarte-Ambara and Gabarte-Tigrac, adding their genealogical
affiliation to the region where they exist so that they do not lose their honorable genealogy.

**Eritrea:**

Eritrea is considered one of the regions where the Gabarte could tire away from the king of Ethiopia. This was after the return of the grandsons of Imam Ahmed from Yemen with an army and armament provided to them by the king of Yemen to restore the Islamic state in the region and for the support of Muslims. This continued in the hands the Gabarte till the arrival of the Turks, and then the Egyptians who used their good linkage with the kingdom of Eifat Gabarte, and where the Gabartis used the Egyptian currency and kept the practice of their religious creed (shafie).

The Gabarte spread particularly in the highlands of Eritrea and in the provinces of saraie, Aklie Gozaie and Hamassen. Most of the inhabitants of the towns were affiliated to them, specially the capital, Asmara. That was because their main profession was trade, artisanship and industry, in addition to their ability to work in the modern institutions because of their urbanism, their knowledge and their usual honesty. Eritrea is considered the only region when the Gabarte kept and publicized their names, their genealogy and their history. They have in Eritrea wide fame in the struggle all through its history.

The present communist and crusader government tried to wipe out and defame their name and their genealogy to the name of their Ethiopian language, the (Tigringa) the language of the Tigraine, and it called them (Tiringa). But the Gabarte, through their social institutions(Youth associations and students) were able
with their own efforts, to impose their name Gabarte and
to keep their honourable affiliation.

**Somalia:**

The Somalia Gabarte was the strongest wing of the
Gabarte army in the Eifat kingdom. That was because of
their large and strong bodies and their excellent skills in
war. After the death of Imam Ahmed they returned to the
coastal regions. They are descendants of Islamil Darout,
the Gabarti. So now they are known as the tribes of
Darout. They are now eminent and distinguished in
knowledge and rule in Somalia, and from them usually
come out all the rulers of Somalia in modern times.

**The Sudan:**

The emigrant Gabarte who fled with their religion
from the king of Ethiopia arrived to Sudan, following the
Blue Nile and Takazi rivers (Seitit or Atbara) in the south
east, and eastern Sudan and its north, and mixed with the
Sudanese Arab tribes and affiliated with them. Sometimes
their names changed due to some of the nicknames
thrown on them by the inhabitants of the regions where
they settled down with, like the ‘Khawawidd’ who are
descendants of the ‘Gaaliyyen’ and some groups allied
with the tribes of Beni A’mir whose lands extended
between Eriteria and Sudan.

The Gabrte participated in the ‘Mahdiya’ revolution
and state against Ethiopia and in which they killed
Yohanis Al Menlik whom they fled a ways from his Yoke
and oppression, and they established their village (Tabark
Allah).

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They entered with the armies of Mahdiya in Omdurman and settled in it practicing their profession, trade. The Gabarte also settled in different regions in Sudan like, Tabarak Allah, Gallabat, gadarif and Kassala. They have a villages carrying their name in the rural areas of Kassala called (Gabarte) near the village of ‘Hafarte.

They extended more to reach the regions of the ‘Hadandawa in Ha’ya’ and there they are called ‘Ashraaf’. They have a dome in Sawakin belonging to one of their Shiekhs.

In northern Sudan, as we mentioned earlier, they inhabited in the regions of the Ga’aliyeeen in wad Al Habashi and deim Al Garraie (means Quoran Reader-who is Gabarti), in the regions and tribes of Al Khawawidh (waders) who took this name because they waded across Atbara river to reach their present habitation.

They have also a grave yard and a tomb (Dharih) belonging to one of their Gabarte Skiekhns north of Konor region which lies north of Barbar city.

**Yemen:**

One of the traditional regions for the emigration of Muslims of Ethiopia, in general, is the Yemeni lands. That is because of its proximity and strong linkage with Ethiopia. We find most of the kings of the Islamic states, after the fall of Eifat, have taken the journey to the king of Yemen for protection. Some of them sought the assistance of the king of Yemen for the return journey to engage in their struggle with the Ethiopian king. The Gabarte are found in big numbers in the region of Zabeid in Yemen.
Saudi Arabia:

It was natural that the Gabarte immigrated to Saudi Arabia after the downfall of their state. They are well known for their piety, God fearing and their love for the prophet (P.B.U.H). In Arabia there is Makka, the Holy House of God, and also the Tomb of the Prophet Mohamed (P.B.U.H), and that is the attractive element for their arrival to the Holy places. They also used to have a ‘Riwag’ (Shelter- gallery) in Madina, till recent times, but some of the Gabarte inhabited the Badia (semi-desert) of the Arabian peninsular. They still keep their names and genealogy to the Etifat Gabarte state and many of them are famous businessmen, poets and sportsmen. They live in Saudi Arabia between Makka and Madina in the valley of Gadid, in the Zibia and in the Khulais valley. They are in alliance with the tribe of Beni Salim to which they now adhere.

Egypt:

‘The Riwag’ of the gabarte’ and Abdul Rahman Al Gabarti are the most prominent remnants in Egypt. This Riwag was established after the increase of the gabarte students in the university of Alazhar Alsharif. The riwag was originally in AlSham (Syria) and was transferred to Egypt after the spreading of the good fame of ‘Alazhar’.

The Gabarte were present in Egypt even before the arrival of the French to it. Some of them lived in the shargiya ‘quarter in Zagazig’, some lived in Port Saied, and in Bolague in Cairo, and in the Azhar quarter. The case in Egypt is different because of the civilized and modern society we find only a small number of the gabartis who attach themselves by naming or affiliating to the Gabarte in the present time.
Iraq and ‘Shamm (Syria, Lebanon and Palestine):
The Gabarte arrived before and after the end of the
kingdom of Eifat, to the regions of Iraq and sham for the
purpose of trade and for acquiring knowledge. They had a
Riwig in each of these regions, but their news and history
are not registered in these regions

The Eminent Gabartis:
1- Abdul Rahman Ibn Hassan Al Gabarti.

Born in Egypt, in Sanadigiya at Alazhar Quarter.
He studies in Alazhar under the supervision of his father
and then at the hands of the Sheikhs. He wrote many
manuscripts in different subjects of knowledge, the most
famous of which is his book (Agaib Al A’atha Fi Al
Tragim wal Akhbar).
Meaning = the wanderers of antiquities in the translations
and ancient news” the second book “Mazhar Al tagdis Fi
zawal Da’wlat Al Frinsiss” meaning =the aspects of
senetification at the vanishing of the French state.

2- ‘Al Nur wad Fugara’:

He was a prince of the gabarte in the village of
Tabarak Allah, near the Ethiopian Matamma. He was
recognized by Imam AL Mahdi as Amir (prince) on the
region and gave him the duty of fighting the Ethiopian
Christians. He fought the Ethiopian Memilik until the
Mahdia, through his assistance, could kill him and cut off
his head.(His skull is said to be preserved up to now in
the museum of Beit Al khalifa in Omdurman).
3- Abdul Gadir Salih Kabiry:
He is from the extended family of Kabiry in the Tigraie district between Ethiopia and Eritrea, famous for the prevalence of Islam in the region. He was a fervent patriot is Eritrea who fought against the Italians, and he chaired the Islamic association party in Asmara, and the independence Block in the forties of the pervious century. He was killed by the Ethiopians just before his journey to the united states to expose the Eritian cause to the national assembly of the united Nations in New York.

4- Al Sheikh Sared bayan:
He worked as secretary in the ministry of Religious Affairs in Sudan during the epoch of president Ga’afar Numeiry.

5- Maghzoub Al Khalifa (from the Khawavidh):
One of the prominent leaders of the Islamic movement in Sudan. He was the Wali (governor) of Khartoum and minister of agriculture in the exiting rule of president Omer Hasan Ahmed AlBashir.

Many of the Khawaiah are sophist Shiekh who are religiously apathetic in life matters. They hated to be famous as they hate public responsibility for its sensitivity. Whenever they go they are an example of piety, honesty and faithfulness to their religion.
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