

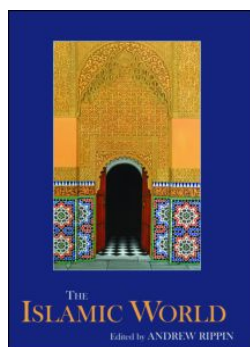
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## **The Islamic World**

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### **East Africa**

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## EAST AFRICA



*Valerie J. Hoffman*

East Africa, which includes the Horn of Africa (Ethiopia, Somalia, Eritrea and Djibouti), the Swahili coast and Great Lakes region (Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, Zambia, and Malawi), and the island states of the Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius and Mayotte, is a vast region encompassing tremendously diverse topography and supporting equally diverse lifestyles. The Muslim population of this region numbers today approximately 92 million, or about 26 percent of the entire population of these countries. Islam entered East Africa mainly via seafaring merchants from southern Yemen, particularly in the Horn of Africa, so Muslims are most concentrated along the coast, from Eritrea to northern Mozambique, with the proportion of the Muslim population diminishing as one goes inland. Somalia, which has a long coastline bordering both the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean, is entirely Muslim, and this is nearly the case for Djibouti, a small country at the intersection of the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, and for the Comoros, Mayotte, and Zanzibar (the last of which joined with Tanganyika to form the nation of Tanzania in 1964). Nonetheless, the country with by far the largest number of Muslims (over 38 million) is the entirely landlocked state of Ethiopia, where Muslims constitute about half the population, despite Ethiopia's historical identification with Christianity.

#### Islamization of East Africa

There were interactions between Arabia and the Banadir coast of southern Somalia before Islam: Muḥammad is said to have been born in 570, the “year of the elephant,” when Abraha, ruler of the kingdom of Axum in present-day Ethiopia, attacked Mecca; and when the Muslims were persecuted in Mecca, they found asylum in Christian Abyssinia (c. 615). Trade across the Indian Ocean fostered exchanges between East Africa, Arabia, Persia, India and Southeast Asia for untold generations. Swahili culture probably developed in towns on the southern Somali coast from the intermarriage of Arab and Persian merchants with local women; although Swahili is a Bantu language, some 30 percent of its vocabulary is Arabic in origin, and there are words of Persian and Hindi origin as well. Some say that Swahili culture pre-dates the Islamization of the Swahili coast, but others say that the earliest Swahili settlements on the east coast were founded in the ninth and tenth centuries. Tradition, coastal chroniclers and Arab geographers suggest that the first settlers came from the Persian Gulf, in a series of waves over several centuries. For decades there has been much

discussion among scholars and among the Swahili themselves concerning the “African” or “Asiatic” origin of Swahili culture and the nature of Swahili identity. Many scholars feel that racial prejudice led earlier Western writers to over-emphasize the Arab and Persian role in the development of Swahili culture as well as in the spread of Islam on the Swahili coast. Recent works tend to emphasize the “Africanness” of Swahili civilization and of Islam in East Africa. Nonetheless, a major sub-group of Swahili speakers call themselves “Shirazi,” based on putative descent from princes of Shiraz in southern Iran who settled in East Africa in the tenth century. Evidence of a Persian presence is indicated by an inscription in a thirteenth-century mosque in Mogadishu naming its builder as Khusrow ibn Muḥammad al-Shīrāzī, and by the fact that one of the ancient quarters of Mogadishu bears a Persian name; indeed, the word *banādir*, which is applied to the entire southern coast of Somalia, is of Persian origin (Mukhtar 1995: 5). Until the development of African nationalisms in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Arabs often enjoyed political power and religious and cultural prestige in East Africa. Many families claim Arab descent, especially from the Hadramawt region of southeast Yemen; Ḥaḍramī influence in East Africa is palpable, recognizable in family names, the preponderance of the Shāfi‘ī school of Sunni Islam, the extreme importance in Swahili society of *sharīf*-ian descent – descent from the Prophet, and the spiritual linkages that led many Swahili scholars to go to the Hadramawt for study.

Until the 1960s, Swahili identity was strongly linked to Islamic identity – to be a Swahili meant that one was a Muslim. With the adoption of Swahili as a national language in Kenya and Tanzania, however, Swahili identity is now linked to language, not religion. Although Swahili civilization originated in the coastal towns of southern Somalia, Somali-speaking nomads, who appeared in that region around the thirteenth century, gradually eroded the Swahili language in the cities of Warsheikh, Mogadishu and Merka; Swahili has survived only in the southernmost part of the coast, particularly in Brava, where the dialect, Chimalazi, has incorporated some Somali vocabulary.

Tradition has it that the second caliph, ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (r. 634–44), sent a delegation to various East African settlements that had accepted Islam. This would put the beginnings of East Africa’s Islamization very early. Arab sources state that the Umayyad caliph ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān (r. 685–705) sent an army to conquer Mogadishu and Kilwa, but Umayyad and then Abbasid dominance of the Banadir coast ended in 805 when Mogadishu succeeded in establishing an independent sultanate. The East African coast sometimes served as a refuge for sectarian groups of Shi‘a and Ibāḍīs, but Sunnism was the dominant form of Islam, with certain families of Arab ancestry forming a religious aristocracy, monopolizing religious functions and education. Islamization intensified in the Red Sea region when trade revived in the late tenth century as the Fatimids came to power in Egypt and assumed the role of protectors of Muslims in Ethiopia; trading towns like Zeila, on the coast of the Gulf of Aden in what is now northern Somalia, served as centers for the diffusion of Islam. For many centuries, Islam remained a largely coastal and urban phenomenon closely tied to trade. A series of Muslim sultanates arose in the twelfth century along the trade routes, including Mogadishu, Merca and Brava. As Swahili civilization extended southward, Lamu, Pate, Mombasa and Kilwa all became virtual city-states, usually ruled by a family claiming Arab descent. The Ethiopian city of Harar was the only

major Islamic center that was inland. Muslim immigrants to northeast Africa were “relatively small groups of traders, adventurers, and refugees” (Trimingham 1952: 33), who married African women and had Muslim children, leading to the gradual development of Muslim genealogies based on an Arab ancestor. Until the thirteenth century, Muslims in the northern trading centers lived under the rule of pagans and the Christian kings of Abyssinia, who did not allow them complete freedom of religion. The earliest known mosque south of the Banadir is in Kizimkazi, on the east coast of Zanzibar, bearing a date of 500 *hijrī* (1107–8). At Kilwa, on the Tanganyikan coast, Muslim-style tombs and stone mosques first appeared in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The only other pre-fourteenth-century stone mosque is in Mogadishu, where two mosques bear thirteenth-century dates. Scholars conclude that actual groups of Muslims on the Swahili coast south of Somalia were scarce before 1300 (Pouwels 1978a: 211). From the fourteenth through sixteenth centuries, Islam gradually expanded through trade, particularly from north to south. Many stone towns appeared during this period along the Swahili coast, including Lamu, Gedo, Mombasa, Malindi, and others. This was also the period that the first *Ṣūfī* order, the *Qādiriyya*, was introduced to the Banadir coast from Yemen.

By the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, many nomadic peoples of the Horn of Africa had embraced Islam, including the *ʿAfar*, Somali and Beja, leaving Abyssinian Christianity “isolated in a sea of Islam” (Trimingham 1952: xv). Islam did not enjoy a comparable spread among rural populations in countries south of Somalia until the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

### Development of Islamic civilization in East Africa

Much of the history of Islam in Ethiopia is marked by struggle and warfare between Muslim principalities and the Christian kingdom of Axum. Between 1529 and 1543, *Aḥmad ibn Ibrāhīm* of Harar, who took the religious title *Imām* and is nicknamed *al-Ghāzī* (“the Conqueror”), conquered most of Ethiopia with the moral and military support of the Ottomans, who had conquered Egypt in 1517 and Yemen in 1525, wreaking massive devastation, forcing conversions, and destroying cities and churches. A Portuguese army defeated him in 1543, and by 1555 the Ethiopian state had restored its pre-*jihād* boundaries. The number of Muslims in the Ethiopian highlands increased through *Imām Aḥmad’s jihād*, but the region was also laid open to mass migrations of pastoral Oromo (Galla) people. In the late seventeenth century, Emperor Yohannes I ordered Muslims to live separately from Christians in villages and town quarters of their own. Christians could not eat with Muslims, drink from cups they had used, or eat meat they had slaughtered.

Vasco da Gama visited Kilwa in 1498, and within a few years the Portuguese had captured and destroyed both Kilwa and Mombasa, the two greatest Shirazi cities. With the exception of Goa on the west coast of India and Mozambique on the south-eastern coast of Africa, the Portuguese did not acquire large colonies, but they did seize small territories throughout the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf where they built forts and garrisons, including Fort Jesus at Mombasa. They were the strongest naval power in the region throughout the sixteenth century, and directly contributed to the decline of Shirazi civilization, as the coastal towns depended on the Indian Ocean trade for their survival. The decline of Shirazi civilization was hastened by

population movements in East Africa; Shirazi towns were frequently attacked by African groups moving into their hinterland.

### Omani rule in East Africa

In the seventeenth century a new dynasty in Oman challenged Portuguese supremacy in the Indian Ocean. Imām Sulṭān ibn Sayf (r. 1640–80) recaptured the Omani port city of Muscat from the Portuguese in 1651, and in the 1660s and 1670s he attacked Portuguese garrisons in India and the Persian Gulf. Omani immigrants living in Mombasa requested assistance against the Portuguese, so he sent a fleet that attacked and burned Portuguese positions in Mombasa, Pate, Zanzibar and Mozambique, leading to a general revolt against the Portuguese in all the coastal towns. For a time the Portuguese were able to crush the revolts, but in the 1660s Sulṭān was able to capture Mombasa after a long siege. Once he left, however, the Portuguese recaptured Mombasa and severely punished its inhabitants. His son, Sayf ibn Sulṭān I (r. 1692–1711), laid siege to Mombasa again in 1696, but it was not until December 1698 that he was able to capture Fort Jesus. He proceeded to expel the Portuguese from Pemba and Kilwa as well, and returned to Oman, leaving the governorships of the major towns in the hands of important Omani families that lived in them: the Mazrūʿī (Mazrui) family in Mombasa and Pemba, and the Nabhānī family in Lamu and Pate. The Portuguese recaptured Mombasa in 1727, but the Omanis took it back in 1729. The Portuguese harassed Omani merchants and closed their Indian ports to them. The ongoing war between the Portuguese and Omanis from 1650 to about 1730 was “a stand-off, costly and detrimental to both sides” (Risso 1986: 13), but in the eighteenth century Portuguese power declined, and by the nineteenth century their only territory in East Africa was Mozambique.

In the 1740s the Bū Saʿīdī dynasty came to power in Oman. The Mazrūʿīs and Nabhānīs of Mombasa, Lamu, Pate and Pemba refused to recognize the new dynasty, and claimed independence. Only Zanzibar remained loyal to the new Omani sovereign. The rebellion was weakened by rivalry between the two families. The Mazrūʿīs were definitively subdued only in 1837 by Omani ruler Sayyid Saʿīd ibn Sulṭān after a series of battles over many years. It was Sayyid Saʿīd who transferred the capital of the Omani empire from Oman to Zanzibar in 1832. From 1832 to 1856, Zanzibar was the capital of a vast empire that included Oman and the Swahili coast from Mogadishu in Somalia to twelve miles south of the Rovuma River in northern Mozambique. By the early nineteenth century, Muslim traders from the coast, usually with the financial backing of Indian merchants, were taking caravans into the interior to obtain ivory and slaves for export. Towns began to appear along these inland trade routes, from which Islam gradually spread into the interior. Although the exact extent of Omani rule in the interior was defined mainly by the payment of tribute by African chieftains and the appointment of Omani governors of often ambivalent loyalties, Zanzibar’s prestige was such that, according to a popular saying, “When one pipes in Zanzibar, they dance on the Lakes.” The most important conversions were among the Yao of the eastern side of Lake Malawi in the Portuguese colony of Mozambique, who embraced Islam in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Sayyid Saʿīd encouraged American and European merchants to come to Zanzibar, and in the 1830s and 1840s consuls arrived from the USA, Great Britain, France,

Portugal, Italy, Belgium, Germany, and Austria-Hungary. Sayyid Saʿīd fostered clove cultivation, which became an important staple of Zanzibar’s economy. The development of plantation agriculture on the Swahili coast in the nineteenth century caused the pace of the slave trade to increase dramatically, accompanied by warfare and convulsive population displacements throughout the interior.

Most Omani settlers in East Africa belonged to the Ibāḍī sect of Islam, but they did not proselytize; according to Trimmingham (1964: 73), the Omanis regarded Ibadism as “a tribal religion” that marked their separateness from and superiority to the indigenous population. Although Omanis took African concubines, and the offspring of such unions were social equals to the offspring born to their Omani wives, the Omanis, unlike the Ḥaḍramīs, remained socially distinct, and did not become fully Swahilized until the twentieth century. A nineteenth-century scholar from Brava who served the sultans of Zanzibar, though claiming Arab ancestry for himself, reserved the word “Arab” for Omanis, who, he wrote, did not know Swahili (Hoffman 2006: 259). Sayyid Saʿīd was determined to make Zanzibar an important center of Islamic scholarship, and for this purpose he invited to Zanzibar not only Ibāḍī scholars, but also Sunnī scholars from various towns along the Swahili coast. The overwhelming majority of the indigenous population of the Swahili coast follows the Shāfiʿī school of Sunnī Islam.

Swahili society during this period consisted of Omani overlords who were Ibāḍī, Baluchi soldiers who were Ḥanafī Sunnīs, Indian merchants who were Ismāʿīlī, Bohora and Hindu, Ḥaḍramī scholars and traders who were Shāfiʿī, and African subjects and slaves who were Shāfiʿī or followed indigenous religions. Ḥaḍramīs intermarried with the local population and became integrated into Swahili society, who were also Shāfiʿī Sunnīs, but the Omanis did so less often, and the Indians formed separate religious and social communities that practiced endogamy and preserved their native languages.

The scholarly class – the *ʿulamā* – was a close-knit group that knew each other personally and recruited from particular families and groups; more than three-quarters of them were of Ḥaḍramī background, though Ḥaḍramīs constituted probably no more than 2 percent of the Sunnī population of East Africa (Nimtz 1980: 20). It is also noteworthy that two of the most important scholars of Zanzibar in the nineteenth century were from the southern Somali town of Brava. Both claimed Arab, though not Ḥaḍramī or *sharīf*-ian, descent.

When Sayyid Saʿīd died in 1856, the British brokered a division of his empire, Oman passing to the rule of one of his sons, and East Africa to another.

### European colonialism

European encroachment gradually whittled away Bū Saʿīdī power in East Africa throughout the nineteenth century. The British, who formally took India as a colony in 1857, were the European power that was closest and most influential with the Bū Saʿīdī sultans. In 1868 Ibāḍī religious scholars in Oman led a revolution that overthrew the sultan and replaced him with an Imām of their choosing. The British regarded the Imām’s government as fanatical and hostile to their interests; a mixed Omani–Wahhābī–British force killed the Imām in January 1871 and reinstated a sultan. From that point on, British interference in Omani affairs was very significant. Sayyid Saʿīd’s son, Barghash, opposed the division of the Omani empire, was

sympathetic to Ibāḍī aspirations for a righteous Imamate, and conspired to overthrow his brother, Sayyid Mājid, ruler of Zanzibar from 1856 to 1870. Barghash was exiled to Bombay, where he underwent an apparent change of heart. When he succeeded Mājid in 1870, he conducted an ambitious modernization program, including the introduction of plumbing and electricity. During his reign, steamship, cable, and the opening of the Suez Canal brought East Africa into closer connection with the outside world. An Englishman, Sir Lloyd Matthews, commanded Barghash's army, and the British Resident, Sir John Kirk, was his close ally and confidant. Despite Zanzibar's economic dependence on the slave trade, Kirk convinced Barghash to put a halt to it in 1874 (although slavery as an institution continued into the early twentieth century), and promised to uphold Barghash's interests in East Africa. Barghash made a state visit to England in 1876, and also visited Paris and Berlin before returning to East Africa. Ultimately, however, Great Britain betrayed Barghash's trust. In the "scramble for Africa," the sultan of Zanzibar lost Tanganyika (the mainland portion of present-day Tanzania) to Germany, Kenya to Great Britain, and southern Somalia to Italy. Beyond the sultan's domains, Germany took Rwanda and Burundi, Belgium took the Congo, France took Madagascar, the Comoros and Mayotte, Great Britain took Uganda, Nyasaland (later Malawi), Rhodesia (later Zambia and Zimbabwe), and Mauritius, Italy took Eritrea, and Somalia was divided between Italy, Great Britain and France. Only Ethiopia, under Menelik II, surprised the Western world by defeating Italy in the battle of Adowa in 1896; Ethiopia remained independent, except for a brief period (1936–41) when it was incorporated into the domains of Italian East Africa. In 1890 the British established a protectorate over Zanzibar. After World War I, Germany lost its territories in East Africa: Tanganyika went to Great Britain, and Rwanda and Burundi went to Belgium.

European rulers of East Africa adopted policies that favored Muslims and the spread of Islam: they recognized that Islam represented a high civilization, appointed *qāḍīs*, judges of Islamic law, over urban and rural communities, and extended their jurisdiction to populations with tenuous linkages to Islam. Nonetheless, secular administrators had ultimate authority over Muslim magistrates and restricted the jurisdiction of the *sharī'a* to marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance.

Trimingham believed that Islamization increased dramatically during the colonial period because European power and the suppression of the slave trade brought increased security, allowing Muslim traders greater access to the interior. Nimitz disagrees, arguing that Islam's major expansion in East Africa, particularly during the period from 1916 to 1924, was a militant response to the advent of colonial rule and an effort to bring order to a chaotic situation, and that Islamization progressed most rapidly during periods of upheaval and crisis (Nimitz 1980: 15).

### Modern regimes in East Africa

Most sub-Saharan African nations were granted independence in the early 1960s: the Malagasy Republic (formerly Madagascar), the Republic of the Congo (formerly the Belgian Congo, later Zaire, and later still the Democratic Republic of the Congo) and Somalia in 1960, Tanganyika in 1961, Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi in 1962, Kenya and Zanzibar in 1963, Malawi (formerly Nyasaland) and Zambia (formerly Northern Rhodesia) in 1964, Mauritius in 1968. Others did not attain independence

until the 1970s: the Comoros and Mozambique in 1975, the latter only after ten years of sporadic warfare, Djibouti in 1977. Mayotte remains a *département* of France.

The post-independence history of this region has been marked by many military coups and wars – both civil wars and interstate wars like the Ogaden conflict between Ethiopia and Somalia. Some of these conflicts are a direct legacy of the arbitrary division of Africa into European spheres of interest in the nineteenth century, while others are the result of government corruption and communist revolutions. Only the most important of these will be described here.

In Ethiopia, Mengistu Haile Mariam led a military coup that deposed Emperor Haile Selassie in 1974 and established a one-party communist state. The ensuing years brought a series of military coups, war with Somalia over the Ogaden province, which the British had given to Ethiopia, severe drought, and displacement of hundreds of thousands of people. Many civilians were deliberately starved by the regime to force them into submission. In 1993, after a thirty-year war for independence, Eritrea seceded from Ethiopia.

Italian Somaliland and British Somaliland joined to form the independent republic of Somalia in 1960, except for Ogaden, which was made part of Ethiopia. Somalia's history has also been marked by military coups. Violence has plagued much of Somalia, especially the capital, Mogadishu, since Mohamed Siad Barre was overthrown in 1991. Although the United Nations recognizes a Transitional National Government, its power is extremely limited. The northern provinces, known as Somaliland and Puntland, are virtually autonomous.

Uganda became an independent nation in 1962. In 1966 Milton Obote overthrew the constitution and declared himself president. He in turn was overthrown in 1971 by Idi Amin, whose rule was marked by ruthless killings that claimed an estimated 300,000 lives, the expulsion of the Indian population, and the collapse of the economy. He was finally ousted by a Tanzanian force aided by Ugandan exiles. Uganda suffered subsequent coups, civil war, and the abduction of children by militias who force them into military service, but it is nonetheless relatively stable and is a major contributor of soldiers to African peacekeeping forces in the region.

Kenya attracted the most British and European settlement in the region, with consequent displacement of the indigenous population, leading to the famous Mau Mau rebellion of the 1950s. Kenya gained independence in December 1963. Although its politics have been authoritarian and sometimes marked by violence, there have been no successful coup attempts, and the government is a parliamentary democracy. The election in 2002 of an opposition candidate to the presidency, Mwai Kibaki, was heralded as a triumph of democracy.

Tanganyika attained full independence from Great Britain in December 1961 under the leadership of Julius Nyerere, who established a system of socialist villages throughout the country. In December 1963 Zanzibar was granted independence as a constitutional monarchy under Sultan Jamshīd ibn ʿAbd Allāh Āl Bū Saʿīdī, but in January 1964 the government was overthrown in a violent coup led by a Ugandan Christian named John Okello, who styled himself “Field Marshall.” The Zanzibar revolution, as it is called, was a revolt against Arab and Indian political and economic dominance; although slavery had ended more than a half-century earlier, the Arabs remained a privileged class. Arabs sometimes continued to address blacks as “slave,” and held a strong sense of racial superiority. Indians did not have the same political

power or social prestige, but they had become the wealthiest segment of society, owning most of the land and businesses. The black African majority was clearly disadvantaged in every way. The leaders of the revolution encouraged black Africans to attack non-blacks; a horrific massacre ensued, in which some ten thousand unarmed civilians were murdered. Thousands of Arabs and Indians fled Zanzibar at this time. The revolutionaries specifically targeted Zanzibar's Islamic heritage, which had been in decline for some time; most of the Arabic manuscripts in the Zanzibar National Archive have been vandalized. Eyewitnesses say that Qur'āns were burned in the streets, although 98 percent of Zanzibar's population was Muslim. Homes were invaded, and people of lighter skin were selected for extermination, often in a hideous fashion, so that no body could remain for burial. Okello allegedly bragged that he personally killed more than 8,000 people. Many Arabs fled to Oman, which remains under Bū Sa'īdī rule to this day and has a large number of Swahili-speaking citizens; even Oman's Grand Muftī, Shaykh Aḥmad ibn Ḥamad al-Khalīlī, is from Zanzibar. Once the revolution was over, Okello went abroad, and his co-conspirators prohibited him from returning to Zanzibar. He was last seen in Uganda in 1971 with Idi Amin, and it is speculated that Amin ordered his assassination, though nothing is known of what happened to him. Zanzibar joined with Tanganyika in April 1964 to form the Republic of Tanzania, although it has its own president and retains some autonomy.

Mozambique attained independence in 1975 after ten years of sporadic warfare against the Portuguese colonial regime. After independence it was plagued by civil war and attacks by the neighboring white-dominated regimes of Rhodesia and South Africa. The civil war ended in 1992, and was followed by a massive resettlement of refugees.

### Islamic education and religious functionaries

In the coastal towns many Muslims assiduously observe their religious obligations. In Zanzibar and other towns most children attend Qur'ān school several hours daily in addition to daily attendance at a secular school. The focus of Qur'ān school is memorization of the Qur'ān, but the children also memorize a lengthy poem that praises the Prophet Muḥammad – the famous *mawlid* (*maulidi* in Swahili) of Ja'far ibn Ḥasan al-Barzanjī (d. 1765). Like other *mawlids*, this poem relates that the first thing God created was the “Muḥammadan light,” made from a handful of God's own light, and from this all other things were made. The poem then traces the transmission of this light from person to person until the conception of the Prophet, whose gestation is marked by miraculous occurrences. In Swahili towns the Prophet's birthday is celebrated with open-air communal recitation of this *mawlid*. Groups of children also recite it on other important occasions, like weddings.

During the Omani period, the government appointed *qāḍīs* for each Muslim legal school represented in the population. The *'ulamā'* also taught in their homes or in mosques, and some, both Sunnī and Ibāḍī, were influential at court, serving as counselors and ambassadors for the sultans. European expansion in the region encroached upon the authority of the *'ulamā'* as the scope of *sharī'a* law became more restricted and new schools were built, first by European missionaries, then by colonial governments. In the early twentieth century the British in Zanzibar organized a commission that included Sunnī and Ibāḍī *'ulamā'* as well as British officials, to improve Islamic education

and administration. They also introduced the use of Latin letters for writing Swahili, which was formerly written in the Arabic script.

In the twentieth century, Indian and Pakistani Muslims, especially Ismāʿīlīs and Aḥmadīs, played a major role in the expansion of education in East Africa, especially in Kenya and mainland Tanzania. The Ismāʿīlīs generally enjoyed good relations with the Sunnī majority, and did not aim primarily to recruit people to the Ismāʿīlī group, but Sunnīs often perceived the Aḥmadiyya as non-Muslims disguised as Muslims, and therefore their educational activities and translation of the Qurʾān into Swahili were perceived as threatening, and led directly to Sunnī translations of texts into Swahili as well as polemical literature attacking the Aḥmadiyya.

### Ṣūfī orders

Many coastal towns had already been Muslim for centuries before the introduction into the region of the Ṣūfī orders – the *ṭuruq* (*ṭarīqa* in the singular), sometimes translated as “brotherhood,” but really meaning “way” or “method” of mystical practice. The first Ṣūfī order was the Qādiriyya, introduced from Yemen and the Hadramawt into the coastal towns of Masawwa (in present-day Eritrea), Zayla (in northern Somalia near Djibouti), and Mogadishu in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and into Harar in the highlands of Ethiopia at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Shaykh Uways ibn Muḥammad of Brava spearheaded the spread of the Qādiriyya further south on the coast as far as Zanzibar in the later part of the nineteenth century, and his disciples disseminated it widely in Tanganyika as well. The Qādiriyya’s use of music and ecstasy during the public ritual of *dhikr* played an important part in the attraction of this order for ordinary Africans; Shaykh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Amawī wrote that an African chieftain who witnessed his *dhikr* during one of his journeys on the mainland in 1885 asked to be allowed to convert on the spot, so he could do this *dhikr* (Hoffman 2006: 263). The orders attracted new converts to Islam, facilitated their integration into Muslim society, and met material, social and spiritual needs (Nimtz 1980: 65). Membership was open to anyone, usually even to women, and Africans rapidly ascended to leadership positions in the Qādiriyya. One of Shaykh Uways’s most important disciples, ʿUmar al-Qullatayn, played a major role in disseminating the Qādiriyya through Zanzibar and the vicinity of Dar es Salaam, and later served on the Zanzibar Revolutionary Council. During the Omani period, many *ʿulamāʾ* of Zanzibar belonged to the ʿAlawiyya, a Ḥaḍramī Ṣūfī order founded in the thirteenth century that focuses on the descendants of the Prophet (Bang 2003: 93–115), and had reservations about other Ṣūfī orders. “In their opinion, brotherhood membership was often a substitute for strict adherence to the essential pillars of Sunnī Islam, especially among the less knowledgeable” (Nimtz 1980: 64). Another major international order founded in the thirteenth century, the Shādhiliyya, was introduced to the Swahili coast by a Comorian *shaykh*, Muḥammad Maʾrūf ibn Aḥmad (1853–1905), and is popular in many parts of East Africa, from Uganda to Mozambique.

In the nineteenth century many new Ṣūfī orders were founded, especially in North Africa, often with a reformist message, missionary zeal, political strength, and even militancy. Quite a few of these were founded by disciples of the Moroccan *shaykh*, Sayyid Aḥmad ibn Idrīs (1760–1837), who had acquired fame in Mecca. Among the most important orders spawned by his disciples are the Sanūsīyya in Libya, the

Mirghaniyya or Khatmiyya in Sudan and Eritrea, the Dandarāwiyya in Egypt, and the Ṣāliḥiyya in Somalia. The Sanūsiyya were important in the fight against Italian occupation in Libya and French incursions in Chad, while the Ṣāliḥiyya fought the British in northern Somalia from 1899 to 1920, led by Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Ḥasan, who claimed to be the expected *Mahdī* (who would restore justice to the world before the day of judgment), and whom the British nicknamed “the Mad Mullah.” The Khatmiyya, on the other hand, sided with the Turko-Egyptian government of Sudan against the Sudanese Mahdi in the 1880s. Other orders that appeared in the region in the nineteenth century are the Tījāniyya, founded in Morocco and West Africa in the late eighteenth century, and the Sammāniyya, an eighteenth-century offshoot of the Khalwatiyya. Agricultural settlements associated with a *ṭarīqa* emerged in the nineteenth century, making the order the basis for a new social group.

### Saint veneration

Throughout the Muslim world it is believed that saints – men or women who work miracles and are favored by God – intercede with God on behalf of ordinary believers, and are even more powerful after death than in life. Their tombs become places of pilgrimage, and their help is sought by women who wish to bear children, by those who wish healing or justice, or just for the sake of receiving some of their *baraka* – their spiritual power or blessing. Although Muslim scholars who allow such visitations to saints’ tombs stress that God alone should be the object of prayer and worship, and that one may pray to God at a saint’s tomb in order to incur His favor by virtue of the saint’s *baraka*, in reality many people pray directly to the saints. They often make vows, promising that if the saint answers their petition, they will sacrifice an animal in his or her honor and share the food with the poor or with other devotees of the saint. Saint veneration is pervasive, and it is more important in the Horn of Africa than on the Swahili coast, but less significant in mainland Tanzania or Kenya.

### Spirit possession cults

Spirit possession cults play an important part in East African religious life. Scholars have tended to see such beliefs and practices as pre-Islamic survivals, but the *zār* spirit possession cult, which originated in Ethiopia, was transmitted into Egypt as recently as the nineteenth century; the standard Islamic belief in *jinn*, who are popularly believed to cause human illnesses and inhabit desolate and dirty places as well as latrines and cemeteries, accords perfectly with ageless beliefs in spirits found in Africa and in other places as well. Trimmingham observes that saint veneration predominated in regions where Islam has been long established, but contacts with spirits are more important in recently Islamized parts of East Africa (Trimingham 1952: 256–7).

Spirit possession ceremonies and traditional healing methods often acquire Islamic elements, such as use of Qur’anic verses or the names of God, and their practitioners believe that it is God who works through these ceremonies to heal and help the afflicted. Some of the spirits whose presence is sought in ceremonies like the *zār* or *ngoma ya pepo* are Muslim saints, so the distinction between the world of saints and the world of spirits is not so clear-cut. All over the Muslim world *‘ulamā’* and *imāms* perform healing and divination that utilize techniques that from the Western point of

view are merely magical; the wearing of protective amulets bearing Qur'anic verses is nearly universal. However, the *'ulamā'* view magic (*siḥr* in Arabic) as something evil and effected through the mediation of *jinn*, whereas prophetic medicine and divination follow sound Islamic methods derived from the Prophet's own practice. The Ibādīs of Oman call divination and the writing of Islamic talismans *'ilm al-sirr* – secret knowledge – and it is the subject of a very large portion of the manuscripts written by Muslim scholars in the Zanzibar National Archives, written by both Ibādī and Sunnī scholars.

Pre-Islamic practices associated with the agricultural cycle and life cycle are often retained, with some addition of Islamic elements. One traditional practice that many Swahili see as evidence of their Persian ancestry is the celebration of *Norūz*, the New Year. However, the Swahili celebration bears no resemblance to the Persian celebration, despite the use of the name, and appears to be similar to celebrations among the nomadic Somali that they call “the Pharaonic festival.” Indeed, the Egyptian celebration of the “new year” in the spring, also called *Norūz* (*nawrūz*) and associated with fertility, is thought to derive from ancient Egyptian fertility rites.

### Islamic reformism

Nineteenth-century reform movements in Africa were Ṣūfī-oriented movements seeking to eradicate what were perceived as heretical innovations (*bid'a*) in Muslim practice. Scholars of the *'Alawiyya* order introduced new disciplines of Islamic learning on the East African coast in the late 1880s and criticized specific practices of the Qādiriyya Ṣūfī brotherhood such as the *dhikr* with *dufu* (drums) (Loimeier 2003: 249).

In early twentieth-century Zanzibar, scholars were aware of the ideas of the Egyptian scholar Muḥammad *'Abduh* (d. 1905), and two Ibādī leaders in Zanzibar founded the first Arabic newspaper there in 1911, with the specific goal of supporting and spreading *'Abduh's* reformism and pan-Islamist ideas. *'Abduh* called his reform Salafī, an adjective related to the word *salaf*, the pious Muslims of the first generation. But rather than wanting a fundamentalist revival of primitive Islam, *'Abduh* wanted to recapture the spirit of innovation and vitality that characterized the early Muslim community, in order to identify Islam with rationalism and reinterpret Islamic law according to its original motive and spirit, but to make it compatible with the modern age.

In the twentieth century, Islamic reformers in East Africa tended to oppose Sufism altogether. Shaykh al-Amīn ibn *'Alī al-Mazrū'i* (Mazrui) of Mombasa (1890–1947), though a student of the most famous *'Alawī shaykhs* in Zanzibar, adopted a more anti-Ṣūfī point of view in the 1930s and became the major inspirer of Islamic reform in East Africa. He became Grand Qāḍī of Kenya, founded several reformist journals, and taught many subsequent reformist scholars (Pouwels 1987: 201–2). He was the first to introduce a distinct anti-*bid'a* discourse in East Africa which was directed against Ṣūfī practices. He also stressed the importance of modern (not only Islamic) education that should extend to females, and he wrote texts in Swahili rather than Arabic. His most influential student, *'Abd Allāh Ṣāliḥ al-Fārisī* (Farsy, 1912–82), said that Mazrui “created a tremendous uproar by publishing newspapers and books vilifying forbidden matters and pagan practices” (Farsy 1989: 122). When Farsy became Chief Qāḍī of Kenya in 1968, he attacked scholars associated with the *'Alawī* and Qādirī orders.

*'Abduh's* closest disciple, Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1935), was more focused than

his master on the need to defend Islam against Western criticisms. His zeal for Islamic political strength led him to admire the Wahhābīs of Saudi Arabia and the Muslim Brotherhood, founded in Egypt by his friend, Ḥasan al-Bannā, in 1928. Gradually the term Salafī has been co-opted by Muslims of a far sterner persuasion, who would be characterized by outsiders as Wahhābī or fundamentalist, but who reject such labels for themselves.

In recent decades, the political aspirations of Muslims in East Africa have given radical Salafism new strength, as recent Islamic reformism has taken on a political character. Like Islamist groups elsewhere, the leaders of recent reform movements have tended not to be trained as *ʿulamāʾ*, but in secular professions like medicine, engineering, and education, taking the title *ustādh* (teacher or professor) rather than *shaykh*. Unlike the modernist reformers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, who often took a cautious approach to *ḥadīth*, in recent decades reformers have tended to emphasize the importance of *ḥadīth* and of learning Arabic philology – emphases that are associated with fundamentalist rather than modernist approaches to reform. They also attack Sufism, saint veneration, and Islamic divinatory practices as un-Islamic superstition. Loimeier describes the recent reformists as rejecting all forms of spiritualism, favoring a process of gradual rationalization of religion and society, in which all forms of magic are rejected as superstition (Loimeier 2003: 254–5). Islamic reformism introduces new ideological cleavages and tensions among Muslims, though Loimeier observed that some politically oriented Islamic groups in the 1990s found it prudent to refrain from anti-Ṣūfī polemics in the interest of Muslim unity in the face of authoritarian secular regimes (Loimeier 2003: 255). In Kenya and Zanzibar, Muslim political parties in opposition to the government have emerged, leading to public disturbances and violent clashes with government troops. The formation of Muslim political parties is motivated mainly by Muslims’ economic and political deprivation in countries where they are a minority. Nonetheless, the effectiveness of Islamic political movements has been hampered by rifts caused by interpersonal rivalries (Loimeier 2003: 259; Oded 2000: 171).

The rival Islamist governments of Saudi Arabia and Iran have tried to influence Islamic trends in East Africa, particularly in Kenya. While the Saudi government and Al Qaeda are both anti-Shīʿī, Iran promotes Sunnī–Shīʿī rapprochement and its own brand of Islamic activism in East Africa. Many young Kenyan Muslims admire Iran for promoting a politically relevant and modern form of Islamism. There have been a number of conversions of Sunnī Muslims to Shiʿism in Kenya (Oded 2000: 118), and this trend continues (personal communication with Shaykh Hammad Kassim Mazrui, Shaykh Ahmad Msallam, and Kadara Harith Swaleh, May 2007).

Al Qaeda’s bombing of the American embassies in Nairobi and Dar Es Salaam in August 1998 sent shock waves throughout the region, especially when some local Muslims were implicated. Somalia in particular was seen as a haven for Al Qaeda. In May to June 2006, a group called the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) captured Mogadishu and much of Somalia with the intention of enforcing the *sharīʿa*. They began prohibiting cinemas, soccer, and the chewing of the narcotic leaf *qāt*, leading to fears of a Taliban-style government in Somalia. The UN-recognized Transitional Government, which held out in northern Somalia, invited Ethiopian troops to intervene, and in January 2007 the USA bombed ICU positions. The power of the ICU is limited to a few towns on the Kenyan border.

## Conclusion

Islam came first to the Horn of Africa very early in Islamic history, but Islamization nonetheless proceeded over the course of many centuries and is still ongoing. Yemen and the Hadramawt have played a major role in the development of Islam in the region, where the Shāfiʿī school predominates and great importance was traditionally attached to those who claimed descent from the Prophet. Although Omanis ruled parts of the Swahili coast and southern Somalia from the seventeenth century through the nineteenth century, and in Zanzibar until 1964, their sect, Ibadism, made no impact on the broader Swahili and African population. The first Sūfī order, the Qādiriyya, did not enter the region until the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and it was not until the nineteenth century that other orders proliferated. Pre-Islamic customs and beliefs pertaining to spirits persist and take on an Islamic guise. Since the mid-twentieth century the religious landscape of the region has changed through the impact of secular education, Islamic reformism, African nationalism, and political upheaval. The enormous prestige once held by the *ʿulamā* and the *asbrāf* is largely a thing of the past.

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