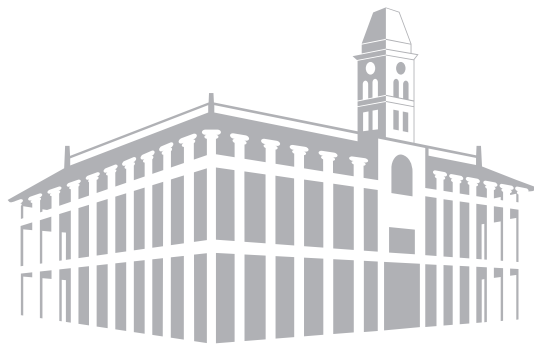


**OMANI PRESENCE
IN EAST AFRICA**

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Georg Popp

OMANI PRESENCE IN EAST AFRICA

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Foreword

The movement and migration of communities between Arabia and the coast of East Africa and Asia in the sphere of the Indian Ocean has been going on for centuries. The families have moved back and forth between Muscat, Sur, Mombasa, Malindi, Zanzibar and Lamu for many generations. It was not out of the norm; it was quite usual. These families and traders saw themselves situated in multiple locations. For one generation, their home was Muscat; in another generation, it was Zanzibar. But they also saw at the same time the possibility that Muscat and Zanzibar could both be their home – it was not either/or.

Wherever the Omanis had trade or settlements on the coast and in the interior, cultural and social influence can be discovered, such as the spread of Islam from the coast to places up country as far as Uganda, the Congo and even Mozambique and the central lakes of Africa.

The Omanis were not missionary-minded. In a sense their targets and their aims were not to spread Islam. But the spirit of Islam resulted as a by-product of the way they dealt with their customers and indigenous Africans. Eventually they won the respect of these people because they did not want to subdue or compel them to embrace Islam. This process was very gradual and smooth without compulsion. One was free to follow one's own pagan belief, to be a Muslim, or even to be a Christian.

The indigenous population, the African tribes, imitated these traders' lives, especially in praying and in their religious values.

The trading caravans took months and months, sometimes half a year or even years. When the traders stayed all this long time, their thoughts turned naturally to marriage and having a family so that they could settle and do their work efficiently during their stay. This led to settlements in certain places, especially the trading centres like Zanzibar, Bagamoyo, Tabora or Kasongo.

Through the dealings in trade they created certain social relations and the best way of winning the trust of the local population was through intermarriage. This was highly appreciated by the local Africans, because when a business partner intermarries with a certain tribe, he eventually becomes a member of the tribe – he respects them, he respects their customs and he builds a very strong social link that leads to an exchange and fusion of cultures.

This kind of exchange is one of the main driving forces of human development. It is a process of give and take that transforms both sides. It is not about one idea or fashion replacing another. It is instead about mutual enrichment and creating something new.

Searching for the traces of exchange in history will remind the present of its diverse roots. Acknowledging the existence and the impact of exchange will lead to a different understanding of identity: It is no longer something that separates peoples from one another, but something that brings them together.

It was the enormous trading empire developed by the Omanis which brought so many and various cultures together in a mutually beneficial cultural and material exchange. A simple popular Swahili saying which prevailed widely in mid-19th century East and Central Africa indicates the extent of Zanzibari influence: *'When the pipes play in Zanzibar, they dance at the lakes'*.

Prof. Ibrahim Elzein Saghairon

Khartoum, 2020

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Introduction



Oman – Homeland of Merchants and Seafarers

If you want to get a good feel for Oman and its people, then you can do no better than to take down *The Thousand And One Nights* and read the tales of Sindbad the Sailor, perhaps in the celebrated English translation of the 19th century scholar and explorer of East Africa, Sir Richard Burton.

A picture of the magnificence of the Orient quickly unfolds before the mind's eye. Colourful and fantastic scenes arise – pictures of the choicest goods heaped up in the narrow, winding alleys of the oriental markets, the souqs: Exotic spices, gold, pearls, gorgeous carpets and pearls, and precious silverwork attract the eye. Haggling traders, storytellers, coffee sellers, breathtakingly beautiful women, striking visages from all corners of the world fill the streets with bursting, sensual life. The fragrance of sandalwood and frankincense. Enormously rich merchants dwelling in fairy tale palaces.

In glaring contrast to this we have the pictures of arduous and adventurous sea voyages to unknown, dangerous realms filled with the promise of wealth. Over the centuries these fairy tale visions of the Orient have inspired artists. Their imagined world, depicted in such a realistic style, has so impressed itself upon the western mind that the boundaries between fantasy and reality have become blurred beyond recognition. The European picture of the Orient is often, if not always, based on these fantastic inventions of the 19th century artistic imagination, but it is better to trust in the pictures conjured up in one's own mind by reading the tales, and even better, having an additional look at the results of scientific research about life and trade in the sphere of the Indian ocean over the centuries.

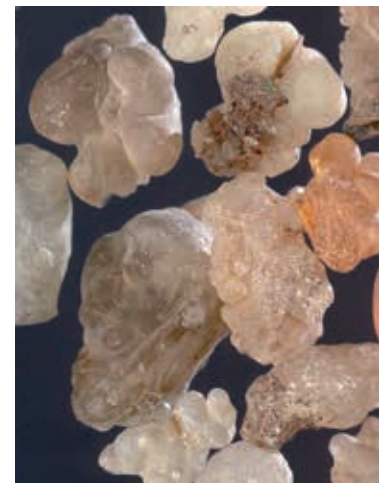
Left
Travel across the Indian Ocean was seasonal. The northeast monsoon winds of December and January brought dhows south towards Zanzibar and Madagascar. The July southwest monsoon drove winds from the south and west, from east Africa towards Oman, the Persian Gulf, and India.



The many beehive-shaped graves which are found in the area of the Western al-Hajar Mountains of Oman date back to the early time of copper trade with Sumer and the Indus valley. Their importance was recognized by their addition to the UNESCO World Heritage List.

As with most legends, that of Sindbad the Sailor has its roots in history. This is not necessarily in the Baghdad of Haroun Ar-Rashid, as the story recounts, but may well have been in 9th century Oman. The ancient port of Suhar lays claim to be the home port of Sindbad. In its day, this settlement on the fertile Al Batinah coast of the Gulf of Oman was the largest and most important seaport of the Islamic world. Al Muqaddasi, a chronicler of the time, described Suhar as the gateway to China and warehouse of the Orient. It was renowned for its innumerable merchants and businesses – and for its legendary wealth.

As early as 2000 BC, sailors of *Magan* provided copper via sea routes to the civilisations of Sumer and the Indus Valley. In the millennia following, the most important export was frankincense, originating in southern Oman and traded primarily with the Egyptians and Romans. Frankincense was literally worth its weight in gold.



The valuable resin of the frankincense tree 'boswellia sacra'.



The ruins of Gedi on the coast of Kenya bear witness to the importance of the city as a trading hub from the 12th to the 16th century.

The adoption of Islam by the inhabitants in the 12th century is marked by the presence of three superimposed mosques. Their style of architecture suggests that the inhabitants were influenced by the Ibadhite denomination of Islam from Oman.

In the 8th century the fame of the Omani seafarer Abu Ubaida ibn Abdullah ibn Qassim spread throughout the then known world. He made a 7,000 kilometre adventure-filled voyage over the seven seas, traveling from Suhar as far as Canton in China. In so doing he laid the foundations of modern scientific navigation and grounded many a legend. Omani seafarers and traders those days were sailing not only eastwards but also southwards along the coast of East Africa, where from the 8th century onwards ever more villages and hamlets developed with small economies. These first settlements grew rapidly in number and by the 15th century more than 100 towns could be found along this 3,200 kilometre stretch of coast between today's Somalia and, in the south, Mozambique. This is known as the Swahili Coast. Many of these cities, like Mombasa, Kilwa and Gedi served as ports for the trading network in the Indian Ocean, the Swahili being connected with the cultures of India, Southeast Asia, China and especially Arabia.

There was a constant exchange with so many different cultures and traditions, which resulted in the language of the civilisation that developed along this coast, Kiswahili, adopted words over the centuries from its trading partners: Persian, Portuguese, English, but most of all Arabic. Even the word *Swahili* is derived from *sahil*, the Arabic word for coast. Thus the language itself is a potent example of the many hundred years of successful and intense exchange between the coastal peoples and the Arab traders.

After defeating the Portuguese in East Africa, the Omanis were the dominant seafaring people in the Indian ocean from the 17th to the 19th century. Attracted by the potential riches to be gained from trading ivory, gold, wood and other commodities, adventurous Omani merchants began to explore the interior of the continent.



For many centuries Omani traders were sailing from Oman along the East African coast.

The historic capital of the island of Zanzibar is Stone Town. Due to its unique architecture, reflecting various cultures of the Indian Ocean, it was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.



They went inland as far as Lake Victoria, Lake Tanganyika, the Congo and founded small trading settlements all along the routes from the cities of the coast. Many of these settlements were ruled by Omani families for generations. Even today Omani descendants of those traders can be found in these historic places in today's Rwanda, Congo, Mozambique, Burundi, Kenya and Tanzania.

The peak of Omani influence was reached under the reign of Sultan Said ibn Sultan. In 1832 he decided to spend most of his time at Zanzibar, preferring to rule over Oman from East Africa rather than to rule over his dominions in East Africa from Oman. He quickly realized the strategic importance of the island of Zanzibar and developed it into the centre of the Omani trade empire. The capital of Zanzibar, which had been a small collection of native huts, rapidly became the largest and most important city along the Swahili coast. Possessing safe harbours and good supplies of pure drinking water, it attracted the ships trading within the Indian Ocean, thus stimulating the local economy. Over time Zanzibar became the commercial hub of East Africa.

The great wealth of Zanzibar which resulted from trading African and eastern commodities also piqued the interest of the western powers. In 1833 a treaty was

signed with the United States of America, which then opened a consulate at Zanzibar in 1837. Quickly did the consulates of Great Britain, France, Germany, Portugal, Italy, Belgium and Austria-Hungary follow. In 1840 Sultan Said sent a trade mission to New York, led by Ahmad ibn Na'aman Al Ka'abi, which carried valuable gifts for the American president. This was the first mission of any Arab nation to the United States of America. Zanzibar became the centre of a flourishing global trade network in the Indian ocean. The success of this network was based as much on commercial and economic grounds as – of at least equal importance – on the social values which the Omani traders and rulers had practiced for centuries, namely: religious tolerance, mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence with other cultures.

This open-mindedness amazed the Westerners, who were astounded by the fact that the first Christian missionaries to arrive in Zanzibar were warmly welcomed into a primarily Islamic society, which supported them in improving health and education



Ivory was always one of the most valuable and sought-after products. The cargo shown in the photograph was intended for America.

on the mainland as they spread their Christian doctrine. Omani scholars even helped them to translate Christian texts into the Swahili language. In return for their positive work, the Christians received a large land grant – the *Bagamoyo Deed* – where they built a base for their work in East Africa, and which still exists today. Not only were other religions and cultures welcome in Zanzibar, but also modern technology. This small island became the first place in East Africa to have electricity, a railway, a printing press and newspapers. Fresh water was piped to the dwellers of the city. Due to the modern construction techniques and modern conveniences and features, such as electricity and as an elevator, the new palace built in 1883 by Sultan Barghash became known as the *House of Wonders*.

It was in the second half of the 19th century that Oman's commercial empire in East Africa became enmeshed in a tangle of European colonial interests, technical innovations and internal intrigue. The death of Sultan Said was followed by a power struggle between his sons, Majid and Thuwaini, who had been his representatives in Zanzibar and Muscat. In 1861 the British stepped in as mediators, concocting a treaty which divided the empire. The wealthy Sultanate of Zanzibar agreed to financially support the relatively poor Sultanate of Muscat. Great Britain acted as guarantor of these payments.



The harbour front of Zanzibar's capital Stone Town was dominated by 'bayt al ajaib', the 'House of Wonders' until its partial collapse in December 2020



The inscription on the grave of Sultan Said ibn Sultan, who died in 1856 on his way from Muscat to Zanzibar, mentions all the dominions which had been under his control.

The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 dealt a severe blow to Zanzibar's position in world trade. The ports in East Africa quickly lost importance in favour of Aden and the entry to the Red Sea. The emergence of steamships accelerated this decline as the Omanis were not in a position to compete with this technology. Sail continued to play a role elsewhere, such as in trade with India, but it was relegated to a minor role.

The economic decline of Oman and the growing strength of the European colonial powers coincided with the British anti-slavery campaign, putting further pressure on the Omani rulers in Zanzibar while at the same time weakening the economic power of Britain's European competitors in the Indian Ocean, where the work on their plantations was based on the use of slaves. Although Sultan Said had already entered into a first treaty with the British in 1822 to abolish the slave trade, it was widespread and not possible to stop it from one day to the next. The treaties signed in 1873 by Sultan Barghash and in September 1889 by Sultan Khalifa declared that effective November 1st that same year all persons who entered the Sultan's dominions should be free.

On November 11, 1890 the islands of Zanzibar and Pemba were proclaimed a British Protectorate. From that date until December 10, 1963 the administration and governance of the two islands were placed in the hands of the British, although both remained under the rule of an Omani sultan. People from Oman and many cultures of the Indian ocean continued to live peacefully together.



One of the few stamps that was issued during the period of the independent state of Zanzibar promoting religious tolerance on the island.

The short period of Zanzibar being recognized as an independent state with its own seat at the United Nations lasted only for one month from December 10, 1963 until January 11, 1964 when in a bloody coup the legally elected government was overthrown. Thousands of people, mostly of Omani and Indian origin, were killed or forced to flee the country, and Zanzibar and Tanganyika were united to form the state of Tanzania. Even though this revolution was dramatic and traumatic to many Omani families living there for generations, it did not mark the end of the Omani presence on Zanzibar or in East Africa. Some members of most families decided to stay.

In 2007 diplomatic ties between Tanzania and the Sultanate of Oman were reinstated and embassies were opened on both sides. Dispossessed properties and land began to be returned to the former owners. Omani investments in the field of trade, education, culture and social areas are welcomed, not only in Tanzania, but also in Kenya and other states of East Africa.

The story of Omani presence in Zanzibar and East Africa looks to be one that will continue far into the future.



Chapter 1



Growing a Relationship with East Africa

Early traces of seafaring and shipbuilding in Oman

Establishing contacts and trade relations with regions some 4,500 kilometres distant, as is the case with Oman and East Africa, requires knowledge of the geography along this route, the people and their habits. Another requirement is an adequate means of transport for the goods to be traded economically over this long distance. A look on the map shows that obviously the safest and fastest way is to travel by sea. This again requires a good deal of skill in shipbuilding, seafaring and navigation.

In 1982 and 1985 the remains of a settlement and burial ground were excavated on the Ras Al Hamra peninsula near Al Qurm in Muscat. These finds showed that the place had been inhabited continuously between 3500 and 2800 BC and that the people lived from fishing and hunting. Interestingly the remains of large fish were discovered, which could only have been caught at sea by boat. Boatbuilding must have played a significant role even at this time. These conclusions were confirmed by similar finds by archaeologists in Ras Al Jinz, a trading station at the easternmost edge of the Arabian Peninsula at the end of the 3rd and beginning of the 2nd millennium BC.¹

Left
This extract from a map of Africa 'nach den neuesten Entdeckungen und Ansichten' (according to the latest discoveries and views), published in Stuttgart, Germany in 1826, illustrates how little was known in the Western world at that time about the geography of East Africa.

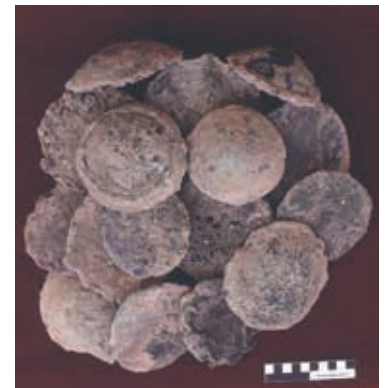
But already on this map can be found the note: 'Diese Küste, von der Insel Mafia bis Madagaskar steht unter der Herrschaft der Araber, des Imam von Maskat' (This coast, from the island of Mafia to Madagascar is under the rule of the Arabs, the Imam of Muscat).

The most easily visible signs of early settlement in Oman are to be found in tombs erected in the foothills of the Al Hajar Mountains. Known as beehive tombs because of their shape, these tombs were built in the thousands throughout this mountain range from the middle of the 3rd millennium BC. The tombs have long since



Beehive tombs at Bat after the restoration by archaeologists.

been plundered and all that has been found are ceramic vessels, apparently worthless to tomb robbers. Since these show a distinct similarity to such vessels of the same period from Mesopotamia – the *Land Between the Rivers* – one must assume that there was already trade with the area between the Tigris and the Euphrates. In 1988 the outstanding agglomeration of graves and settlements of this period in the northern Omani mountains at Bat, Al Khutm and Al Ayn were the second site in Oman to be listed by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. According to UNESCO's World Heritage List, together with the neighbouring sites, it forms one of the most complete collections in the world of settlements and necropolises from the 3rd millennium BC.² These signs of well-organized settlements and their successful integration into an international trading network lead one to conclude that the culture of those days – the *Umm-an-Nar civilisation* – represents one of the high points in the history of the region. The story of how this peak of civilisation was reached remained a puzzle until archaeologists unearthed the reason for its prosperity in the Omani mountains.



Hoard of copper ingots from Aqir near Bahla.

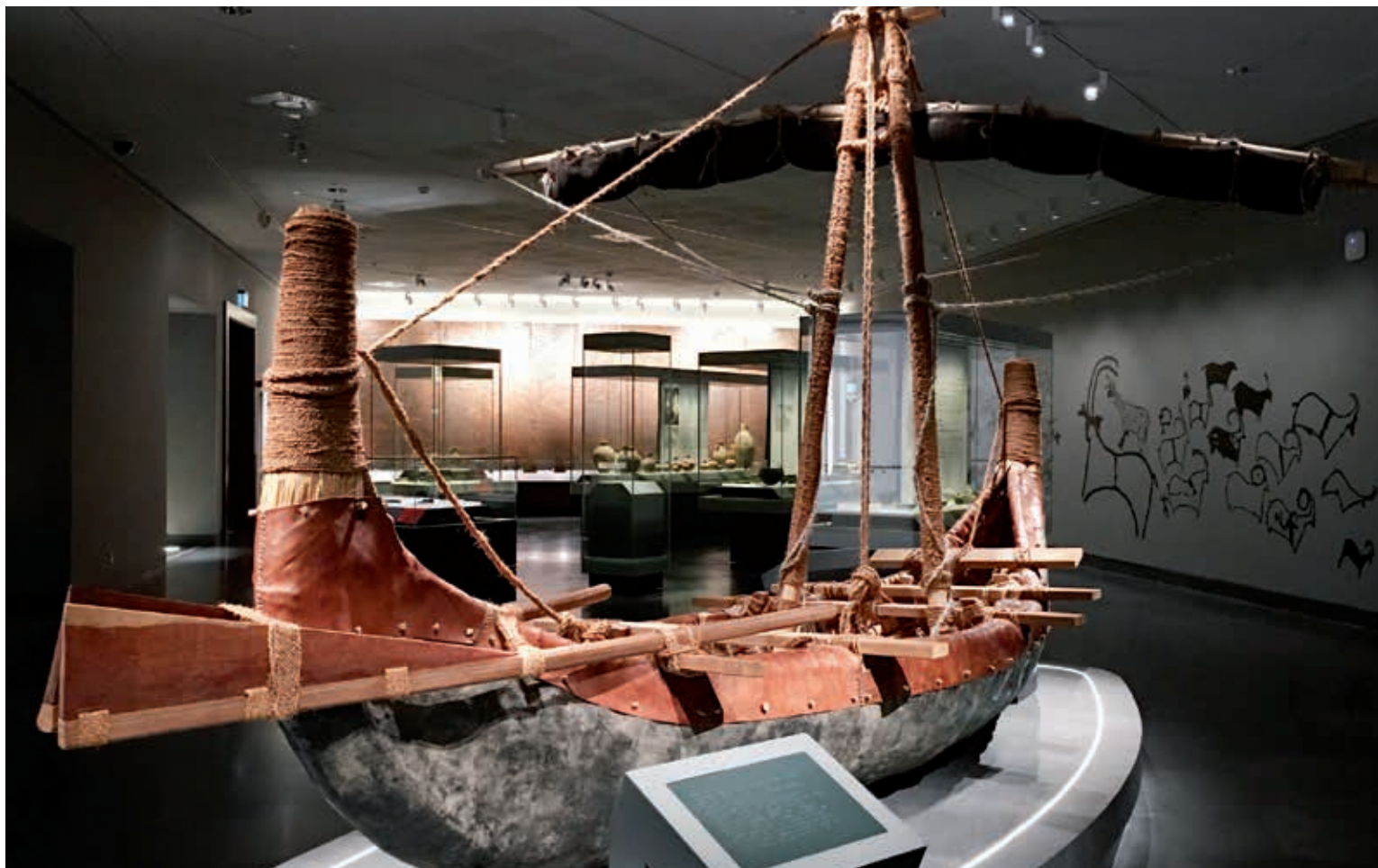
In 1974 geologists prospecting for minerals in the Al Hajar Mountains came across numerous traces of copper mining and processing from days long gone. Subsequently the German Museum of Mining in Bochum set up a five-year research project, which began in 1977. The idea was to demonstrate that the historic Magan, at that time not geographically identified, is identical with present-day Oman. Investigations of copper objects found in Oman, Bahrain and Iraq formed the basis of this theory. All of these samples apparently stemmed from the same unknown source. The Al Hajar Mountains form part of an oceanic ridge which stretches from the Omani island of Masirah, through Iran and as far as Cyprus. Geologically speaking it is comprised mostly of Samail ophiolite, a rock stratum of volcanic origin between 94 and 98 million years old in which there are beds of sulphide ore deposits from which the metal can be won.

The term *Magan* (or *Makkan*) first appears around 2300 BC in the writings of King Sargon of Akkad. This Mesopotamian ruler describes ships from Dilmun, Magan and Meluhha, with their various cargoes being unloaded on the quays of Akkad. Trade with these regions clearly flourished at this time.

In 2200 BC Sargon's grandson, Naram-Sin, reported his victory over the king of Magan. He commemorated his triumph in a masterpiece of Mesopotamian sculpture, the Naram-Sin stele, his own portrait carved from diorite. Alabaster bowls were found nearby in which Naram-Sin had had the words '*Spoils from Magan*' engraved. Tablets from the period, inscribed with administrative texts, mention the occurrence of copper in Magan for the first time and also the importing of ivory, semi-precious stones, wood for buildings and furniture, along with diorite, all in exchange for silver, textiles, wool and furs from Mesopotamia.

In the 1930s cuneiform tablets were discovered in Ur which verified a vigorous trade between Mesopotamia, Magan and Dilmun in the period between 2500 and 1500 BC. *Dilmun* is now the island of Bahrain in the Arabian Gulf. *Meluhha* was the Sumerian term for the Mohenjodaro civilisation of the Indus basin. The geographical location of Magan remained unknown.

To the great disappointment of the researchers the first finds dated, not as hoped, from the Bronze Age, but from the Early Islamic (9th–10th century) and Middle Islamic (12th–19th century) periods. As copper extraction in the Orient during this period was as little known as in historic Magan, they widened the area of their investigations. Further excavations soon solved the puzzle. Copper production in Oman took place in the same locations over centuries and millennia.³ The early copper workings lay buried beneath the later ones. Because of the intensive use of the terrain, no traces of the earlier building structures of this era could be found. What



Model of a 'Black boat of Magan' at the Oman National Museum in Muscat. Even today the people of East Africa refer to the people of Oman as 'Wa-manga', meaning 'people of or from Magan'.

did remain from the Bronze Age were immense slag heaps and vast quantities of clay shards with a thin vitrified coating, probably fragments of the oldest generation of smelting furnaces.

These finds gave a good picture of the scale of copper extraction during the Bronze Age. Dating revealed that the peak of this production phase must have been between 2200 and 1900 BC, during the Umm-an-Nar period. The 10,000 tons of slag found mainly in the hinterland of Suhar indicate the production of 2,000 to 4,000 tons of copper. The quality of the copper was improved by repeated smelting, but because of its impurities it was known as black copper. Its composition is identical to finds in Ur, Sumer and in the Indus basin. Experts no longer doubt the identification of Magan, the land of copper, with Oman.⁴

Concerning the answer to the question about how people in those days transported tons of copper and diorite over the sea from Oman to Sumer and the Indus valley, the excavations at Ras Al Jinz contributed important finds. More than 300 bitumen pieces were recovered in a mud brick building. The slabs had the impressions of bound reeds, rope lashings and woven mats on one side and fully-grown barnacles on the opposite side indicating continuous submersion for at least three months. This was the first direct evidence of the actual construction of Early Bronze Age vessels in the Arabian Sea. The bitumen was used to protect the corpus of the boats made mostly from reed against the water. Due to the colour, scientists named them the *Black boats of Magan*.

In correlation with the fact that an ivory comb was also found at Ras al Jinz and that the Mesopotamian tablets mention the import of ivory from Magan, one could raise the question whether those black boats were sailing even during the Bronze Age in the direction East Africa. Perhaps, we will never know for sure, but Omani sailors, from Bronze Age onwards, did indeed start collecting valuable knowledge about shipbuilding, sailing on open water and navigation.

Heading towards the East African coast

Around 563 BC Cyrus the Great conquered northern Oman. The Persians maintained their dominance over the coastal area of the al-Hajar Mountains during the entire period of the Achaemenid, Parthian and Sasanian dynasties (i.e. from 563 BC to 637 AD). Knowledge about this period in Oman's history is patchy. In the *Periplus Maris Erythraei* (*Circumnavigation of the Erythrean Sea*) an anonymous Greek travel book written in the 1st century AD, Oman is described as a Persian province. Around the 5th century BC, a maritime settlement *Mazun* developed in the vicinity of today's Suhar on the Omani coast. By the 3rd century AD this city was the most important Sasanian port after Siraf. Most importantly, since the arrival of the Persians, maritime trading had slowly developed between the northern coast of the Indian Ocean and East Africa.

At the beginning of the 6th century this area was occupied by increasing numbers of Arab settlers from the south, the Azdi, and from the east, the Nizari of the Najd region, who eventually drove out the Persians. In 570 AD the Persians managed to reoccupy a part of the coast and Suhar became the residence of the Sasanian vice-roy. The land was divided by treaty between the Arab Al Azd Kings and the Persians. Sasanian rule was restricted to the region around Suhar, with the rest of the country held by the Al Azd.

Islam was accepted peacefully in Oman, without coercion, during the Prophet's lifetime. In the year 629 AD the Prophet Mohammed sent a letter to the two kings of Oman, Abd and Jaifar, sons of Al Julanda ibn Mustakbar, living in Suhar, exhorting them to become his followers. The letter matched those sent by Mohammed to the rulers of Byzantium, Persia, Ethiopia, Egypt and Yemen. Delegations were exchanged to study and consider this, and Abd and Jaifar became believers and converted freely.

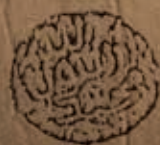
The two kings of Oman united the Arab tribes and expelled the Persians, and political power remained in the hands of the Al Julanda dynasty until Oman was annexed to Basra by the third caliph, Uthman ibn Affan.

A bloody confrontation between the caliphs Ali and Muawiyah created a schism which led to the development of the Sunni and Shiite schools of jurisprudence. Abd ibn Al Julanda decided that Oman would not follow either of these schools, initially keeping Oman largely independent of Umayyid rule. As a result, they faced military attacks attempting to coerce their submission. As a result a centre of political resistance to Umayyad hegemony was created in Oman, which over time evolved into the Ibadhi school of thought.

For the Ibadhis the imam's ancestry is irrelevant. They maintain that every faithful and theologically educated Muslim can be chosen as imam, the religious and civic leader with full governmental power. He is '*the first among equals*' in the eyes of the Ibadhis, just as humans are first among God's other creatures.

Right
*Replica of the letter from
Prophet Mohammed to the kings
of Oman.*

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
 فِي مُحَمَّدٍ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ
 الَّذِي كَفَّرَ وَجْهَهُ بِرَبِّهِ الْكَافِرِ
 وَتَوَلَّى عَلَى مَنْ أَسْلَمَ إِلَيْهِ
 أَمَامَهُ وَأَسْلَمَ إِلَيْهِ كَمَا
 كَانَ الْأَسْلَامُ إِسْلَامًا سَلَامًا
 بِرَسُولِ اللَّهِ الَّذِي الْيَاسِرِ
 خَافَهُ لَا تَدْرِي مَنْ كَانَ كَمَا
 وَكَانَ الْمَوْلَى عَلَى الْكَافِرِ
 وَأَبَى كُفْرًا أَوْ أَقْرَبَ سَلَامًا
 سَلَامًا وَلَسْنَا وَابْنُ آسَمَاءَ
 وَأَبْنَاءُ مَالِكِ كَمَا وَابْنُ آسَمَاءَ
 كُلِّ مَسَا كَسَمَا وَكُلِّ مَسَا
 بِرَسُولِ اللَّهِ كَمَا وَكُلِّ مَسَا





In 696 AD the ruling brothers Said and Suleyman Al Julanda were expelled from Oman by the invasion of Al Hajjaj ibn Yusuf, who in those days was governor of Iraq. Interestingly they fled to East Africa, which must have been the best option for them to reach a safe haven. It is assumed that they settled in the area north of the island of Lamu and that even at this time there were Omani communities there. Unfortunately there are no reports about the princes' life in exile.

Based on the system of changing monsoon winds the seafarers developed a vast trade network connecting Arabia, East Africa and Asia.

Being situated on the easternmost edge of the Arabian Peninsula, the Omani merchants could easily take great advantage of the monsoon winds in the Indian Ocean which blow south in the winter and north in the summer. This system of changing winds enabled sailing on these routes as far as China, thus connecting the Abassid empire with the Tang dynasty. This has become known as the *Maritime Silk Road*. The 7,000-kilometre route led through the Strait of Melaka, passing via Ceylon and the Malabar coast in south India. The most famous descriptions of this route



This porcelain plate found in the Belitung wreck shows a design produced especially for the Arabian market.

are found in the tales of Sindbad the Sailor. Precious goods from Arabia, Africa and India, such as ivory, copper, fragrances and spices, were exchanged at Canton for silk and porcelain. Already in the 10th century Al Masudi noted the fact that all ivory trade to India and China was channelled through Oman.

The discovery of an Arab shipwreck off the coast of the Indonesian island of Belitung in 1998 not only gave evidence about the construction of the sea-going boats of those days, but also the extent of the trade. The cargo consisted of an unimaginable sixty thousand pieces of precious porcelain and ceramics from what is today's Hunan province in China. The style and methods of production indicate origins during the Tang Dynasty. In addition to porcelain, bowls and ornaments of gold and silver were found. Never before had archaeologists discovered such a great treasure from that period.

Based on the remains of the Belitung shipwreck a replica of this 9th century Arab vessel was constructed in Oman, using the technology of sewn planks as was practised in those days and proven by the findings. The dhow was named '*Jewel of Muscat*' and set sail in February 2010 for the Far East.

The Omani captain, Saleh ibn Said Al Jabri, sailed the ship with the same means of those days and five months later safely reached Singapore, its final destination. He stated in his captain's log:

For nearly five months, this ship has been our kitchen and our cradle, our office and our classroom. Our lives have depended upon her, in the most adverse weather conditions, on tossing seas and in driving winds.

She has not failed us. She has surprised and perplexed us on many occasions. But she has proven loyal and true, exceeding our expectations, and above all protecting our lives. On her deck, we have gained a whole new respect for our forefathers, learning to navigate by the stars, as they did centuries ago.⁵



The hull of the 'Jewel of Muscat' was sewn together with coconut fibre. The wood was protected by a layer of goat fat mixed with lime, and the sails were made from palm leaves.

The 9th-century navigation technique plotted by night the course with a 'kamal', a small block of wood connected to a piece of string that can calculate latitude. Observation of the sky and sea colour, marine and bird life, and wind direction were also used as aids to navigation.



An Arab merchant wishing to go to East Africa would travel south on the winter monsoon and return north with the summer monsoon. In Africa, this trade extended about as far as Mozambique at the southern limit of the monsoon winds.

In 916 AD Al Masudi reported that many ships sailing along the East African coast belonged to sailors from Oman or Siraf, the port of Shiraz. As they had to wait several months for the wind to change for sailing back again, many of them decided to set up a second home along the East African coast. When in 977 AD an earthquake destroyed the port of Siraf, this development was even intensified. Written proof of these early settlers can be found in the chronicles of Kilwa, for example, which tell us that the first Shirazi princes arrived in the 10th century and soon thereafter ruled the island, introducing Persian Islamic architecture.

The earliest evidence of Omani communities along the East African coast is seen in architecture and writing dating from the 10th century. Between the 10th and 12th centuries many urban centres arose from small trading posts along the coast. They were mostly governed by representatives or descendants of Yemeni or Persian kingdoms, as at Kilwa. There are few traces of Omani communities from those days, but they can be identified by their Ibadhi belief. The practices of the Ibadhi school of Islam distinguishes its followers from the Sunnis of Yemen or the Shiites from Persia.

A significant difference between Ibadhis and other Muslim believers is found in the architecture of their mosques. To archaeologist Mark Horton, the Ibadhi mosques on Zanzibar of the 19th century provide a guide to identify Ibadhi features in the mosque architecture of earlier times. To him,

(...) the 19th century mosque on Zanzibar is very distinct, and reflects the prevailing Ibadhi dogmas of simplicity, democracy, equality and tolerance. This is found in their buildings, which tend to be austere, discreet, while the lack of congregational mosques reflects the absence of the imam that could be only elected by the whole country. Their mosques lack 'minbars' for the delivery of the 'khutba', and generally are very plain. Critically, the 'mihrab' is shallow with minimum decoration, set within the thickness of the wall. The reason given for this is that the prayer leader should not be isolated but be among equals. The 'mihrab' serves only to mark the direction of prayer and there is no external expression of the 'mihrab', a deliberate feature that makes the building as



The simple design of a mihrab is typical for Ibadhi mosques.

anonymous as possible. Another feature that is found is the raising of the floor above the surrounding area so that to passers-by, all that is seen are blank walls, with the window set up high. In keeping with the very plain nature of the mosque, there is generally (but not universally) the absence of a minaret – a feature that was to glorify the skill of the architect. Generally, the mosques are organised in a linear form, with a square prayer hall with a central column that opens into a courtyard, with covered ablutions to the south.⁶

The oldest of such features were found by archaeologists in layers dating from around 1000 AD at the mosque of Shanga on the island Pate of the Lamu archipelago, and at the other end of the Swahili coast at Sanje ya Kate of the Kilwa archipelago. Both Ibadhi mosques date from a period in which the second imamate in Oman was flourishing. Mark Horton takes this as an ‘indication for local conversion or arrival of Ibadhis at this time on the East African coast’.

We know for certain that an Ibadhi community existed on Kilwa from the ‘*Kilwa Fatwas*’ dating from 1137 AD. The fatwa inquiries are addressed to a famous scholar of the Ibadhi school of Islam, Sheikh Abu Qasim Said ibn Quraish. Affixed on paper, these questions of jurisprudence were transported over the Indian Ocean northward, all the way to Nizwa, in the mountainous region of central Oman, to be decided by this learned Muslim religious authority. They give a close insight into the problems, needs and challenges of everyday life far away from home. A copy of the correspondence is kept in the archives of the National Records and Archives Authority in Muscat.

Georg Popp

Kilwa Kisiwani, the forgotten trading hub

Located on two islands, close to each other just off the Tanzanian coast, about 300 km south of Dar es Salaam, are the remains of the port cities Kilwa Kisiwani and Songo Mnara. The larger, Kilwa Kisiwani, was inhabited from the 9th to the 19th century. The historical development of Kilwa and its surroundings has occurred through different epochs, which were marked by a variety of influences. During the Stone Age and Iron Age Kilwa Kisiwani was most likely only a simple settlement. But between the 12th and 15th centuries the town had attained the status of a commercial trading hub in the Indian Ocean.

A product of African, Arabian, and Persian cultures, Kilwa in those days was an economic powerhouse that oversaw the flow of gold, ivory and other luxuries along the Swahili Coast. The 14th-century sultan's residence overlooked the Indian Ocean and boasted more than a hundred rooms.

We owe a detailed description of the former trading metropolis to the traveller Ibn Battuta, who visited the city in 1331. He seemed to be very impressed by the beauty and size of the city, its architecture and also the people who inhabited it.

'We stayed one night in this island [Mombasa] and sailed on to the city of Kulwa, a large city on the seacoast, most of whose inhabitants are Zinj, jet-black in colour. They have tattoo marks on their faces, just as [there are] on the faces of the Limis of Janawa. (...) The city of Kilwa is one of the finest and most substantially built towns; all the buildings are of wood, and the houses are roofed with reeds.' ⁷

During this heyday of trade, there was also a small community of about forty Omani traders on the island, as documented in the 'Kilwa Fatwas'.

The Omani traders in Kilwa directed questions to the Omani scholar Abu Qasim Said bin Quraish at Nizwa relating to the Omani experience in political, social and economic life away from home. They wanted to know whether the rules and traditions practiced in Oman can be applied on Kilwa in accordance with the Ibadhi teachings of Islam. These fatwas also deal with the situation of the Muslim minority



Copy of a page of the 'Kilwa Fatwas' manuscript. Topics discussed in the 'Kilwa Fatwas' manuscript were often very specifically related to the living situation of Omani traders on Kilwa. For example, the question was raised whether they are allowed to do business with traders who drink alcohol. Also whether they are allowed to elect a member from their community as their imam, even if this member has no theological qualifications. It is the oldest Omani manuscript found to this day that refers to the relations between Oman and East Africa. It dates back to the year 531 AH corresponding to 1137 AD.

in certain places in East Africa. The importance of the 'Kilwa Fatwas' lies in the attempt to transfer the experiences in the political and social life in Oman to the situation on the island of Kilwa.

After the island was removed from this trade network by the conquests of the Portuguese at the beginning of the 16th century, the decline of the once magnificent city began. Kilwa experienced a renewed, brief heyday in the 18th century, pre-



The Great Mosque of Kilwa Kisiwani is the oldest standing mosque on the East African coast and, with its sixteen domed and vaulted bays, has a unique floorplan.

cipitated by the flourishing ivory trade, which was now dominated by Omani traders. The fortress built by the Portuguese was expanded, and a palace, mosques and a new settlement were built.

In 1981, UNESCO inscribed the ruins of Kilwa Kisiwani and the ruins of Songo Mnara on the World Heritage List on the following grounds:

'Kilwa Kisiwani and Songo Mnara were Swahili trading cities and their prosperity was based on control of Indian Ocean trade with Arabia, India and China, particularly between the 13th and 16th centuries, when gold and ivory from the hinterland was traded for silver, carnelians, perfumes, Persian faience and Chinese porcelain. Kilwa Kisiwani minted its own currency in the 11th to 14th centuries. In the 16th century, the Portuguese established a fort on Kilwa Kisiwani and the decline of the two islands began.

The remains of Kilwa Kisiwani cover much of the island with many parts of the city still unexcavated.

The substantial standing ruins, built of coral and lime mortar, include the Great Mosque constructed in the 11th century and considerably enlarged in the 13th century, and roofed entirely with domes and vaults, some decorated with embedded Chinese porcelain; the palace Husuni Kubwa built between 1310 and 1333 with its large octagonal bathing pool; Husuni Ndogo, numerous mosques, the Gereza (prison) constructed on the ruins of the Portuguese fort and an entire urban complex with houses, public squares, burial grounds, etc.

(...)

The islands of Kilwa Kisiwani and Songo Mnara bear exceptional testimony to the expansion of Swahili coastal culture, the Islamisation of East Africa and the extraordinarily extensive and prosperous Indian Ocean trade from the medieval period up to the modern era.

Kilwa Kisiwani and Songo Mnara provide exceptional architectural, archaeological and documentary evidence for the growth of Swahili culture and com-



In 2018 these two old men were the last Omanis living in Kilwa Kivinje.

merce along the East African coast from the 9th to the 19th centuries, offering important insights regarding economic, social and political dynamics in this region’.⁸



The Swahili

In the ancient world, the coast of East Africa was known as Azania or Zengis/Zeng. The early Arab traders first referred to it mainly as Zanj. This term they also used for the people living on this coast. Idrisi (12th century) reports that the Zanj do not have their own ships but use the ships of Oman and other countries. He also mentions caravan trade by people from the interior, bringing goods to be sold on the coast at Mombasa and Malindi. Soon the people of the coast were also called Swahili, deriving from the Arabic word for coastal dwellers, *sawahil*, an expression used till today.

In 1331 the famous Arab traveller Ibn Battuta visited the Swahili coast. He observed that overseas trade was based on personal relationships. Business was not conducted in public markets; instead the local merchants invited the foreign traders into their homes. When Swahili and Arab traders entered into a satisfying agreement, the relationship normally lasted for many years. To strengthen the business relationship it was even common along the coast to marry off a daughter to the Arab merchant.

The long-lasting trade relations and exchange between the inhabitants of the coast and the people from the interior of Africa with the merchants from lands at the other end of the monsoon led over the centuries to the development of a unique cosmopolitan society: the Swahili.

Professor Abdul Sherif, emeritus history professor at the University of Dar es Salaam, describes this process as follows:

Sailors and traders in the Indian Ocean were dependent on the monsoons which both facilitated trade but also hindered it in one important way – they had to wait for a few months before they could turn around to return to their home countries. Since the vast majority of these traders were men in many cultures, they could not help in getting involved in what the Periplus had described as ‘continual intercourse and intermarriage’ with the local population, to produce a rainbow population both racially and culturally. Some of them settled down and were absorbed, adopting the local language and much of the local culture; but, in the process, they also imparted to the host community elements of their own cultural heritage and language, literature, and belief systems, laying the basis for a new synthesis that is uniquely Swahili.⁹

The Swahili culture which emerged during the 10th century was predominantly Islamic, mercantile and urban. Its distinctive stone houses and towns stretched from Mogadishu in the north to Sofala in the south, a 3,200 km expanse of coastline, referred to as the Swahili Coast.

As a result of this fruitful coexistence of cultures an own idiom developed, Kiswahili, born of the hybridization of Bantu, Persian and Arabic. It became the language of the merchants and spread along the routes of trade.



Changes brought by the European *'Age of Discovery'*

Up until about 1500 the trade in luxury goods from East Africa and the Far East was in Arab, for the most part Omani, hands. As the Middle Ages came to a close these expensive wares found an increasing market in Europe, where overseas merchants established themselves as a new social group. They sold goods from the east, above all spices and textiles, making enormous profits in the process. Through their financial strength they soon established themselves as forces to be reckoned with at home. Politics in Europe was now determined by families such as the Medici in Italy and the Welsers and Fuggers in Germany – the financiers of the emperors, kings, popes and local aristocrats.

As the market for these goods grew, the great mercantile houses became determined to cut out the Arab middleman and to buy goods directly and as cheaply as

Left
The Vasco da Gama Pillar was built in 1498 by the Portuguese at Malindi Kilifi amid Muslim resistance. It was meant to give direction for those following the sea route to India.

possible. India, then an unknown and almost mythical land, became the imaginary aim of many an important expedition. The Portuguese and Spanish made it their mission to find a sea route to India. The people of the Iberian Peninsula had early on become accustomed to the lifestyle introduced by Arabs and had come to treasure the small but expensive comforts of the good life. When, with the fall of Granada in 1492, the Arabs lost their last foothold in Spain, this was taken as the signal to expand into Arab territories and to seize the lucrative trade with the east.

Six years after Columbus' first voyage to America, Vasco da Gama succeeded in 1498 in circumnavigating Africa. In Malindi, in East Africa, da Gama hired a local navigator, who showed him the route to Calicut on the Malabar Coast of India. From then on there existed a direct trade route between Europe and India.

Among the goods brought home from this first trip also must have been a copy of an important book by Ahmad ibn Majid. This famous Omani master navigator penned more than 40 works in his life; almost all are written in rhyme, which facilitates committing the often complex contents to memory. His most famous books are *Fawa'idh Fi Usl Ilm al-Bahrwa-al-Qawaidah* (*The book about the merits and principles of navigation*) and *Kitab al-Fawa'id*, in which he explains the basics of navigation. It is the first written documentation of the accumulated knowledge of several generations of sailors, enhanced by the great treasure of his own experiences and observations. Presumably on their first voyage to the region of the Indian Ocean the Portuguese came into possession of a copy of the *Kitab al-Fawa'id*. Back in Lisbon, it was translated

and the knowledge of the Omani master navigator and his colleagues as well as the technique of navigation by using the *kamal* was incorporated into European seafaring practices. At the time of the first arrival of the Portuguese, Ahmad ibn Majid was already an old man – but he sensed the upcoming danger and spoke out a clear warning to the people about the Portuguese. Very soon, it would turn out, he was right.



Admiral Alfonso de Albuquerque

Beginning in 1503 the Portuguese Admiral Alfonso de Albuquerque conquered settlements in East Africa and Arabia. The knowledge of a sea route to India had to be turned to a profit and he was under orders to block the trade route with the East via the Red Sea that was used by the Venetians and Egyptians. In addition, he was to take possession of the important trading posts and found colonies. In his pocket he carried a decree from King Manuel pronouncing him Governor of the still unconquered colony of India. The intention was to establish a Portuguese colonial empire in the Indian Ocean. This seemed well within the realm of possibility, their cannons making their ships militarily far superior to anything the Arabs had to offer in defence.

From 1508 the Portuguese moved up the coast in the direction of Hormuz. Although strongly impressed by the towns with flourishing business life and magnificent gardens, they left behind a trail of destruction and death. Tolerance and magnanimity in regard to foreign cultures and religions, which was the foundation of the enormous success of the Indian ocean trade until then, were not the order of the day in the Europe of this time: it was the era of the Inquisition. By the time of his death in Goa, India, in 1515, Admiral Albuquerque had realised his dream.



Page of the Portuguese translation of Ahmad ibn Majid's 'Kitab al-Fawa'id' explaining about navigation with a kamal.

The Portuguese introduced taxes and duties, prohibited trade by the locals for the most profitable goods, like pepper, and built large fortresses along the Omani coast, in Mombasa, at Hormuz and in India to safeguard their power.

Although the Portuguese now appeared to have gained complete control of the profitable trade route, in fact they never fully succeeded. The trading centers of the Indian Ocean were scattered over thousands of nautical miles, and the number of occupying forces was far too small to provide an effective defence and keep the local powers subdued.



A 'kamal' as it was used for the navigation of the 'Jewel of Muscat' to Singapore.

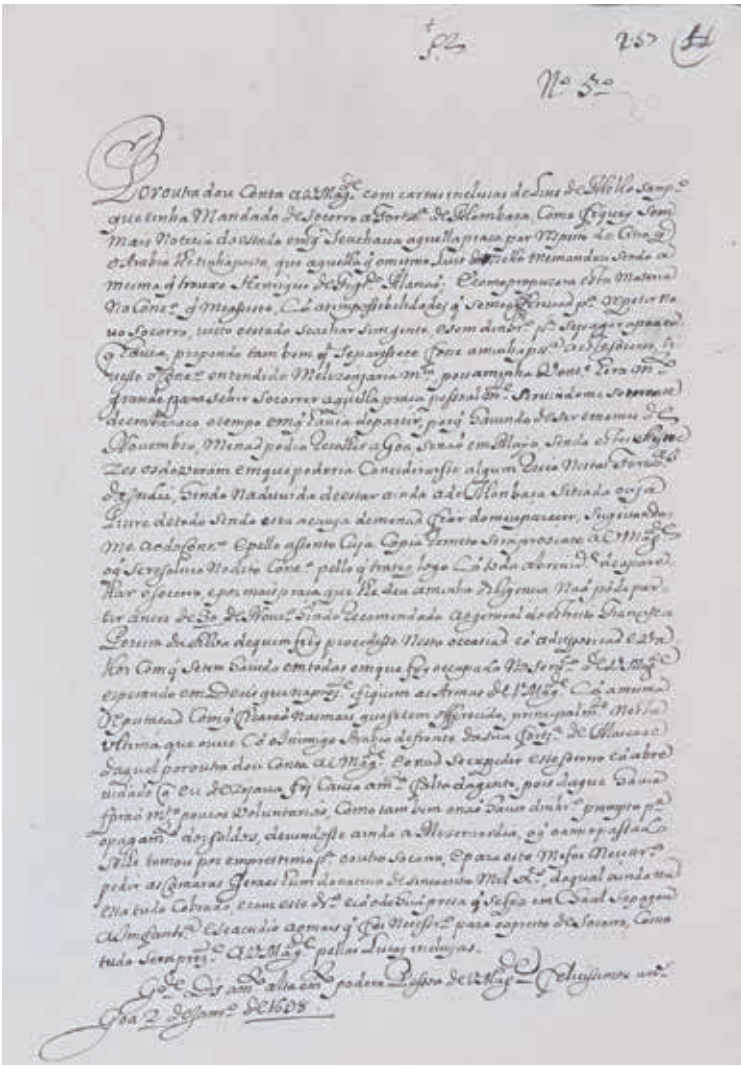
From about 1580 other European powers became involved in the Indian Ocean. They also wanted to secure a part of the lucrative spice trade. The English, the Dutch and the French each established East India companies. By the beginning of the 17th century, Portugal's power was past its zenith.

Building up a naval power

When the Portuguese arrived in the Indian Ocean at the beginning of the 15th century and started to take over all important trading ports, the people of Oman already had various severe problems making their lives difficult. They faced a long-lasting period of drought, making their sophisticated system of water channels, the *aflaj*, fall dry and the fields arid. Ongoing wars between the tribes even worsened their situation. In addition to this, earthquakes hit the coast, damaging houses and fortifications in Qalhat, one of the most important trading hubs on the Omani coast at this time.

In those days, many Omani took the opportunity to escape this peculiar situation by migrating to the humid and fertile East African coast.

In 1624 Nasir ibn Murshid Al Yaarubi was elected Imam in Rustaq. He succeeded in overcoming the long-lasting tribal rivalries and managed to unite the Omani tribes into a force to be reckoned with. Concurrently resistance to the weakening colonial power of Portugal increased in Oman's interior.



Letter by the Viceroy of India to the King of Portugal about the Arabian siege on Mombasa dated 2nd January 1698.



Nasir ibn Murshid died on April 14, 1649 and was buried at this graveyard at Nizwa.



The gravestone of Imam Nasir ibn Murshid.

In response to the death of the Portuguese agent, Ruy Freire in 1632, Nasir ibn Murshid's forces started to attack and capture the Portuguese fortifications along the coast, one by one, at Dabba, Suhar, Julfar, Sur and Qurayyat. Ibn Murshid died on April 14, 1649, with his soldiers laying siege to what remained of the Portuguese forces in Muscat.

After Nasir ibn Murshid's death his cousin Sultan ibn Saif Al Yaarubi was elected imam by popular acclaim. (Note: in Oman *Sultan* is not only a ruler's title but also a normal first name.) He had been a great supporter in the reunification process of his predecessor and had distinguished himself in the struggles against the occupiers. As was to be expected he continued Oman's liberation struggle and by 1650 the Portuguese were driven completely out of Oman.

Imam Sultan ibn Saif Al Yaarubi used the mood now prevalent across the country against the Portuguese and pursued them into the Indian Ocean. Imam Sultan's political aim was to drive the Portuguese out of as many as possible of the former Arab trading posts in India, and above all East Africa. With this aim he started to build up Omani merchant and battle fleets. Having defeated the Portuguese in several sea battles, he captured many of the Portuguese vessels, thus also acquiring the crew on these boats who were skilled at handling them. New ships were built locally or bought in India, due to the fact that timber was rare in arid Oman and it was cheaper to buy the boats at the place of the origin than importing timber to Oman. By the end of the 17th century, a span of only 50 years, Oman had developed into a naval power.



In as early as 1652 an Omani fleet attacked Portuguese settlements in Pate and Zanzibar, again in 1655 in Mombasa and Bombay, and in 1661 Bombay ultimately was sacked. The city Diu on the Indian Malabar coast was captured in 1668 with a fleet of 16 ships and 6 frigates that, on their return, defeated a 12-ship Portuguese fleet.

According to the naval historian Charles Ian Hamilton, the Omani navy around 1720 consisted of one ship with 74 cannons, two with 64 cannons, one with 50 cannons, 18 with 12 to 32 cannons and a number of rowboats, each with between 4 and 8 cannons.¹⁰ Regarding the types of vessels, it was a mix of European and Arab boats. What they had in common was the fact that they were all constructed by using nails – the traditional way of sewing the planks together had become obsolete, as the stitching could not withstand the blow of a cannon.

Left
Old graffiti on the walls of Fort Jesus at Mombasa recall the fighting between the Portuguese and the Omani troops.

The most important stronghold of the Portuguese on the East African coast was Mombasa with the fortification Fort Jesus. There had been several attacks on Mombasa starting from 1655. In 1660 the town was sacked, with Fort Jesus remaining in Portuguese hands. On March 13, 1696 a fleet of seven ships and 3,000 soldiers was sent by Imam Saif I ibn Sultan to Mombasa, which conducted a successful siege of 33 months, until December 13, 1698. There had been attempts by the Portuguese to regain the strategically important fort, but they did not manage to do so. With the fall of Fort Jesus, the Portuguese basically were expelled from East Africa north of Cape Delgado. Their power collapsed and their allied coastal states recognized Oman as the new powerhouse.

It is said that soon after this event the imam sent Nasir ibn Abdallah Mazrui as his representative, *wali*, to Mombasa. The Mazrui were native to the Rustaq region of Oman at the foothills of the western al-Hajar mountains. Beginning with Nasir, the Mazrui administered Mombasa as its principal ruling family until Sultan Said ibn Sultan Al Busaidi replaced them with his own representative in 1837.



Chapter 2

Although Europeans frequently called him imam and sultan, Sultan Said ibn Sultan (1791–1856) himself used the title 'Sayyid'. He was never elected to the purely religious office of imam that all his predecessors held. 'I am nothing but a merchant'.



The Birth of a Unique Commercial Empire

Paving the ground

Starting in 1828 Sultan Said ibn Sultan Al Busaidi, the ruler of Oman, visited the coast of East Africa several times on expeditions to secure the authority of the Al Bu Said over the East African coastal territories. As early as 1832, he decided to move his government, his court and family as well as most of his military and commercial activities from Muscat to the island of Unguja, generally known as Zanzibar.

Dr Allen Fromherz, Director of the Center for Middle East Studies at Georgia State University in Atlanta describes the distinctiveness of this step as follows:

Imagine if Queen Victoria, after visiting Bombay and Calicut, decided to uproot her court and Parliament at Westminster and establish herself and her majesty's government in India, the Jewel of the Crown of the British Empire. Rather than arriving in the splendour of nearby Buckingham Palace, European dignitaries would now have to journey half a world away for an audience with the Queen, where they would be greeted by all the grandeur of the subcontinent. Imagine instead of cotton, tea and other raw materials flowing back to England to fuel the percussive growth of the Industrial Revolution, these natural resources instead were sent to India. Instantly this scenario sounds preposterous, and there is a reason such a situation seems hard to imagine. It goes against a fundamental tenant of European colonialism. The capital of empire, government, and commercial operations remains in Europe, which benefitted first and foremost

Left
Although this painting by Henry Blosse Lynch (1807–1873) gives the impression of a realistic portrayal, it is an artistic interpretation, not necessarily accurate in detail, especially regarding the Sultan's clothes. (Courtesy of the Peabody Essex Museum)

from its possessions, regardless of distance from the colonies. Whatever the use of moving the seat of rule could have been, the institutions of British imperialism and of the East India Company would have abhorred the transfer of the metropole, that capital center where most profits were funnelled, to foreign possessions. Indeed, this distinction between homeland and colony was a feature of European rule and mercantilism, even for merchants or expatriates who spent most of their lives abroad. Yet Sultan Said ibn Sultan of Oman made a move that Queen Victoria never could have made.¹

What were the premises and visions behind Sultan Said ibn Sultan's decision?

What were the factors which made it an economic success story?

Before heading to East Africa, Sultan Said ibn Sultan first of all needed to secure his power and his position within Muscat and Oman. His earlier years of rule at Muscat had been complicated. Within Oman, they were dominated by family and tribal disputes; at sea by the trade rivalry between the British and the French over claims in the Indian Ocean; and the activities of the Qawasim pirates in the Gulf. From the interior of the land his territories and trade were threatened by the puritan Islamic Wahhabi movement expanding over the Arabian Peninsula.

It took Sultan Said ibn Sultan almost two decades to overcome internal opposition and external threats, to reestablish stability within Oman and to secure the travel and trading routes in Arabia, with only a small army and a fleet that also

Watercolour by William Daniell, dated 1793, showing the well protected harbour of Muscat



served mercantile purposes. He created a sense of central rule and authority within Oman among the different powerful tribes and had become known as the one who established and promoted connections between people of different races, ethnicities, languages and cultures.

In gratitude for his victorious campaigns in 1824 he embarked on a Hajj to Mecca at the age of 33. For the first time he could risk being absent from his own land and could think about also visiting his territories in East Africa. From then on he frequently sailed between East Africa and Oman. However, he could not be in two places at once, and had to find a way to ensure the security of Oman and of Muscat as well as of his possessions in East Africa during his periods of absence.

As a solution to this dilemma he appointed loyal governors, who maintained his position and his power at the different locations of importance. Of utmost importance in this respect was a woman, Bibi Mouza, an aunt of Sultan Said who resided in Muscat. About fifteen years his senior, she had played a decisive role in Sultan Said's ascent to power.

Sayyida Salme, a daughter of Sultan Said, reports about Bibi Mouza:

My grandfather, the Sultan Imam of Mesket, in Oman, left at his death three children: my father Said, my uncle Sâlum, and my aunt Asche. My father was only nine years old at the time, and a regency had to be established. Contrary to all custom, my great-aunt at once declared in the most decided manner that she would carry on the government herself until her nephew was of age, and she suffered no opposition. The ministers, who had never anticipated such a thing, and who had already in secret congratulated themselves on the prospect of ruling the country for some years, could do nothing but submit. They had to make their reports to her, and to receive her instructions and commands every day. She watched closely and knew everything, and nothing could remain [sic] concealed from her, to the great vexation and annoyance of all the disloyal and idle officials (...) Her courage was soon put to a very severe test. Not long after she had taken up the reins of government a very serious war broke out – unfortunately a frequent occurrence in Oman. Some of the next of kin had thought it an easy affair to overthrow the government of a woman, to extinguish our house, and possess themselves of power. Their hordes ravaged the country with fire and sword, and advanced close to the gates of Mesket. Thousands of country people from the sacked provinces had already fled for shelter and protection into the city, leaving all their goods and chattels behind.

Mesket is strongly fortified and well able to stand a siege, but of what use are the strongest walls when provisions and ammunition are exhausted?



The memoirs of Sayyida Salme provide a unique insight into the time and life of her father, Sultan Said.

But in this terrible distress my great-aunt proved herself equal to the occasion, and she even gained the admiration of the enemy. Dressed in men's clothes, she inspected the outposts herself at night, she watched and encouraged the soldiers in all exposed places, and was saved several times only by the speed of her horse in unforeseen attacks (...)

The situation grew, however, to be very critical at Mesket. Famine at last broke out, and the people were well-nigh distracted, as no assistance or relief could be expected from without. It was, therefore, decided to attempt a last sortie in order to die at least with glory.

There was just sufficient powder left for one more attack, but there was no more lead for either guns or muskets. In this emergency the regent ordered iron nails and pebbles to be used in place of balls, the guns were loaded with all the old iron and brass that could be collected, and she opened her treasury to have bullets made out of her own silver dollars. Every nerve was strained, and the sally succeeded beyond all hope. The enemy was completely taken by surprise, and fled in all directions, leaving more than half their men dead and wounded on the field. Mesket was saved, and, delivered out of her deep distress, the brave woman knelt down on the battle field and thanked God in fervent prayer. From that time her government was a peaceful one, and she ruled so wisely that she was able to transfer to her nephew, my father, an empire so unimpaired as to place him in a position to extend the empire by the conquest of Zanzibar. It is to my great-aunt, therefore, that we owe, and not to an inconsiderable degree, the acquisition of this second empire. She, too, was an Eastern woman!²

Though never appointed to an official position, it is Bibi Mouza's loyalty and vigor that Said relied on most to retain his reign in Oman in times of absence. She settled all disputes and even managed to handle serious rebellions.

The first visit to Zanzibar

Sultan Said's first visit to Zanzibar took place in 1828, when his fleet anchored in the reef harbour facing Stone Town. On first sight this island was a great opportunity that he could not resist and could not ignore. He saw it as the gateway to mainland Africa, strategically located along the big trading routes and with the best fresh water supply in the east coast region. The capital of the Zanzibar archipelago – at that time not more than a dozen stone buildings surrounded by a belt of simple huts made of adobe and straw – could be turned into a prosperous city, a trading port. With the lushness of the fertile islands and water resources, he envisioned plans for extensive agricultural use. He saw an excellent opportunity to expand both his empire and trade within East Africa. This way he would be able to compensate for the decline of commercial trade revenues in the northern Indian Ocean. As the European powers' strength grew in this region, they imposed restrictions on international trade. Therefore, his decision to move his capital to Zanzibar was primarily a financial decision, to move to a place where the commercial activities made more sense for the Omani empire and where he could encourage and expand trade, thus increasing the revenue coming into the treasury of the Sultanate.



The newly renovated palace of the Mwinji Mkuu at Dunga.

A drum belonging to the Mwinji Mkuu. The carvings include flora, praise of God and exhorting the chief to rule justly. One of them reads: 'Your actions are a reflection of your leadership, so call all people together, including those who behave differently, for the wise gathers all to satisfy them'.



Sultan Said knew that it would take time to create the foundations for his vision and that in the meantime he must also take care of the affairs of state back home in Muscat. Therefore it was no surprise that only two and a half years later, in 1830, he returned to Oman.

Before he could make his visions for Zanzibar become reality, he would first have to come to terms with the Mwinji Mkuu – Swahili for *Great Chieftain* – the local ruler of the Wahadimu people. The Mwinji Mkuu was the scion of a dynasty of Shirazi kings on Unguja which had survived two centuries of Portuguese occupation, and thereafter lived peacefully side by side with the Omani and Swahili merchants and farmers who settled on the biggest island of the Zanzibar archipelago.

When meeting Muhammad ibn Ahmed ibn Hassan Al Alawi, the Shirazi king of Zanzibar, Sultan Said made it clear that he did not have the intention to change the



actual status. He assured the Mwinji Mkuu of his respect and the recognition of his status as a king, with his own court and palace. In return, the local ruler expressed his acknowledgement of Sultan Said's claims and was appointed *Minister of Hadimu Affairs*. After the Mwinji Mkuu's death in 1845, he was succeeded by his older brother who built a large palace in Dunga, a small village about 40 kilometres from Stone Town in the interior of the island. Although the Mwinji Mkuu did not have authority at the same level, Sultan Said gained the important support of the Shirazi king's heirs through his acceptance of the local ruler Sultan Said, thus showing a style of leadership that was distinctively different to the European colonial one of superiority. This difference in style was a fundamental key to the successful development of the commercial empire he envisioned.

The harbour of Stone Town in the heyday of dhow trade seen from the fort.

To convert the island into a commercial hub within a global trade network, as intended by Sultan Said, the existence of a well-functioning trading port that can



The deep reef harbour is still essential for Zanzibar's economy today.

be called on even by big ships was essential, but Stone Town in those days did not possess any harbour installations whatsoever. This is because the island is exposed to enormous shifts in the water level due to the tides. Fortunately, about two kilometres into the sea, right in front of Stone Town, a massive coral reef had developed over the millennia. It runs parallel to the shore and served to replace the usual breakwater rock piles and harbour quays. With access only via two passageways, through which even big ships can enter and leave, the reef harbour provided perfectly safe anchoring and mooring. Goods would have to be transported ashore using ship's tenders.

Sultan Said must have realised from early on that Stone Town was blessed with this natural harbour that would enable his plans for Zanzibar to be realised. Already on his first visit the new ruler of Zanzibar had the main passageways through the coral reef to the anchorage of Stone Town marked with tin buoys. The metal spheres were fixed by chains and rocks and carried a flagpole with the red flag of the Sultan.

Having determined the ideal spot for the development of a future commercial harbour, Sultan Said inspected the island regarding its possibilities for producing extensive agriculture crops for export. The original African settlers lived on land *'that was neither very fertile nor enjoyed good rainfall. Their economy was mainly built on subsistence agriculture, fishing, and the export of cash crops such as coconut fibre, copra, fish, poultry, eggs, pepper, milk, goats, and kapok.'*³ The Arab settlers introduced the cultivation of sugar cane, rice and coconuts, but the Sultan's vision for Zanzibar and its neighbouring island Pemba was to grow a highly profitable plantation crop on a big scale for export: cloves.

The precious spice, originating from Indonesia's Molucca Islands, became known in Europe through the Portuguese and more importantly, the Dutch, who monopolized the trade with cloves in the 18th century. They even banned the export of clove seeds and seedlings out of Indonesia until 1770. In that year the French came into possession of clove seedlings and began to cultivate them on Mauritius, from where they spread the crop throughout the French colonies in the Indian Ocean.



Drawing of the palace at Mtoni

The ruins of Mtoni Palace



There are various stories about how and when the first clove seedlings arrived on Zanzibar, but most probably they were brought by the Omani trader Saleh ibn Haramel Al Abri, a leading figure within the East African Omani trading community. It is reported that he accompanied a French officer to the island Réunion where he received permission to take with him a small number of clove seedlings to Zanzibar, where he cultivated them at a place by the sea called Mtoni, about five kilometres north of Stone Town. When Sultan Said first came to Unguja in 1828 the nucleus of a clove plantation already existed.

After Sultan Said saw the estate, he acquired it from Saleh ibn Haramel Al Abri and decided to build his first residence on the island there at Mtoni. The reasons for this were not only the already growing clove trees, but also a strategical one: From Mtoni both passages through the coral reef into the harbour of Stone Town – the so-called *British Passage* and the *French Passage* – could easily be monitored.

Sayyida Salme alias Emily Ruete

Memoirs of an Arabian Princess

Although today only ruins are left from this first residence of Sultan Said, we have a very vivid and detailed description of the rooms and life in this palace in the memoirs of his daughter Sayyida Salme, published first under her German name Emily Ruete in 1886 at Berlin in German language with the title *Memoiren einer arabischen Prinzessin* (in English, *Memoirs of an Arabian Princess*).



Sayyida Salme

It was at Bet il Mtoni, our oldest palace in the island of Zanzibar, that I first saw the light of day, and I remained there until I reached my seventh year. Bet il Mtoni is charmingly situated on the seashore, at a distance of about five miles from the town of Zanzibar, in a grove of magnificent coconut palms, mango trees, and other tropical giants. My birthplace takes its name from the little stream Mtoni, which, running down a short way from the interior, forks out into several branches as it flows through the palace grounds, in whose immediate rear it empties into the beautiful sparkling sheet of water dividing Zanzibar from the continent of Africa.

A single, spacious courtyard is allotted to the whole body of buildings that compose the palace, and in consequence of the variety of these structures, probably put up by degrees as necessity demanded, the general effect was repellent rather than attractive. Most perplexing to the uninitiated were the innumerable passages and corridors. Countless, too, were the apartments of the palace; their exact disposition has

escaped my memory, though I have a very distinct recollection of the bathing arrangements at Bet il Mtoni. A dozen basins lay all in a row at the extreme end of the courtyard, so that when it rained you could visit this favourite place of recuperation only with the help of an umbrella. The so-called 'Persian' bath stood apart from the rest; it was really a Turkish bath, and there was no other in Zanzibar.

Each bath-house contained two basins of about four yards by three, the water reaching to the breast of a grownup person. This resort was highly popular with the residents of the palace, most of whom were in the habit of spending several hours a day there, saying their prayers, doing their work, reading, sleeping, or even eating and drinking. From four o'clock in the morning until twelve at night there was constant movement; the stream of people coming and leaving never ceased.⁴





Clove buds grow as a cluster of flowers arranged on a stem.

Building an economy on cloves

Sultan Said ibn Sultan brought more seeds from Mauritius and sowed them near his new residence, Bait Mtoni. When these plants produced seeds themselves, he ordered his Omani and Arab subjects on Unguja and Pemba to plant three clove seedlings for each coconut tree, even threatening violators with punishment. In this way he forced them to join him in the experiment, with no one knowing if it really would lead to the envisioned result. After all, it was a new crop and there was no guarantee of success or profit.

In fact, the Arab farmers worked very hard for the first four years without any success. It was only at the end of the fifth year that those who had planted the seedlings on appropriate soil and had taken good care of them saw the saplings bearing buds. On average the first small revenues could have been earned only after seven long years. To enjoy a true profit the weight of the clove harvest had to exceed three kilogrammes per tree.

Under the direction of Sultan Said, over the years the number and size of plantations and farms on Unguja and Pemba increased rapidly. Remarkably this expansion was done mostly in collaboration with the local population as described by Dr Issa Al Hajj Ziddy from the State University of Zanzibar:

Villagers, for instance, were allowed to practice agriculture and even build houses on the land. This was normal practise on all farms owned by Arabs, Washirazi and Indians alike. No brick boundaries or iron fences encircled the farms, as happened in many other countries where locals could not benefit from development projects established near their villages. Research shows that, in Kenya for example, there were vast areas of land protected by iron-spiked fences erected to prevent Africans having access to it. In Zanzibar, where the population included indigenous as well as Arab and other Muslims, such inhuman practices were unheard of. Farms were open for all under the true practice of partnership.

Traditionally the picking of the clove buds from the small stems was done mostly by men.



Those who lived on a farm would protect and clean it, with the owner paying them twice or even more in different forms of benefits. First, they could live on the farm and feel free to use its resources without paying any rent. Second, they received wages in return for their cleaning services. In addition they had their own fields within the farm on which they could plant any crops except perennial ones like cloves and mangos. Regardless of gender, colour or ethnicity, they also could get extra payment during the harvest season, depending on the tasks performed and clove quantities collected. In this way, a sense of belonging to the villages and farms was fostered and mutual benefits were enjoyed by all stakeholders who relied on the farms in one way or another, whether owners or nearby villagers.⁵



Today, the picking of the clove buds from the stems is mostly women's work. Cloves still are the most important commodity exported from Zanzibar.



Left
Clove buds spread out in the sun for drying before packing in sacks.



Right
Harvesting the stems with the clove buds.

In 1840 clove exports already amounted to 140 tons, mainly to India. And at the beginning of the 1850's Zanzibar achieved almost a monopoly on the international clove market. Sultan Said's successors fostered and extended the clove economy even further. It is reported by Tidbury that the number of clove trees on Unguja and Pemba in 1940 numbered more than 3.5 million.⁶ This agricultural revolution and the revenues gained from it changed Zanzibar from a small subsistence economy to an internationally recognized trading place, attracting traders from all over.

Among the many immigrants, the Banyan from India became especially important. Sultan Said ibn Sultan never explicitly invited Indians to settle on Zanzibar. They came because the circumstances were promising and the monsoon winds allowed regular travelling back and forth. These bankers and traders from India soon occupied the most important positions in Zanzibar's administration. As money lenders they became indispensable for Sultan Said ibn Sultan and his successors.

From 1830 until the 1840s, Sultan Said divided his time more or less equally between Muscat and Zanzibar. Within this period parallel to the expansion of the agricultural economy, the capital of Zanzibar also developed from an agglomeration of a few stone houses into a real city. As a role model, Sultan Said started the construction of a royal residence, and encouraged others to build stately homes.



Zanzibar Landing Place.



Historic views of the Zanzibar Landing Place and streets of Stone Town.



Swahili cities along the coast of East Africa long showed a distinctive separation in architecture between impermanent, thatch-roofed earthen architecture and monumental permanent stone houses, lined up along the waterfront. While the earthen houses were typical of mainland Africa, owning a stone house was seen as a prerogative of the prosperous merchants of the sea. The sea also provided the main building materials of those houses – coral blocks and coral lime – which gave them a splendid shiny appearance that sailors could see from afar. Sultan Said invited merchants from all around the Indian Ocean, Europe and America to settle in Zanzibar and conduct their business from there. The houses that were built over the decades reflect the full spectrum of architectural pluralism of the cultural background of the traders, coming from all over. This unique architectural richness – wooden balconies, carved wooden doors, latticed windows, exquisite ornamentation, plaster work, rooftop verandas – is an asset of the town today and into the future.

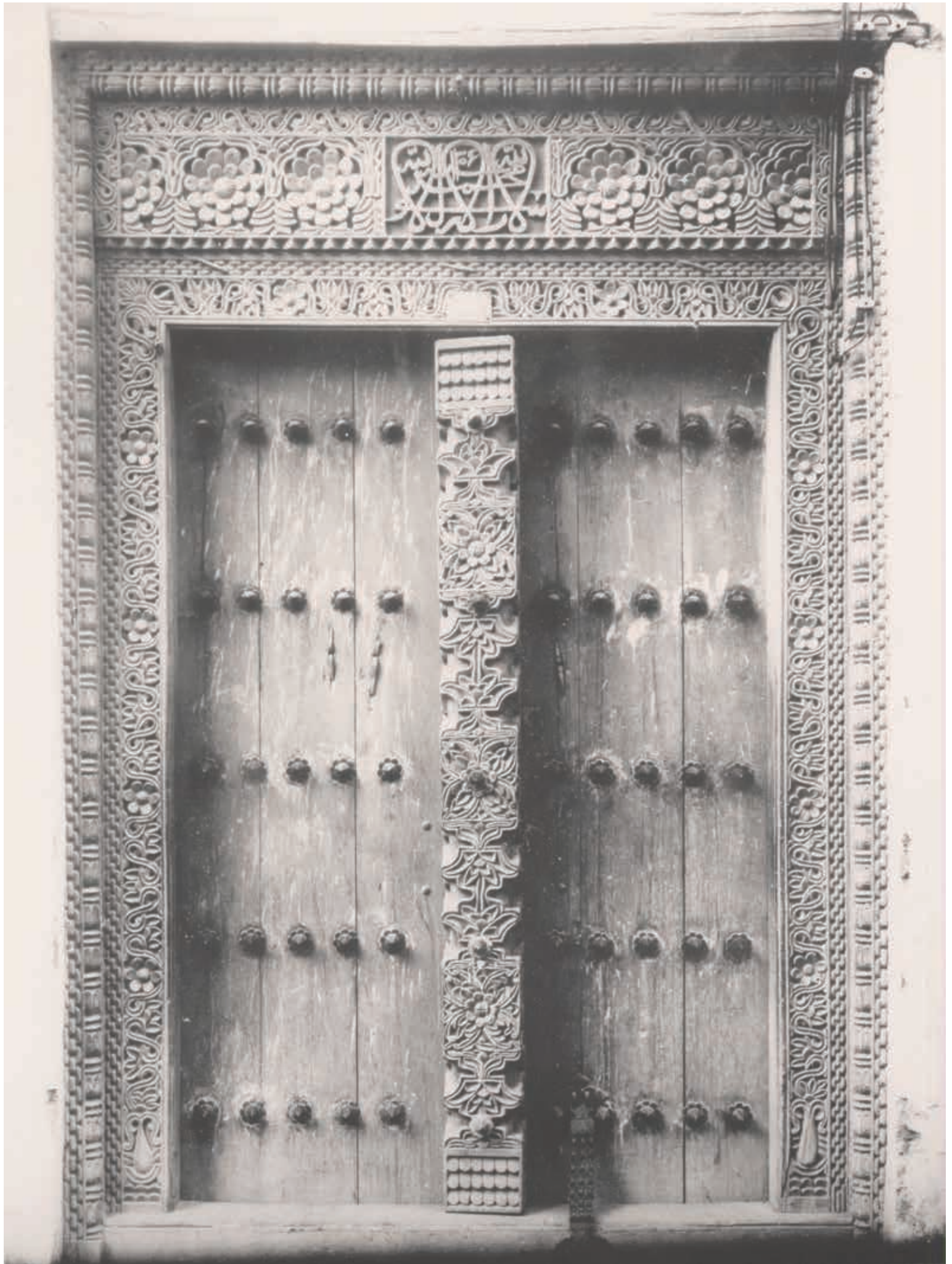
In 2000 the UNESCO acknowledged Stone Town as an outstanding material manifestation of cultural fusion and harmonisation. The UNESCO justification for bestowing the city with the title of a World Heritage Site reads as follows:

Located on a promontory jutting out from the western side of Unguja island into the Indian Ocean, the Stone Town of Zanzibar is an outstanding example of a Swahili trading town. This type of town developed on the coast of East Africa, further expanded under Arab, Indian, and European influences, but retained its indigenous elements, to form an urban cultural unit unique to this region. The Stone Town of Zanzibar retains its urban fabric and townscape virtually intact and contains many fine buildings that reflect its particular culture, which has brought together and homogenized disparate elements of the cultures of Africa, the Arab region, India, and Europe over more than a millennium. The buildings of the Stone Town, executed principally in coralline ragstone and mangrove timber, set in a thick lime mortar and then plastered and lime-washed, reflect a complex fusion of Swahili, Indian, Arab and European influences in building traditions and town planning. The two storey houses with long narrow rooms disposed round an open courtyard, reached through a narrow corridor, are distinguished externally by elaborately carved double 'Zanzibar' doors, and some by wide verandahs, and by richly decorated interiors. (...)⁷



Above and right
The richly ornamented carved Zanzibari doors are the most striking feature of Omani stone architecture.

An important reason Zanzibar became the principal power in eastern Africa and the western Indian Ocean was Sultan Said's concept of cosmopolitan governance.



Prof Dr Allen Fromherz

Sultan Said's Concept of Governance

Many of my fellow scholars in history explain the rise and subsequent dominance of European powers in the colonial period with a superior form of government. Its basic rule was to channel all economic activity through a metropole – usually the capital city of the empire. Hence this concept of governance was called *imperial government*. This was not the method Sultan Said ibn Sultan applied, when he came to Zanzibar. And while his concept of governance stood in plain contrast to *imperial government*, it proved to be successful just the same.

Instead of centralizing everything around a metropole, instead of requiring all goods produced to be delivered to the center of an empire, Said involved multiple groups in exchange and allowed all of them to get a piece of the pie. It was not mercantilism in the classic sense. It was almost its inverse.

To make this concept work, Sultan Said provided a framework for peaceful relations. He enforced a type of general peace, which is a prerequisite for successful economic exchange. You must have peace throughout the realm in order for the disparate merchants to be able to trade with one another.

Sultan Said ibn Sultan was known as a *hakim*. *Hakim* in Arabic means one who brings people who are different together. The term also labels a type of judge, a reconciler, somebody who will unite people around a common purpose, and that is exactly what Sultan Said ibn Sultan did when he came to Zanzibar island.

He was not simply a ruler for the Arabs. He saw himself as a representative of and for all the peoples – people of different religions, ethnic groups – who

gathered and settled in Stone Town and Zanzibar. Sultan Said was a ruler who held frequent audiences, called *darbar*. People with different backgrounds and social status could come and bring forward their questions, their concerns, and also their tributes. People came from India, from all around the Indian Ocean, even from as far away as Europe and America, and from as close as the East African coast or from Zanzibar itself. They all convened at the Sultan's *majlis*. In this respect, Sultan Said was very much a sultan of the seas, who believed in encouraging a cosmopolitan atmosphere which encouraged economic growth, and which reinforced his position as a ruler while demonstrating his accessibility.

Sultan Said governed through a sharing of power and revenue. There was a class of merchants from India for example called the Banyan, a merchant



Beit al Hukum, situated between Bait Sahel and the lighthouse, was mainly used by Sultan Said as an 'office' and for official meetings.

caste of men who would leave home for a certain period of time and engage in trade until eventually they returned. Usually, it was one of these Banyan merchants that the Sultan would sell the temporary lease of the customs house to. Customs collection was a core function of the government and the greatest source of its revenues. And even this task was assigned to minions from other parts of the world, who were not necessarily Muslim or Arab.

One of the most important ministers working for Sultan Said was actually a Sabeian-Mandaean.

The Sabeans are recognized in the Quran as one of the protected Peoples of the Book. The Sabean Ahmad ibn Aman acted as Said's finance minister and one of his closest advisors. Of course Sultan Said was not excluding Arabs. Tribes from Oman and the Hadhramaut were represented in his government, as well as members of the sultan's own family. But people from many different parts of the Indian Ocean were also entrusted with Zanzibar state affairs. This cross-cultural expertise proved to be highly successful in maintaining the Omani empire in spite of the pressures put on it by the great Western powers.

This idea of a free port was by no means a new concept. It had already existed for centuries in the Indian Ocean. Generations of Omanis had experience in living within a migrant merchant society, which practiced free trade ensuring mutual benefits. Sultan

Said built on this experience. Said's concept of open trade and cooperative governance was very different from that of the British. In India for instance they had staked out claims, where they created little islands of England and positioned themselves above their subjects. Sultan Said ibn Sultan Al-Said exercised more of an open door policy, respecting his audiences and the autonomy of trading partners. He assured economic success by encouraging trade and cooperation with the peoples of East Africa and around the Indian Ocean.

What Sultan Said ibn Sultan created in Zanzibar resulted in a sort of self-propelling system. During Said's reign Zanzibar boomed. But as it became more and more prosperous, it not only attracted the attention but also the envy of the European colonial powers.



Protecting the commercial empire

Sultan Said ibn Sultan's intention was to build an economically strong empire with good relations with the nations around the Indian Ocean, and with the emerging western powers. When he became the ruler of Oman, the Indian Ocean was already full of European and American merchant and navy ships. The tensions of the Napoleonic war between the British and the French spilt over into the Indian Ocean. In order to protect his empire and ward off any threats, he needed to maintain good relations with all players, and to build a strong military.

The military of Sultan Said ibn Sultan was as cosmopolitan as his empire. In Zanzibar his regular troops mostly were recruited from Baluchistan, but he also had '*an irregular force of Albanians from Egypt, Bashi-Bajuks of Hijaz, Sayyareh, and Zabtiiyyeh of modern Syria. He also had Afghanis and an African contingent with a fierce reputation commanded by Musa Mayasa called Rubaat Musa (Musa's force)*'⁸

The strength of his troops was not in numbers, but in certain specializations and the lack of reason to rebel against the ruler. All in all the regular troops of the Sultan numbered only a few hundred men, with the majority, about 250, being deployed at Mombasa, and 80 at Zanzibar. The network of forts along the East African coast was manned with just a handful of soldiers.

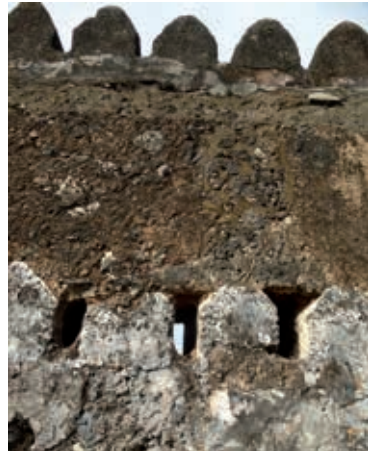


Existing fortifications were enlarged and improved, and some new ones were built. The Omani fort *Gereza* on Kilwa Kisiwani for example incorporates the walls of a smaller Portuguese fort built in 1505. Kilwa Kisiwani and nearby Songo Mnara were Swahili trading cities and their prosperity was based on control of Indian Ocean trade with Arabia, India and China, particularly between the 13th and 16th centuries, when gold and ivory from the hinterland were traded for silver, carnelians, perfumes, Persian faience and Chinese porcelain. Kilwa Kisiwani minted its own currency in the 11th to 14th centuries. The decline of the two islands began in the 16th century, when the Portuguese established a fort on Kilwa Kisiwani. Importance as a trading place was only regained when a new Omani settlement with houses, mosques and burial grounds was established in the 19th century in the south of the island. The remains of these buildings have been recognized as UNESCO World Heritage since 1981, together with the monuments from the heyday of trade in former times.

Left
*Remains of the Omani fort on
Kilwa Kisiwani*

Above
*Carved inscription at the
main door of the fort of Kilwa
Kisiwani*

Right
The heightened bailey of the Mombasa fort



Below
View into the fort of Mombasa



Whereas at Mombasa basically only the bailey of the Portuguese stronghold Fort Jesus was heightened, new forts were constructed at Chake Chake on Pemba island, at Lamu and at Siu on Pate island, which is part of the Lamu archipelago. These three forts as well as the *Geraza* at Kilwa had a square ground-plan with two massive round towers placed diagonally on the corners to protect the four sides of the building. This kind of standardized defence architecture one also can find at many places within Oman, like Al Hazm, Jabreen, or Bayt Na'aman at Barka.

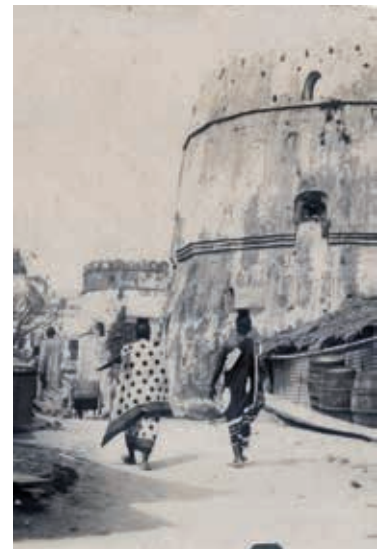


Above
Traditional local house built with adobe and straw.

Right
The fort of Lamu is still the center of social life on Lamu Island.



The fort at Stone Town was erected to protect the port and it also has a square ground floor, with a round tower on each corner. It stands on an area where, during the time of Portuguese rule, there was a settlement of colonialists and a mission for the Order of St. Augustine.



The massive round towers of the fort at Stone Town.



Traditional market along the wall of the fort of Stone Town.



Impression of the fort at Siu and the mosque situated within its compound.

The village of Siu has a varied history. It is said that Chinese seamen found shelter here when their ship wrecked on this coastline during the expedition of Zeng He to East Africa in the 14th century. Siu came finally under Omani control in the second half of the 19th century.



Ancient Chinese porcelain on display in the fort of Siu.

The source of Sultan Said ibn Sultan's strength and authority and the pride of his military were not the troops or the forts, but his navy. The captains and crews were a cosmopolitan bunch coming from various nations, and his fleet consisted of ships built in Zanzibar, Oman, India, Britain and even America.

According to Wellsted, in 1835 Sultan Said's fleet was three times the size of the British East India Squadron. It consisted of 15 European designed warships and numerous Arab vessels, such as the *baghlah* and *battil*. All ships could be used as warships, and also for trade in times of peace.⁹

The frigates of the Omani navy were light three-masted sailing ships, with two decks. Sultan Said's preferred one was the *Shah Allum*, the biggest of his frigates, carrying 56 guns. It was built in 1819, like many others, at the East India Company shipyards in Bombay. Other frigates of the Omani navy included the 40-gun *Rahman*, the 40-gun *Victoria*, the 36-gun *Caroline*, the 36-gun *Piedmontese* and the 26-gun *Mustafa*. But the largest and most impressive was the *Liverpool*, a three deck 74-gun European warship. In those days, ships of this line symbolized the ultimate in maritime power. Sultan Said used the devastating power of his flagship in 1828, 1832 and 1837 to suppress the rebellion of the Mazrui against his rule at Mombasa.

Construction activities and ships were Sultan Said's biggest budget items. To save money and to retain as much autonomy as possible in this important sector, he had a shipyard constructed on the beach right in front of his residence at Mtoni.

The HMS Implacable, a 74-gun third-rate European warship, was similar in construction to the Liverpool.



Even today boats are built and repaired on this site. Sultan Said made the most of his makeshift shipyard at Mtoni. Reports by visitors mention that a 10-gun two-mast schooner named *Naziri*, 30 meters long and weighing about 60 tons, was built there for his fleet – one of the biggest ships ever built on the beaches of Unguja. A key feature that he demanded for every new ship was the capacity to carry and fire cannons. This explains why Arab vessels like the *baghlah* and *battil*, which were traditionally stitched together, had to have the framework reinforced with nails. The recoil of big cannons would have torn any stitching apart.

In spite of a distance of more than 4000 kilometres between Oman and Africa, Oman's navy managed to protect all the areas under its control including dozens of ports on the Arabian and African coasts and more islands across the Arabian Gulf and Indian Ocean. Thanks to Oman's protection hundreds of merchant ships sailed between India and south of the Arabian peninsula without any problems.

Strengthening economic and diplomatic ties

After the decisive defeat of the uprising in Mombasa in 1837 Sultan Said saw his rule more or less unthreatened. He changed the focus of his shipbuilding efforts to the creation of additional trade capacities and to fostering diplomatic ties with the western nations.



In fact Sultan Said had begun his efforts to establish strong diplomatic ties with the United States earlier on his first visit to Zanzibar, when he met with Captain Edmund Roberts, an American trader, who introduced himself as a representative of the United States government. Sultan Said took the opportunity to suggest to Roberts that the Americans negotiate a commercial treaty with Oman. His hopes for such a treaty were not purely commercial, but included the possibility of receiving military equipment from America to improve his position against the emerging European powers in the Indian Ocean. Such a treaty could decrease his dependence on his British allies.

Edmund Roberts

Roberts' lobbying for such a treaty after his return to the United States was successful and President Jackson agreed to send a special mission to Muscat, Oman. Edmund Roberts was appointed by the State Department as Special Agent with the power to negotiate on behalf of the U.S. government.

He was instructed to keep his mission secret from the English, Dutch, and French and was further informed that the American government had no political or territorial ambitions in these regions – in contrary to the European powers.

In a letter from United States Secretary of State Edward Livingstone to Edmund Roberts, dated January 27, 1832, the American policy was described as follows:

(...) we can furnish (our goods) cheaper than any other nation because it is against the principles of our nation to build forts or make expensive establishments in foreign countries, that we never make conquests, or ask any nation to let us establish ourselves in their countries as the English, the French and the Dutch have done in the East Indies. All we ask is free liberty to come and go for the purpose of buying and selling, paying obedience to the laws of the country while we are there but that while we ask no exclusive favor, we will not carry our commerce where we are treated in any degree worse than other nations.¹⁰

As a result of his negotiations, Roberts and Sultan Said signed the first treaty ever between the United States and an Arabian state on September 21, 1833. The treaty was ratified by the U.S. Congress in June 1834, and ratified treaties were formally exchanged on September 30, 1835. This treaty with the United States of 1833 served as a model for the later commercial treaties between Oman and Britain as well as France, resulting in the establishing of the following consulates in Zanzibar: United States (1837), Britain (1841), France (1844).

After signing the contract, diplomatic relations between the United States and Oman and trade between the two nations grew dramatically. Already in 1834 thirty American merchant ships put in to the port at Zanzibar. As the Industrial Revolution transformed the economies of Europe and America there was a concomitant rise in demand for imports, and with the increased production, a need for export markets. As the economies of the Atlantic and Indian Ocean nations merged, the Omani East African empire became increasingly entwined with the Atlantic network of trade.

American merchant traders brought household goods such as crockery, mirrors, glassware, furniture; certain commodities and groceries, like sugar, flour and soap; and especially important: muskets and gun powder. The most highly valued of all, however, was American cotton cloth, which became to be known as *merikani*. Its quality was far superior to that of British and Indian cloth, and was used by the Omanis for their trade along the Swahili coast and in the interior of Africa, along with other American goods such as beads, brass wire and various kinds of hardware and tools.

The Omani products which were prized by the Americans included palm oil, animal hides, gum copal, ivory, dates, and spices like cloves and ginger. Palm oil was used for manufacturing soap and as a lubricant for industrial machines. The hides were needed in the expanding shoe manufacturing industry and gum copal was the base for varnishes and lacquers used in the making of furniture.



The British and the American consulates on the harbour front of Stone Town.

Slaves to the U.S. came primarily from western Africa, while the slave trade from East Africa, in which the Omanis were complicit, was being sharply curtailed and limited by the British, with the cooperation of Sultan Said.

As trade grew in the mid-19th century, the various nations involved looked for ways to protect their interests and establish monopolies, or at least earn most favoured nation status. The trade agreements and treaties led to the establishment of consulates, government representatives looked after commercial interests, and traders wanted monopoly rights. From today's perspective, vendors were concerned with exclusive supply chains and acquiring market share. This was well understood by Sultan Said, who himself wanted to increase the profits from trade with the U.S. by sending his own ships and being represented by his own diplomats.

Thus in 1840, seven years after signing the treaty with Roberts, the Sultan of Oman cemented the formal relations with the United States by sending an emissary to New York City – the first Arab envoy to the United States.

There is also some suspicion that behind the Sultan Said's move was a complicated plan by which Oman hoped to assume control over Mozambique's trade with China. However, there was an obstacle: To capture Mozambique, the sultan needed arms, which were banned from trade by Great Britain and France.

Thus Sultan Said decided that by establishing direct relations with the United States, an effective arms supplier at this time, he would be able to circumvent the regional arms embargo. He also reasoned that by omitting the middlemen and maintaining direct control over the exports and imports, he could realise a higher return on his investment, and would be better able to secure and finance arms purchases.

PART VI
MISCELLANEOUS

No. 1

TREATY OF AMITY AND COMMERCE BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
AND THE SULTAN OF MUSCAT, DATED SEPTEMBER 21, 1833

ARTICLE 1.

There shall be a perpetual peace between the United States of America and His Majesty Syud Sued Bin Sultan, of Maskat, and his Dependencies.

ARTICLE 2.

The citizens of the United States shall have free liberty to enter all the ports of His Majesty Syud Sued Bin Sultan, with their cargoes, of whatever kind the said cargoes may consist, and they shall have liberty to sell the same to any of the subjects of the Sultan, or others who may wish to purchase the same or to barter the same for any produce or manufactures of the kingdom or other articles that may be found there. No price shall be fixed by the Sultan or his officers on the articles to be sold by the merchants of the United States, or the merchandize they may wish to buy; but the trade shall be free on both sides to sell or buy, or exchange, on the terms and for the prices the owners may think fit; and whenever the said citizens of the United States may think fit to depart, they shall be at liberty to do so; and if any officer of the Sultan shall contravene this Article he shall be severely punished. It is understood and agreed, however, that the articles of the muskets, powder and ball can only be sold to the Government in the Island of Zanzibar, but in all other ports of the Sultan the said munitions of war may be freely sold without any restriction whatever to the highest bidder.

ARTICLE 3.

Vessels of the United States entering any port within the Sultan's dominions shall pay no more than five per cent. duties on the cargo landed, and this shall be in full consideration of all import and export duties, tonnage, license to trade, pilotage, anchorage, or any other charge whatever. Nor shall any charge be paid on that part of the cargo which shall remain on board unsold and re-exported. Nor shall any charge whatever be paid on any vessel of the United States which may enter any of the ports of His Majesty for the purpose of refitting, or for refreshments, or to inquire the state of the market.

ARTICLE 4.

That American citizens shall pay no other duties on export or import tonnage, license to trade, or other charge whatsoever, than the nation the most favoured shall pay.

ARTICLE 5.

If any vessel of the United States shall suffer shipwreck on any part of the Sultan's dominions, the persons escaping from the wreck shall be taken care of and hospitably entertained at the expense of the Sultan, until they shall find an opportunity to be returned to their country, for the Sultan can never receive any remuneration whatever for rendering succour to the distressed, and the property saved from such wreck shall be carefully preserved and delivered to the owner, or the Consul of the United States, or to any authorised agent.

ARTICLE 6.

The citizens of the United States resorting to the ports of the Sultan for the purpose of trade shall have leave to land and reside in the said ports without paying any tax on importation whatever for such liberty other than the general duties on imports which the most favoured nation shall pay.

ARTICLE 7.

If any citizens of the United States, or their vessels or other property, shall be taken by pirates, and brought within the dominions of the Sultan, the persons shall be set at liberty and the property restored to the owner, if he be present, or to the American Consul, or to any authorised agent.

*Excerpt of the treaty between the
Sultan of Muscat and the United
States of America, 1833*

Article 16.

Si des navires français, d'ailleurs pris par des pirates autres que des chrétiens, et conduits dans les États de son Altesse le Sultan de Mascate, l'équipage et les passagers de ces bâtimens seraient remis ainsi que leurs cargaisons entre les mains du Consul ou de l'Agent consulaire de France.

Article 17.

Les Français auront la faculté de fermer soit à Zanzibar, soit sur tout autre point des États de son Altesse le Sultan de Mascate, des dépôts ou magasins d'approvisionnement de quelque nature que ce soit.

Article 18.

Cette convention négociée ou stipulée antérieurement au présent traité, est de nulle valeur.

Article 19.

La présente convention sera ratifiée et les ratifications seront échangées à Mascate ou à Zanzibar aussitôt que possible & au plus tard dans l'espace de quinze mois, à dater du jour de la signature.

Fait à Zanzibar, le 17 Novembre 1844.

Pour la Majesté Impériale des Français.
Alphonse Desjardins

النظام الثاني

إنما نحن المأمور الذي من فو سلا الشعارى أخذ شريك من مركب فرنسا أو مسلمة إلى بلدان
 السلطان وأخذت كذا فعدنا في فقهه وبقية كذا كذا

النظام الثالث

والفقيههم رخصت يستأجره ويجعلوا تجار وبيوت في زنجبار أو غيرها

النظام الرابع

كل ما وجدته كانت أو شرط كان قبل هذه الكتابة فذلك باطلا لا عمل عليه ولا يلتفت إليه

النظام الخامس

هذه الكتابة تكون فصحها أو يكون التصحيح بيننا في زنجبار أو غيرها
 أو يكون في مكان آخر من بلادنا أو من بلادهم أو من بلادهم
 صحت دكر وصاروا منكم دكر والحمد لله رب العالمين
 تاريخ العقد ١٧/١١/١٢٦٤ (17 Nov 1844)



Excerpt of the treaty between
 the Sultan of Muscat and France,
 1844

The *Sultanah* Voyage

The plans to sail the *Sultanah* – a three-masted, 80-foot wooden sailing ship with a delegation of 52 sailors – to New York took shape in late 1839. After refitting at Bombay, the *Sultanah* took on cargo at Muscat and at the end of December sailed for Zanzibar where additional cargo was loaded. In February 1840 she set sail with the north-east winds, loaded with iconic Indian Ocean products, including Omani dates, Persian carpets, Zanzibari cloves, Yemeni coffee, East African ivory, gum copal and hides. She made a swift voyage around the Cape of Good Hope to New York, calling in at only one port, St. Helena.

The man Sultan Said ibn Sultan chose as his surrogate and advocate was Ahmad ibn Na‘aman Al Ka‘abi, who had long been in his personal employ. Ahmad ibn Na‘aman was *‘a small, slightly corpulent, bearded Arab gentleman, to whom all paid deference. His complexion was tawny, his eyes were black and piercing. Some were to describe him as fierce looking; others thought him handsome’*.¹¹

In late April, after 87 days at sea, the unusual vessel arrived in New York City flying a red standard never before seen on American shores. She was under the command of an Arab emissary, an English captain, with African and Persian officers. The crew members, from South Asia and East Africa, represented for American sensibilities an exotic sampling of peoples from little known Arabia and Africa. What was run-of-the-mill around the Indian Ocean, the mixing and mingling of various nation-

*Portrait of Ahmad ibn Na'aman
Al Ka'abi by Edward L. Mooney
(1813–1887)
Courtesy of the Peabody Essex
Museum, Salem, Massachusetts.
On the right side of the paint-
ing you see the 'Sultanah' flying
Sultan Said's red flag.*



alities and ethnicities, delighted the cosmopolitan New Yorkers but was at the same time shocking to the more parochial and puritan parishioners.

The ship created an immediate stir – especially when ibn Na‘aman, the Sultan’s envoy, stepped onto a New York wharf in a bright turban, sparkling cashmere shawl and long black caftan trimmed in gold, raised the Sultan’s crimson ensign over the battered *Sultanah* and calmly announced, in English, that he – not the English captain Sleeman – was in command of the vessel, and that this was an official diplomatic mission from the Sultan of Oman to the United States.

As soon as the announcements appeared in the press, heralding the arrival of such an exotic cargo of man and beast, with untold riches and luxury goods, there arose a tumult at quayside as New Yorkers came to gawk and glean their own impressions of the crew and cargo.



Impression of Broadway in New York 1840 by Hippolyte Sebron.

Newspaper reports give a vivid picture of this unique event. This article appeared in the *New York Morning Herald* on May 5, 1840:

Arrival of an Arabian Ship – Trade between the United States and Muscat

(...) Since last Thursday, a perfect wonder to us Americans, in the shape of an Arabian ship, has arrived. She lays at the foot of Rector street, on the North river, and has been thronged, and the pier crowded with people, anxious and pushing to get a peep at the Arabian sailors and the Arabian horses that are on board. So great has been the crowd that police officers are required to keep things in order (...) The name of this ship is the 'Sultanée'.

The 'Sultanée' is loaded with fine Mocha coffee, dates, hides, ivory, and drugs, the property of the Sultan, and worth about \$20,000. There are also on board two beautiful Arabian stud horses, intended as a present (from) His Highness the Sultan to (the) President of the United States.

When any of the Arabs pass through our streets, they are followed by great crowds, who cry out to them 'Alla! Alla!' The Arabs look round, curl up their mustaches, look at each other, and wonder at the depravity of the natives.



Above
The harbour of New York 1840

Ahmad ibn Na'man brought with him no formal accreditation as ambassador and did not solicit a meeting with President Van Buren. His diplomatic mission consisted solely of delivering a letter to the President expressing Sultan Said ibn Sultan's goodwill, and presenting gifts and goods for sale and barter.

The sultan commanded a considerable fleet and had at his disposal many other ships which could have made the transatlantic voyage, but the *Sultanah* was chosen for several reasons. It was the flagship, the pride of the Omani fleet, both armed and capable of carrying significant cargo. It served also as a reminder of an earlier encounter between the *Sultanah* and the American merchant ship *Peacock*, which foundered by running ashore at Masirah Island in the Indian Ocean, in 1835. On board was Edmund Roberts for the purpose of exchanging the ratified treaties with Sultan Said. Subsequent succour was proffered by the sultan, who rescued the crew and ship, and salvaged the guns and some of the cargo which had been thrown



President Van Buren



overboard. In that date, place and age it would have been usual to leave the ship and crew to the mercy of the elements and the pirates, but the respect for the 1833 treaty of friendship between the two countries prompted the sultan to place them under his protection. The *Evening Post* wrote of the sultan, '*There is not a monarch in Christiandom whose character would not have been elevated in the eyes of the world by conduct like this*'.¹²

Stowed aboard *Sultanah* at Muscat were 1,300 bags of dates, 21 bales of Persian wool carpets and 100 bales of Mokha coffee. Added at Zanzibar were 108 prime ivory tusks, 81 cases of gum copal – partly cleaned, partly uncleaned and in bulk – 135 bags of cloves and 1,000 dry, salted hides. The freight was sold almost immediately within three days which clearly demonstrated the demand in the United States. And this demand even increased through the immense response the *Sultanah* and its crew gained in front page reports in media all over the U.S. over the period of their

stay in New York. Ahmad ibn Na‘aman was presented with the keys of the city and the New York City Council raised \$500 to commission a portrait of him – those days a considerable amount. Moreover, even though the *Sultanah* did not visit Washington DC, the vice president, Richard Mentor Johnson, came to New York to visit the vessel in person.

The vessel’s condition on arrival soon gave rise to the suggestion that, as a gesture of appreciation for the aid rendered *Peacock*, the Omani ship ought to be overhauled at United States government expense. The suggestion was approved and the *Sultanah* was refitted for a total cost of repairs of roughly \$5,000. The departure of the ship was also deemed newsworthy, as seen in this article from the *New York Morning Herald* of August 3, 1840:

Our arabien visitors

Reis Achmed Ben Ahmed, his officers and crew, leave us today for home, with all of the presents for the Soldam of Muscat snugly stowed away in the ‘Sultanée’. El-Allah protect them (...) Since these Arabs have been in this country they have received every attention and kindness. They have seen every thing, visited every where, had all kinds of presents showered upon them, their vessel put in complete repair, and been permitted to turn their faces to the east, and pray three times a day. What they have seen has not apparently much astonished them. It does not seem in their nature to be surprised at any thing. They have been pleased with the attention shown them, and that is all. They would talk

and smile, show their white teeth, and turn up the white of their brilliant eyes. The only thing that surprises the Americans is, that the Arabs are not more surprised. We believe that if they were blown up sky high by the explosion of a powder magazine, and landed safely on the Battery, they would only stroke their beards, throw their eyes to heaven, and thank El-Allah in the most quiet manner possible. The explosion would not astonish them – they would consider it part of the performance.

Artist's impression of the arrival of the Omani delegation at New York by E. Harper Johnson. (Detail)



Michael Dickinson

The *Sultanah* and the *Peacock*

The *Sultanah* and her crew were not just well received, they were fêted, both in the press and by local New Yorkers. Ibn Na‘aman and his officers were treated as VIPs, invited for dinners, soirées, visits to various institutions, taken on excursions, and generally enjoyed red carpet treatment. This stemmed in part from their unique character, somewhat exotic appearance, charming comportment and their modest demeanor. This was also due to a previous encounter with the American merchant ship *Peacock*, which beached and was stranded on the shore of Masirah Island, off the coast of Oman, in 1835. ‘As a tangible gesture of appreciation for the aid rendered *Peacock*’ Commander Stribling exhorted in his letter to Navy Secretary Paulding in May 1840, the *Sultanah* should be overhauled at U.S. government expense.

The complete saga was reported in the *Alexandria Gazette*, May 9, 1840, as follows:

There has probably been no instance of more prompt and unlimited national hospitality than was manifested by the Sultan to one of our ships at the time of the ratification of this treaty. The United States ship ‘Peacock’, having the treaty duly signed, on board, in the month of September, 1835, on her voyage to Muscat, ran on a coral reef in the night, on the coast of Arabia Felix, at a distance of about a mile from shore, and, as the tide fell, settled on her side, so that not one of her guns could be brought to bear. Her situation was, of course, very critical, and her boats had abundant occupation in repelling the Arab daus, by which she was soon approached. After twenty-four hours of fruitless attempt to get her off, Capt. Kennedy determined, as a last resort,

to despatch an officer in one of the ship's boats to Muscat, on the Persian Sea, to carry the treaty, and, if possible, to procure assistance. After a most perilous voyage of five days and nights, in which this little open boat, with eight men, (including Mr. Taylor, who commanded her, and Mr. Roberts, the United States Agent, who negotiated the treaty) narrowly escaped destruction from the Arabs, who pursued her, and afterwards from the rough weather, in which she was with the greatest difficulty kept afloat – she reached Muscat in safety. At one time, when a large dhow, manned by about thirty Arabs, was gaining on the boat, the crew of which had prepared for her a warm reception, with their little armament of muskets – the officer, to test the pluck of his men, said – 'Boys, if that fellow comes up with us, what shall we do?' 'Go to Muscat in the prize, Sir!' was the reply. There were, of course, the right sort of men for such an expedition.

On their arrival at Muscat, they were treated by the Sultan with every possible hospitality. When

he heard of their arrival, and before he had seen them, he was just going off, on a visit of state, to an English man-of-war, but immediately sent word to his commander that he should forego his visit, as he had just learned that a ship of his allies, the United States, was wrecked on his coast, and he should do nothing until he had taken every measure for her relief. He immediately placed the 'Sultani', with a full complement of officers and men, under the command of Mr. Taylor to proceed to the relief of the 'Peacock', and tendered the use of any ships in his navy (in case the 'Peacock' should not be saved) to return to the United States with her officers and crew, or to complete her cruise, as Capt. Kennedy might elect. The Governor of Sur, (a town some eighty or ninety miles distant from Muscat, toward where the 'Peacock' lay), who was at the time in Muscat, was despatched to that place with orders to send every vessel bearing the Arab flag, to the relief of the 'Peacock' – and a Bedouin chief was sent with his camels, across the desert, with a message from the Sultan to the Sheikh of the tribe occupying the coast on which the >

'Peacock' was wrecked, that he would hold the tribe and every member of it, accountable for any injury to the 'Peacock' or her crew.

The Sultani fell in with 'Peacock' at sea. She had laid on the reef for fifty-six hours, and was not floated until she had lost several of her anchors and thrown overboard eleven of her guns. After visiting Muscat, where they were all treated with a degree of courtesy and hospitality rarely met with in Christian countries, the 'Peacock' proceeded to Bombay, to refit, and purchased from the East India Company a battery in place of the guns thrown overboard on the coral reef. After lying at Bombay about a month, and as the 'Peacock' was on the eve of sailing on her cruise, a ship was seen entering the harbour, bearing the Arab flag. It proved to be the Sultan's ship, with the Peacock's guns which had been thrown over, and which the Sultan had caused to be raised, and sent his vessel with them to overtake and restore them to the 'Peacock', a distance of a thousand miles from the place they had been lost.

For all this labour and expense, which it is believed has not to this day met either requital or acknowledgement from this government, the Sultan would receive no compensation – Such conduct as this certainly justifies the statement of our officers who have seen him, that the Sultan is a gentleman, in the largest and strictest sense of the term, and affords an example well worthy of imitation by other powers professing greater civilisation than the sons of Ishmael.

Under these circumstances it is hoped that every facility will be given by our Government to the first commercial enterprise of the Sultan with the New World, that the 'Sultani' and her officers may be greeted with civilities approaching in some little degree to those (of which she has been an instrument) extended by the hospitable Arabs to our people.

Right
Brooklyn Navy Yard. Lithograph by A. Weingärtner around 1850.

After receiving estimates for the repairs, authority was eventually granted. The *Sultanah* was taken to the Brooklyn Navy Yard for repairs, the officers became guests of Commodore Renshaw, while the crew was accommodated on another ship in the yard. The ship was completely overhauled: recaulked, re-

painted, new sails, and in August, having been struck by lightning, given a new mast. Even the lavatory and tender boats were replaced. She could now sail proudly home, and inform Sultan Said that his own good deeds had been acknowledged and reciprocated.





Detail of one of the cashmere shawls that Ahmad ibn Na'aman brought as a gift to President Van Buren.



The *Sultanah* and the Smithsonian Institution

The Smithsonian Institution was established with funds from James Smithson, a British scientist who left his estate to the United States to found '*at Washington, under the name of the Smithsonian Institution, an establishment for the increase and diffusion of knowledge*'. Smithson died in 1829 and six years later President Andrew Jackson announced the bequest to Congress. On July 1, 1836, Congress accepted the legacy and in September 1838, some 100,000 gold sovereigns were delivered to the mint at Philadelphia and put into a charitable trust. The gift amounted to more than \$500,000.

Since its founding more than 170 years ago, the Smithsonian Institution has become the world's largest museum, education, and research complex, with 19 museums, the National Zoo, nine research facilities, and over 137 million objects. Almost unknown is the fact that its founding as the National Museum was instigated by the need to create a repository for the presents brought to the United States aboard the *Sultanah* by Ahmad ibn Na'aman.

It was common at that time for monarchs and nobility to bestow gifts on foreign dignitaries, especially when currying favour and seeking preferential treatment. It was unthinkable for the Sultan of Oman and Zanzibar to send a delegation on a diplomatic mission without valuable gifts for the head of state. Therefore Ahmad ibn Na'aman brought an assortment of fine gifts for President Van Buren, including two

fine Arabian horses, a string of pearls, two separate large pear-shaped pearls, some 120 assorted brilliants (totalling 18.25 carats), a gold bar, a silk Persian carpet, a demijohn of attar of roses, rose water, six cashmere shawls and a beautiful gold-mounted sword.

The framers of the U.S. Constitution however, included in it the *Title of Nobility Clause*, also known as the Emoluments Clause, which clearly states that '*no Person holding any Office of Profit or Trust under them, shall, without the Consent of the Congress, accept of any present, Emolument, Office, or Title, of any kind whatever, from any King, Prince, or foreign State*'. The White House explained to Na'aman that, as a public servant, the president could not personally accept the gifts. Na'aman responded that he could under no circumstances return to Zanzibar with the sultan's gifts.

From this quandary a congressional battle quickly ensued as lawmakers debated the fate of the invaluable collection. The president's opponents in Congress seized the opportunity to lambaste the president in an election year, arguing that his accepting gifts from a sultan was high-handed and illegal. Other lawmakers organized to pass a bill authorizing the president to accept the gifts, which was opposed by the former president John Quincy Adams who then led a counter-offensive to overturn the bill.



The cashmere shawls and carpets brought by Ahmad ibn Na'aman are handled with the utmost of care in the facilities of the Smithsonian Institution.

There are reports of other gifts intended for the president, such as a pair of tigers from the emir of Morocco, which were being held on consignment in Tangiers. The dilemma of accepting or rejecting tokens of esteem, or objects of great value, personally or in the name of the American people, made obvious the need to prohibit gifts to federal officeholders of the United States in order to shield them from *'corrupting foreign influences'*, and to regulate the acceptance of gifts, so

as not to cause offence. There was also a need to legislate some procedure for the disposition of gifts which were deemed acceptable and received in the name of the American people. This resulted in various legal proscriptions applicable to the executive branch.

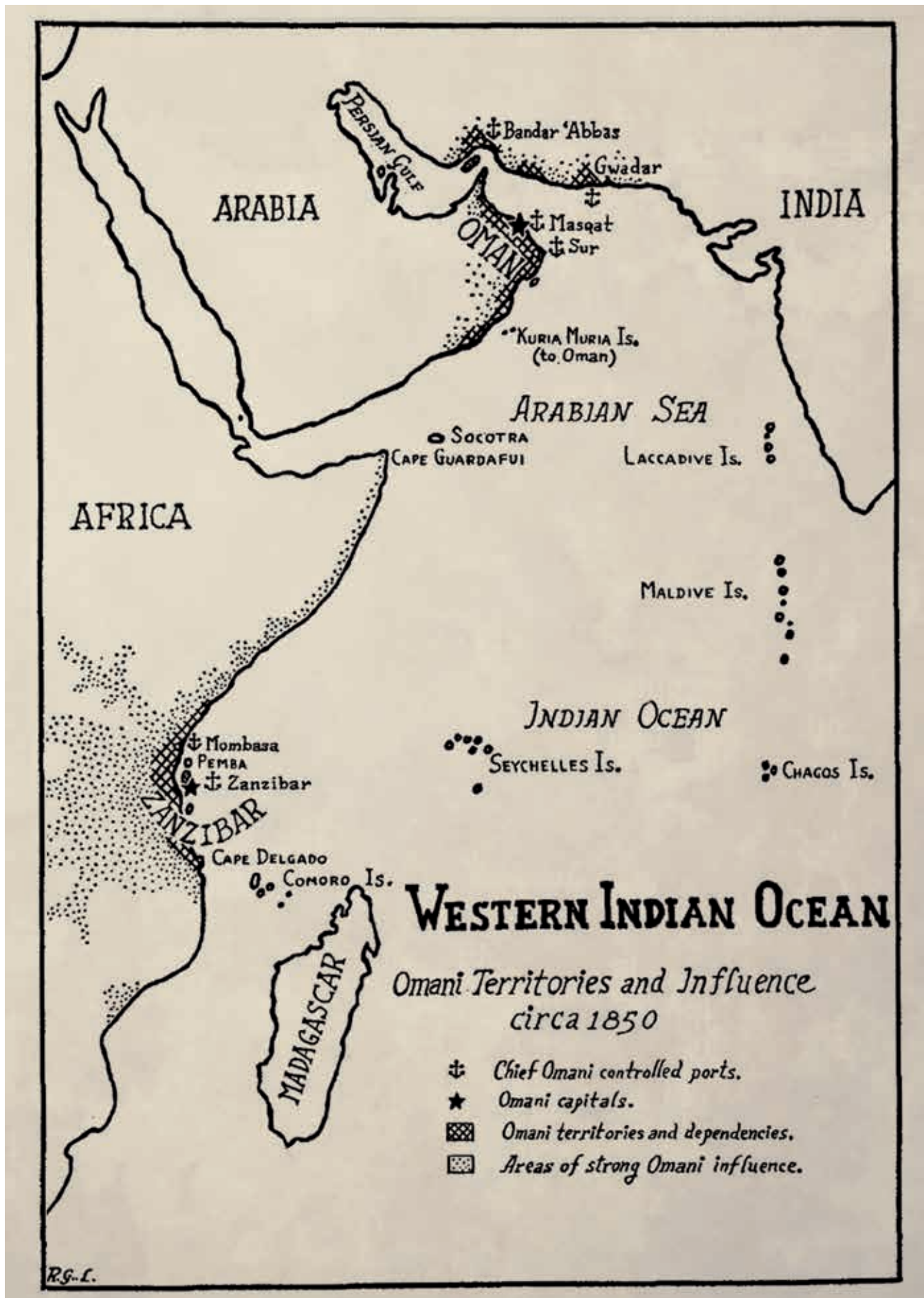
After eight years of political wrangling and sometimes heated debate, on August 10, 1846, an act of Congress was passed, organizing the Smithsonian Institution, which was signed into law by President James K. Polk. In the interim, the president would accept the gifts in the name of the American people. Those gifts that could not *'conveniently be deposited or kept'* were to be sold with the proceeds going to the Treasury.



Detail of one of the cashmere shawls that Ahmad ibn Na'aman brought as a gift to President Van Buren.

Most of the gifts of Sultan Said to President Van Buren were deposited first at the National Institute Gallery in the Patent Office, whereas the two horses were sold at auction in New York for \$993,28. On December 20, 1841, a thief broke into the *treasure room* at the National Institute Gallery and stole, among other things, the pearl necklace and the two large pearls. The pearls were recovered and, after a series of thefts at the Gallery, finally sealed up with the other valuables in a metal box and deposited in the U.S. Treasury. Finally all was handed over to the newly built Smithsonian Institution in the 1880s.

Today a woollen and a silk carpet are safely kept in the first storage depot of the National Museum of Natural History, Anthropology Department, together with three cashmere shawls. One of the gemstones is purportedly now in the Smithsonian mace and hanging in a wall panel in the reception room of the Smithsonian Castle. The whereabouts of the gold-mounted sword is disputed.



Consolidating and Expanding the Trade Network

Sultan Said was very much aware of the fact that the main source of Omani power and wealth was its trade empire, and he spent his life bolstering all of the aspects of trade: stability and security, access to natural resources, agriculture and manufacturing, labour, transportation and delivery systems, the development of new markets, and the stymieing of competition.

Left
*Map of Western Indian Ocean
showing Omani territories and
areas of influence, circa 1850.*

Zanzibar became the center of Indian Ocean trade not only because of its location and climate/geography, but because the Omani rulers and traders brought with them a cosmopolitan viewpoint and an established network. The land and its leaders were multicultural and possessed a sophisticated global perspective. It was a symbiotic relationship of people and place.

Dr Birgit Mershen

Swahili – Omani Knowledge Transfer

The ruling Omani upper class of the 19th century did not consider the Swahili culture inferior. It was respected and found worthy to be documented and its knowledge imparted to Omanis. A good example for this is the work of Nasir ibn Abi Nabhan Al Kharusi about Swahili herbal medicine, *As sirr al-jalli fi khawass al-nabat al-sawahili*.

In 1832 this Omani all-round scholar followed Sultan Said ibn Sultan to Zanzibar and stayed there as his close personal advisor, judge and mufti. It is said that the Sultan took him with him wherever he went by land or by sea. The variety of Swahili herbal medicine must have made a huge impression on Nasir ibn Abi Nabhan. He dealt intensively with the ethnopharmacology of his host country, and compiled a comprehensive documentation in an extensive book of 320 manuscript pages that was

intended for Omani-Arab readers unfamiliar with the Swahili language. One could name him as a pioneer of ethnopharmacology and ethnobotany.

Nasir ibn Abi Nabhan begins his book with some 20 pages of introduction, a sort of trilingual glossary in Arabic, Omani dialect and Swahili. The remaining 300 pages of the work are structured in 29 chapters about East African herbal medicine. Each of the chapters (*bab*) contains sub-chapters (*fasl*) that deal with a specific plant. In a *fasl* there is a whole range of applications/recipes (*siffa*) explaining its use. The mostly medical applications also include some rather magical formulas.

A large number of the described plants can still be found in the repertoire of today's Omani traditional pharmacies.



By 1820 Sultan Said had managed finally to secure his holdings in Oman against external enemies. The ensuing period of relative peace enabled him to direct his energies towards the development of a mercantile empire and to consolidate existing possessions. In an ocean of shrinking opportunity, due to the increasing influence and interference of European powers, he achieved remarkable results.

Sultan Said made Zanzibar a free port and attracted regional trade and investment. The structures for handling and financing trade which developed at that time were very efficient. Omani ports were impressive, able to handle a wide variety of cargoes from their friendly trading partners. British, American, Dutch, French and German naval documents all refer to the excellent facilities provided by Omani port administrators. The hospitality and cooperation provided to visiting vessels by Sultan Said ibn Sultan, his sons and representatives, was frequently commented on.

During Al Busaid rule, the finances of the ruler and the state were intimately connected, and the customs master was central to providing credit to the sultan and his government. One of Sultan Said's innovations in East Africa was to remove the customs duty from the portfolio of the governor and transfer it to a merchant house. Zanzibar-based firms, most of which were subsidiaries of western Indian financial houses, began offering generous lines of credit, which brought more cash into circulation, fueled coastal trading ventures to the interior, and stimulated agricultural production for export. When Sultan Said ibn Sultan needed to raise additional funds to pacify resistance to his rule in Oman, he turned to the customs master.



The Maria Theresa thaler is a silver bullion coin that has been used in world trade continuously since it was first minted in 1741. It is named after Empress Maria Theresa, who ruled Austria, Hungary, and Bohemia from 1740 to 1780 and is depicted on the coin. Since the death of Maria Theresa in 1780, the coin has been reminted until today dated always 1780. Next to the Indian rupee, the Maria Theresa thaler was the main currency in Oman until 1940.

In 1835, Shivji Topan won the contract to *farm the customs* at Zanzibar for 84,000 Maria Theresa thaler. This meant that his firm paid an advance to the ruler and then kept all customs revenue for itself. His family held this vital and remunerative position for fifty years. The family firm also maintained branches in Muscat, Bombay, and Kutch.

Borrowing from the powerful customs master would bring certain commercial advantages in Zanzibar, including assistance in collecting on debts and finding suitable business partners. The customs master naturally had a strong interest in the foreign firm's success.

Sultan Said extended the Sultanate of Oman and Zanzibar across most of the Swahili world, developing an alliance with Lamu's patricians, building very good relations with the kings of many provinces and islands such as Madagascar and the

Comoro Islands. He marginalised hereditary rulers and installed Busaidi governors (*walis*) in each principal Swahili city. As soon as the control was consolidated, the sultan banned many foreign merchants from direct trade with the mainland ports. The most extensive Omani territories were along the East African coast, where a strip of nearly 2000 miles from Cape Guardafui to Cape Delgado was under Omani domination.

The journey of the *Sultanah* to New York was not only a diplomatic mission, but the attempt to widen and to test the demand in the American market for western Indian Ocean goods. The fact that Ahmad ibn Na'aman bypassed the port town of Salem during his five-month sojourn is clearly indicative of this. Salem was the base of the American whalers that frequently visited Zanzibar. Salem merchants had also been the main supplier of *merikani* cloth. The trade agreement signed 1833 guaranteed every American ship a '*most-favored nation*' status, including duty-free access to the seas and markets of Zanzibar, and by 1838 the majority of western ships that called at Stone Town harbour were from Salem, which had basically established a monopoly. Bypassing Salem showed that the envoy was commissioned to find new commercial relations in New York to expand the import and export of goods.

The overwhelmingly positive reception of the Omani delegation in New York confirmed for Sultan Said that his plan to enhance this trans-Atlantic relationship was viable. He saw in the United States a country that would quickly become an important player on the world stage. From his Zanzibari point of view the economic



and political ties with America were of more importance than those with Britain. This would also help mediate the influence of the British in the Indian Ocean sphere.

Salem was the base of the American whalers that frequently visited Zanzibar.

These efforts to grow direct trade with distant ports and markets were intended to achieve significant economic advantages, which in turn alarmed the merchants in Zanzibar. The Sultan could deliver goods cheaper without paying duties on either side, thus undercutting their own trade. The sultan's system of selling goods imported on his vessels was simple and highly effective. He would require the various banyan merchants to buy his imports in proportion to the size of their businesses, irrespective of the state of the local market, and at prices ranging from 20% to 25% above current rates.

Sultan Said's global perspective of establishing trade relations directly in foreign markets, and reducing the reliance on middlemen, is underscored by his sending missions to London, Marseille, Bombay, Calcutta and China, but nowhere else was the reception comparable to that of New York.

Sultan Said's interest in trade was also focused on stabilizing and expanding the caravan routes between the coastal regions and the Great Lakes of central Africa. In 1834 a contract was signed with the highest ranking chief of the Nyamwezi tribes at Tabora which guaranteed safe passage for the sultan's caravans all the way to the Great Lakes. This agreement allowed him to respond to an earlier trade inquiry received from the Kabaka Suuna, the king of Buganda, the powerful kingdom controlling vast territories to the west and north of Lake Victoria. A caravan led by Ahmed Al Amri, an experienced merchant from Zanzibar, arrived at King Suuna's residence by order of Sultan Said ibn Sultan in 1844. This was just a few years after Ahmad ibn Na'aman had arrived at New York.

At that time the kingdom of Buganda was the most powerful state in central Africa. The Kabaka, its ruler, had the status of a god. To contradict his decisions or statements was unthinkable to his subjects and was heavily punished.

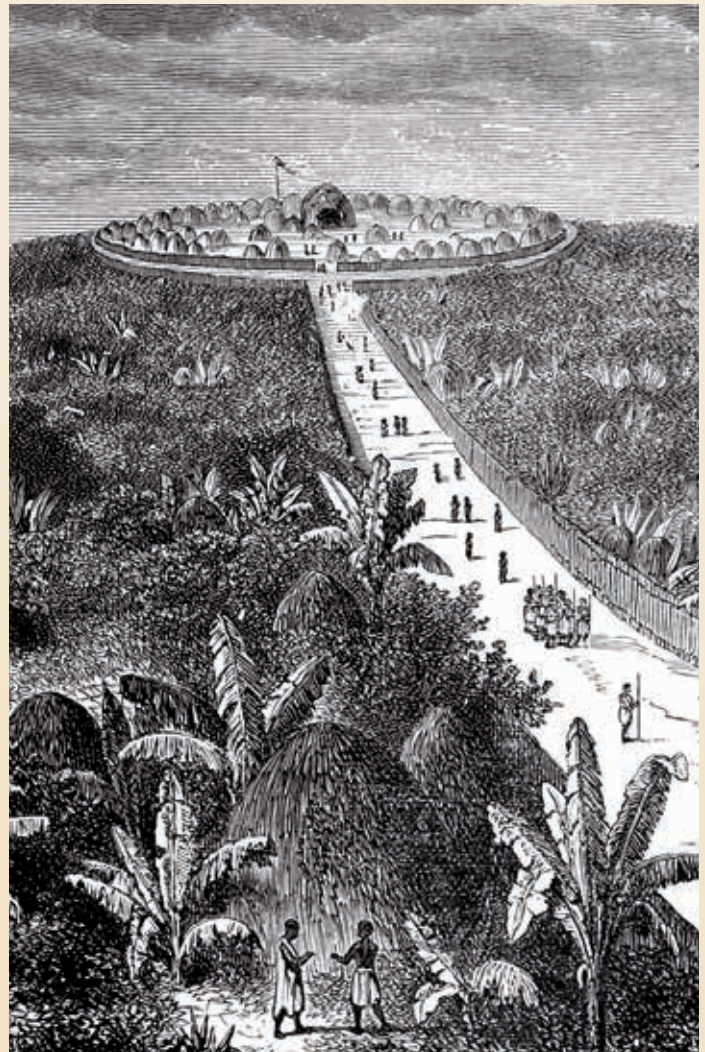


Dr Sulaiman Al Mahdhouri

Ahmed ibn Ibrahim Al Amri

The Omani trader Sheikh Ahmed ibn Ibrahim Al Amri was the first to introduce Islam to the interior of East Africa. He was known for his high morals, his powerful and influential personality and his ability to communicate in the language of Waganda. Historical sources indicate that he arrived in the Kingdom of Buganda in 1844 during the rule of Kabaka Suuna, and thus was the first Arab merchant to arrive in this kingdom. His story was annotated by Amin Pasha in his diary when he met Al Amri on one of his travels in central Africa.

The sources documented that according to the beliefs and rituals of the religion of Lobare, which was embraced by Kabaka Suuna, who represented the political and spiritual authorities of society, the blood of innocent people, especially slaves, was shed as a ritual to appease gods or spirits. These



The kings of Buganda always resided on top of a hill.

practices were prevalent in some African societies as part of the inherited culture especially during the 19th century.

In this context Amin Pasha documented the story of Sheikh Al Amri with Kabaka Suuna. When the King issued his orders to carry out the sacrifice in the presence of Sheikh Al Amri, the Sheikh stood up, challenging the king amid the astonishment of the audience, addressing him with courage *‘that both – he and his people – had been created alike by Allah, that to Allah alone he owed his kingdom and that it was a grievous sin in the eyes of Allah to destroy those whom Allah had created’*. The king said: *‘It is the gods who have commanded me to do so’*. The Sheikh began with courage and composure, repeating: *‘only the one God has the right to end their lives; a right which no creature has’*. Here the king began to wonder in confusion about God, who has no partner and whom Sheikh Al Amri was talking about. The God he considers the creator of the

universe and who owns what is in the heavens and on earth. Slowly, the King was enraptured and asked Al Amri to teach him more about the sole god who is worthy of worship.

The king appeared to be a good listener. After several meetings Al Amri was able to explain the principles of Islam. According to some sources, the king converted to Islam with many of his courtiers. Some sources indicate that Al Amri was able to teach the king verses from the Quran. Among the documents left are a series of sacred religious manuscripts written in Arabic. They might be verses from the Quran left by King Suuna to his son Mutesa, who followed him as a king. Chaille Long saw these documents in 1874 and mentioned them in his book *Central Africa*. Thus, the arrival of Sheikh Al Amri to the Kingdom of Buganda was a turning point in the history of this kingdom and the neighbouring regions. Historical sources confirm that King Mutesa (1856–1884), who succeeded his father Suuna in >

governance, accepted Islam. He showed an unbri-
dled enthusiasm for Islam and spread it among the
denizens of his kingdom. The sources point out that
he ordered his people to perform the rituals of Islam
and to construct mosques throughout the kingdom
of Nakawa in order to perform prayers, especially
Friday prayers. He issued a decree that the use of
languages other than Arabic for greeting between
his followers is a punishable crime. This shows the
importance for him of using Arabic as an official
language. In addition, he introduced the Islamic
Hijri calendar into his kingdom. The enthusiasm for
this religion prompted him to send his messengers
to King Kabarega, king of the province of Benyur,
inviting him to accept Islam too. In his court Omani
merchants were given a prestigious status making
them consultants and advisers, such as Abdul
Rahman ibn Obaid.

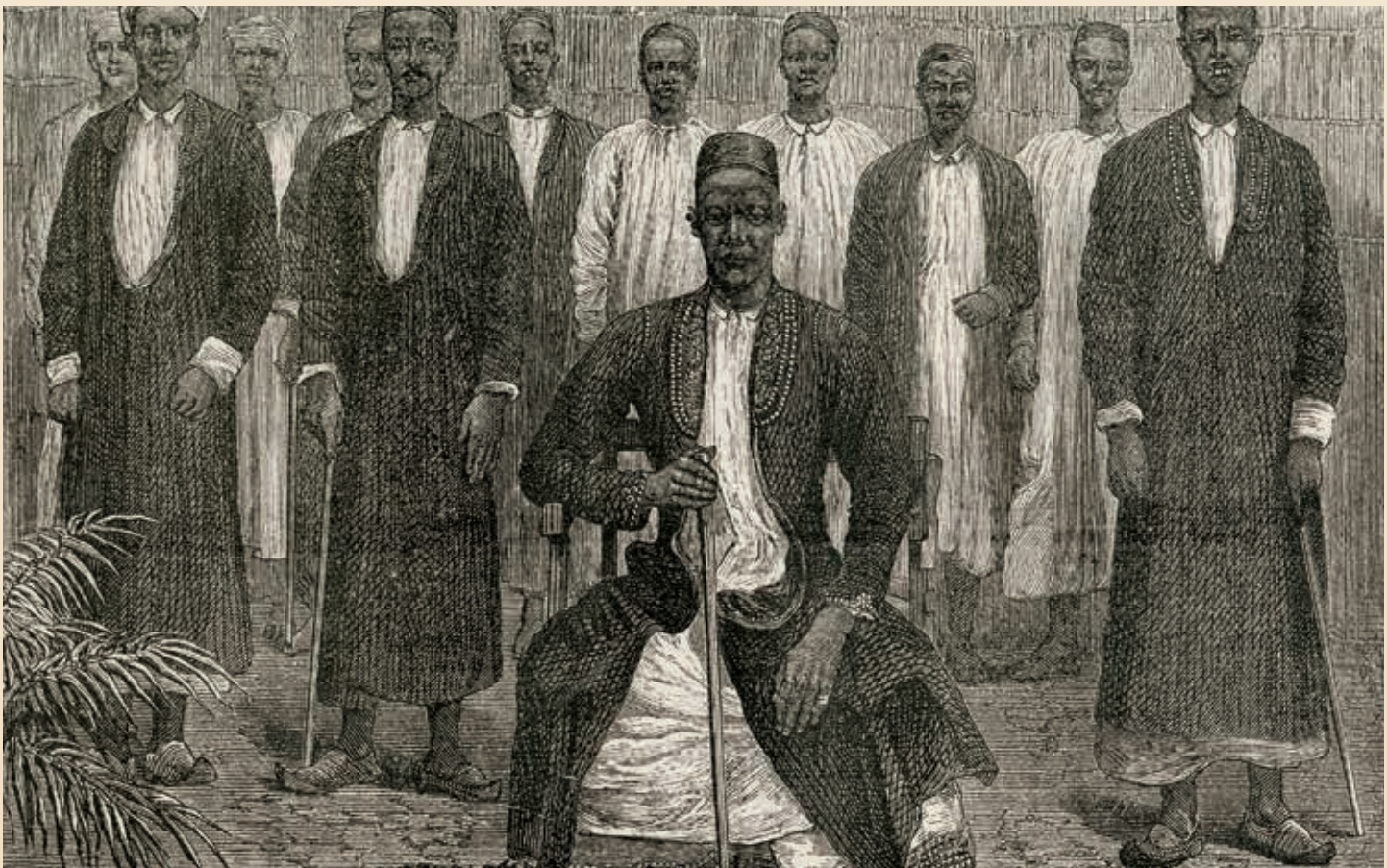
The end of Sheikh Al Amri was tragic. He was
killed by a member of the Wanyambo tribe who shot
him with an arrow while he was sitting in front of

his house in the evening with a group of Arabs. As
his daughter Salha narrated: *'I was small when my
father died. He was called "the state" which means
the representative of the government. I remember
very well what happened on the day of his death.
My father was generous and kind to us all.'* After his
death many Arab merchants left Kafuro. Surgeon Ma-
jor Park describes this city in his book *My Personal
Experiences in Equatorial Africa*. He said: *'When we
arrived in Kafuro in August 1889 at 11 am, we found
the settlements built by Arab merchants in a pitiful
condition that looked like abandoned ruins with fallen
walls. Arab graveyards still exist there. Nothing left
of their remains only but a lemon tree and tomatoes
which they had planted.'*

Thus, ended the story of the man who risked
his life to save the lives of others when he stood
bravely and courageously in the king's court and pre-
vented him from offering human blood as sacrifices
to the gods according to their pagan beliefs. None
of the former kings of Buganda had been addressed

in such a tone as Sheikh Amri did. Thanks to his influential personality, Arab merchants were welcomed in the kingdom of Buganda, whose kings were cordially associated with the Sultans of Zanzibar and exchanged gifts with them. There is no doubt that Sheikh Ahmad Al Amri is an honourable example of

an Arab merchant who carries his trade in one hand and his call to Islamic principles and ethics in the other. The impact of his contribution in spreading Islam in the interior of East Africa along with his fellow Arab merchants still continues to this day.



Mutesa, Kabaka of the kingdom of Buganda with his chiefs



Chapter 3



Exploring the Heart of Africa

The quest for ivory

In the middle of the 19th century the international market saw a strong and rising demand for a commodity from Africa that was very highly prized: ivory, the *white gold of Africa*. For millennia ivory was traded in small quantities to the empires in Europe and Asia as raw material for the creation of luxurious status objects and artworks for rulers, nobility and religious leaders.

Ivory was scarce and quite expensive, which kept the demand for it quite modest. As civil society gained power and influence from the 17th century onwards, the import of ivory even decreased.

This changed with the industrialisation in Europe and America. Industrialisation resulted in a massive change in production methods and an exponential rise of the output of goods for sale, as well as dramatic changes in society.

Workers were needed in coal mines to power the new engines of production and needed in factories to produce the goods for an ever-burgeoning middle class. These masses worked in onerous conditions for subsistence wages. This exploitation of the workers produced great wealth for the owners of the means of production, and standards of living rose in the middle class, which was eager to show its status through the acquisition of luxury goods and ostentation. The consumer society was created.

Left
*The most famous Omani
trader of the 19th century and
even today was Hamad ibn
Muhammad ibn Juma ibn Rajab
Al Murjebi, better known as
Tippu Tip. (1837–1905)*

In this context, ivory, which was formerly an exotic luxury good, was democratised and became a material with ubiquitous applications, supplanted only in the 20th century by plastic. It was turned into piano keys, billiard balls and pipe bowls; for objects of daily use such as handles for knives and cutlery, umbrellas and walking sticks; even for sets of artificial teeth, fashion accessories and decorative objects.

Cottage industries developed which specialised in the processing and carving of ivory, such as the small village of Erbach in Germany. Even today it attracts many tourists to its *German Ivory Museum*. At Erbach and the neighbouring Michelstadt the craft of carving ivory quickly became the main economic sector of the village. Their most successful export item was the *Rose of Erbach*, a single naturalistic shaped rose, that was rewarded a *Medal for Merit* at the Vienna World Exposition in 1873. By the end of the 19th century about 50 self-employed masters and 150 journeymen from Erbach and Michelstadt made their living exclusively from the production of this rose made from ivory, selling it all over Europe.

To meet the growing demand for ivory it was necessary to increase its import. The Indian elephants were not suitable as a source for ivory, as only the bulls have tusks. Moreover the average size of their tusks is just 1.60 metres and the average weight only 20 kilograms. Therefore most of the ivory traded originated from African elephants. Both sexes of this species have tusks which reach 3 metres on average and weigh 50 to 90 kilograms. The longest reported tusks reached 4.10 metres; the heaviest ones weighed as much as 120 kilograms. In general, the ivory from East



The rose was first introduced as a motif for ivory carving by artist Friedrich Hartmann from Erbach.



Ivory tusks covering the floor of a warehouse in London's docklands before they were sold. London and Antwerp were the main places for ivory auctions in Europe.

and Central Africa was preferable to that from West Africa as it was softer and therefore more suitable for processing.

Towards the end of the 19th century, in 1891, the yearly consumption of ivory in Great Britain amounted to 188 tonnes, in Germany 113 tonnes, in France 108 tonnes, in the USA 116 tonnes, in India 121 tonnes, in China 13 tonnes and in other countries 6 tonnes – a total of 647 tons. Most of this ivory, 430 tonnes, was imported from Zanzibar and the East African coast. Fifty years earlier, in 1841, the total import from this region was just 190 tonnes.¹

This huge global increase of ivory demand within only a few decades had far reaching economical implications and social, cultural and political consequences for the population in East Africa as well as on politics in Europe.

In exchange for ivory, copal gum, hides, precious metals, not to mention slaves – which would be conveyed to the coast – goods from global trade reached the interior of Africa: beads, cloth, agricultural products, medicine, tools, weapons.

The material and cultural exchange which ensued on the caravan routes was a symbiotic relationship, in which everyone profited. The African interior was woven into the global fabric of finance and trade.

Expanding to the heart of Africa

In the beginning of the 19th century, African traders extended their long-existing trade network within Central Africa by pioneering trade routes to the coast, most prominently the traders of the Bantu tribes Kamba, Yao and Nyamwezi. The northernmost route led from Kamba country, today's central Kenya, to Mombasa. The southernmost and also oldest route led from Yao country at the southern end of Lake Malawi to Kilwa. The route in between those two was introduced by the Nyamwezi in about 1800. It originated in today's central Tanzania and ended on the coast at Bagamoyo just opposite the island of Zanzibar. This geographic location quickly made it the most important due to the development of Zanzibar by Sultan Said ibn Sultan as the principle trading hub in the Indian ocean.







The significantly rising price and demand for ivory and the high profit that could be achieved in ivory trade encouraged the Arab and Swahili traders from the coast to organise expeditions into the then widely unknown heart of Africa. The aim was to

Left

Date palms are not native to East Africa. They were planted on purpose by the traders to add to their nutrition or even by chance, when spitting out the pits on the way.

Date palms still can be found at the former trading centres in the interior of East Africa and along the former caravan routes which often have since been turned into modern roads.

omit the African middlemen to acquire ivory at the source. Sultan Said fostered these adventurous enterprises by lowering taxes for ivory for the Zanzibari traders.

The first caravan from the coast reached Umyamwezi, the homeland of the Nyamwezi tribe, in 1825. At this terminal point of the caravan route a trading post developed – Tabora – which quickly turned into the most important trading centre in the interior. From there the further exploration of the area up to Lake Tanganyika and Lake Victoria was undertaken. By the middle of the 19th century three main trading routes were established originating at Tabora. One led north to the kingdoms of Buganda, Bunyoro, Ruanda and Burundi in the region between Lake Tanganyika and Lake Victoria. The second ran to the southern end of Lake Tanganyika and the third route arrived at the northeastern coast of Lake Tanganyika, where the trading post Ujiji was founded in 1831. It quickly became the gateway for all trade across Lake Tanganyika to the Congo, an important source for ivory.

Caravans – Technology transfer and exchange

For trade with Central Africa to be profitable, a system and infrastructure had to be developed by the Arab and Swahili traders: a network of trading posts and places for storage of the goods had to be established along the caravan routes, reaching the cities at the coast. To make these routes safe, the coastal traders had to earn the trust of reliable trading partners, build alliances with leaders of the Bantu tribes, socialise with the indigenous people and to negotiate trade contracts with terms beneficial to the local chiefs.

Organising the caravan trade between the East African coast and the interior of Africa on a big scale was foremost a huge logistical challenge. There were no roads or railroads and the tracks often crossed rivers. Whereas elsewhere in the world pack animals like camels, donkeys or horses were being used for carrying heavy cargo, in East Africa this was not possible. These beasts of burden were too susceptible to deadly tropical diseases such as sleeping sickness (African trypanosomiasis).

Another obstacle was the offloading of the valuable cargo before traversing a river to ensure safeguarding the cargo and supplies, which needed to be ferried across by people in any case. Fording a river, with offloading and reloading the equipment, was a risky and time-consuming process. Having the goods carried by humans, as the Bantu tribes were already doing on a small scale, was the most practical solution.

To carry hundreds of ivory tusks and other goods over a distance of 1200 kilometres to the coast and then return with commodities requested by the people of the interior, hundreds of porters were required. They in turn had to be provided with food and water during their whole journey, which took many months and sometimes even years.

The more the caravan trade increased, the less the villages along the route were able to provide them with the everyday supplies needed. As a consequence new crops and fruits were introduced along the caravan routes by the traders. To this end they shared their knowledge and experience in agriculture with the locals as a basis for the provision of the caravans, which also of course benefitted the local people.

The most important crop in this respect was rice, which was introduced and was being newly cultivated extensively in the area around Tabora, Nyangwe and Kasongo, which became known as the *New Bengal* for its extensive rice plantations.



Rice fields close to the shore of Lake Tanganyika



Huge old mango trees along the track to Ujiji, dating back to the time of the caravan trade.

Planting mango trees along the routes and in the vicinity of the trading posts was another important task. Today, impressive big old mango trees can be found all along the historic paths witnessing the activities of those days. Mangos became a common crop that is exported even nowadays from East Africa to the world.

Situated on fertile land at the crossroads of two caravan routes, Tabora developed into the main base camp for the trade between the coast and Central Africa, sporting a warehouse, a supply station, a place for entertainment and shelter for passing caravans, and offering everything to recover from the hardships of the trek. It was a place to rest and to exchange goods that was unique between the interior and the coast.

The great farms, many of them run by Omani traders who settled there, provided a surplus of food essential for the caravans. Cattle farming was introduced to supply



Even nowadays Tabora is the region with the highest number of cows in Tanzania – with more than three million animals.

milk, meat and hides. Along with the Omani merchants came a new era during which the indigenous people had the opportunity to attain prosperity and power. The cattle and plantation farming that was introduced by the merchants from the coast made it possible to produce a surplus of food which could then be sold by the local people, adding to their income. The processes of commercialisation that began with the direct linking of the coast to the far eastern African interior was the driving force of exchange and development.

Dr Karin Pallaver, historian from the University of Bologna, is calling the city Tabora of those days *the other Zanzibar*. The presence of the Omani merchants in the region of Tabora seems to have met with the favour of the powerful local Nyamwezi chief, Fundikira, since he exempted their merchandise from taxation. Muhammad ibn Juma ibn Rajab Al Murjebi, one of the earliest Omani traders who made it to the interior, was singled out for special favour. Muhammad ibn Juma married Karunde, a daughter of Fundikira, and in so doing established a base for himself and other Omanis who came from the coast to that vicinity. The intermarriage with Karunde put him in an advantageous position in Tabora society and trade. Their son Hamad, known as Tippu Tip, would become the most famous Omani trader of the 19th century. These family ties were of central importance. The members of the family trusted and

The family connections between the Omani merchants and the Nyamwezi are still alive.

Descendants today are proud to belong to this tolerant and unique culture.

Chief Ngulati Said Fundikira and his brother are currently working on a Family Chronicle, in which the close ties between his family and that of Tippu Tip play an important role.



supported each other. By marrying the locals, Omani merchants were accepted, assimilated, and contributed to the communal welfare. Intermarriages were widespread and the children from these connections were fully valued members of the community.



In the area of Tabora still today, typical *Tembe houses* can be found, like the one Tippu Tip's family owned.

The concept of the Tembe house is different from that of the typical African *boma*, which consists of a few mud buildings surrounded by a wooden fence. The Tembe house architecture is a result of collaboration between the Omani traders and the locals and may be recognized as a cultural achievement for both sides. These flat-roofed Arabic-style homes are built in a square or rectangle around a courtyard fortified and surrounded by walls without any window to the outside, an ideal construction to defend and protect one's own property against thieves and robbers. The entrance, an obvious point of attack, was reinforced with beautifully carved but heavy wooden doors.

The restored Tembe house at Tabora that was home to the British explorer and missionary Dr David Livingstone in 1872. It once belonged to an Omani trader.



Crossing Lake Tanganyika with simple dugout canoes was a very adventurous and at the same time athletic accomplishment. Even today vegetables and items for every day use are transported across the lake by small boats.

Another significant collaboration took place at Lake Tanganyika, which is the second largest lake of Africa with a length of 673 kilometres and an average width of 50 kilometres: Shipbuilding. Before the arrival of Omani merchants the only boats available for crossing the lake from Ujiji to the coast of Congo were dugout canoes. Having a very long tradition in seafaring and boatbuilding, the Omanis introduced the technique of constructing ships with frames and planks. Having bigger boats made the long passage over the lake safer and more profitable for all.

Another challenge for the caravan traders was the use of different currencies in the various zones they passed through. In those early days the most common currency in East Africa was glass beads from Venice, but there was no unified currency zone. In some areas food and supplies could be bought or taxes paid only with white beads, in other areas only red beads were accepted, or cylindrical ones with red, blue and white strips, and so on. Therefore a variety of glass beads differing in colour,

shape and size had to be carried by the caravan from the coast, as well as cowrie shells, which were used as a mode of payment in some specific areas of trade, such as the kingdom of Buganda.

Over the years American cotton cloth – *mericani* – became more and more important as a means for exchange. The possession of *mericani* by local chiefs became an important way for them to display their status, wealth and political power. The import of this and other commodities influenced the local economy and connected it through the coastal traders with the global market. In large part the trade between the coast and the interior was controlled by three main parties: the African tribes, the Omani and Swahili traders, and the Banyan Indian financiers. The organisation of caravan trade was a huge undertaking with many inherent risks. The sheer number of people involved to create trade routes, develop infrastructure, communications and sales channels, to transport commodities, sustain communities, and provide a livelihood to thousands of participants in the endeavor required massive capitalisation. Only a highly coveted commodity such as ivory, with a global demand, was worth the cost.

It was the Omani traders who recognized the potential and who could secure the required financing through the Banyan Indian financiers. Together with the Swahili they organised the infrastructure in collaboration with the African tribes. The African tribes from the interior collected and gathered the natural resources – ivory, copal gum, precious metals, not to mention slaves – to be conveyed to the coast by the caravans organised by the Omanis and Swahili.



This boat under construction is built to convey cargo over Lake Tanganyika. It is noteworthy that the planks of the hull are first joined together before the frames are inserted – similar to the traditional construction of an Arabic dhow. The commissioner of this vessel is a local trader of Omani origin.



European travellers frequently reported that the tusks were carried by slaves, who in turn were also sold by the traders upon reaching the market. This widely spread opinion requires revision, because in East Africa it was mainly porters who were hired and paid by the African and Omani traders who carried the tusks.

Prof Karin Pallaver

Slaves and Porters in East Africa

Slavery was an institution in many African societies long before the development of the Atlantic slave trade or of plantations in Zanzibar, along the Swahili coast and the French and Dutch dominions in the Indian ocean.

One should note that it was a different kind of slavery compared to what is commonly envisioned based on practices in the Atlantic world. These slaves were not living in barracks or big compounds but close to the family of their owners. Many of these slaves were women who were employed as domestic servants or as helpers in the fields. These slaves could become

part of the family and of the society where they were living. Basically it could happen that they and their children did not remain slaves for their entire life.



Nyamwezi fighters

With the expansion of plantations in the Indian Ocean world the demand for slaves increased and so did the value, price and number of slaves traded. It was the task of African traders to obtain slaves, bring them to the main markets along the caravan roads and to sell them to Omani or Swahili traders. African societies participated in the slave trade in the 19th century at the same time that the ivory trade developed.

The slaves mainly came from the south of what is now Tanzania and reached the coast via the southern route to Kilwa, whereas on the central and



northern routes connecting Lake Tanganyika, Lake Victoria and Tabora with the coast, mainly ivory was traded.

For the long distance trade it was necessary to have people who could carry ivory from the interior

to the coast and at the same time people who could carry imported commodities from the coast to the interior regions. To do this work, porters needed to have very specific skills, enabling them to travel for months or even years along the caravan roads. They needed to be very strong to carry loads that weighed up to 40 kilos.

The Nyamwezi people had established a network of interregional trade before the development of the long distance trade in East Africa. Based on the portage of products such as honey, bark products or sweet potatoes in exchange for iron, salt and animal products that were available in the surrounding regions, the Nyamwezi were experienced, capable and knowledgeable in the ways of trade.

When the long distance trade with the coast developed, the Nyamwezi expanded from the regional trade to long distance trade. They were organised and motivated. They were considered the best porters to be found in East Africa because they would

carry goods on their heads instead of on their shoulders as the coastal porters did. Very often they were accompanied by their family, women or children who carried small items, such as kitchen tools that were then used during the trip to cook food. This way they created a sort of mobile village in which they were able to enjoy more comfortable conditions during the trip.

The porters received a wage for their work which was negotiated before being engaged by the caravan master. One part was paid at the beginning of the journey and the rest was paid at the end of the journey in order to prevent porters abandoning the caravan during the trip. With the accumulated wealth the porters could pay for bridewealth or buy slaves. Owing to the rising number of caravans passing Unyamwezi, the demand for agricultural products in the region increased. Therefore slaves were needed to help the women to cultivate the fields while the Nyamwezi men were employed in the caravans.

Europeans in the 19th century depicted East African ivory trade as based on the exploitation of slave porters. There are many drawings in books pertaining to European explorers or travellers showing African slaves in chains carrying ivory. Actually this was not the case. To be able to carry very heavy ivory tusks from the interior regions to the coast porters had to be very skilled, organized, strong and most of all motivated. Slaves were not motivated nor did they have the skills to undertake these very long

marches. Slaves travelled along with caravans but were generally not used as porters.

It was a part of European propaganda to show that Arabs continued to trade and use slaves in East Africa even after Europeans had abolished slavery. In the second half of the 19th century this was a way to justify that European colonial rule was needed to end slavery.



The Arab settlement Ujiji at about 1899



Coming into view of Europe

In 1788 a small club was founded by a dozen titled members of London's upper-class establishment, the *Association for Promoting the Discovery of the Interior Parts of Africa*, those days commonly known as the *African Association*. Its members felt that it was a great failing that, in a time when men could sail around the world, the geography of Africa remained almost entirely uncharted on European maps. The wealthy members of the club each pledged to contribute yearly a certain amount of money for recruiting and funding expeditions from England to Africa to remedy this grievance and at the same time to counter the African slave trade.

With the ever-increasing industrialisation in the second half of the 19th century the situation changed: not only did a small circle of enthusiasts show interest in the widely unknown continent, but by now almost all states of Europe developed a craving for African resources.

The main European focus of research in Africa therefore was on the sources of the rivers Nile, Niger, Zambesi and Congo. Although the aim of the expeditions was described in general as being either a geographic one, or a missionary one in favour of the abolition of slave trade, they clearly also followed commercial interests. The expeditions intended to explore the heart of Africa looking for rivers that allowed for easy transport of huge amounts of goods by boat to the Atlantic coast or the Mediterranean Sea. From there further transport to the harbours in Europe would be fast



Sultan Majid ibn Said ruled Zanzibar from October 19, 1856 to October 07, 1870.

and easy. If they met with success, the waterways would also provide the unique opportunity to bypass the existing caravan trade in East Africa, thus omitting the intermediaries and granting direct access to valuable resources like ivory and copal gum, a tree resin used by locals as incense, glue and for traditional medicine.

In addition to the geographic and commercial interests these expeditions were also a reflection of the jockeying for power within Europe, paving the ground for what became known as *the Scramble for Africa* and the divvying up of the whole continent among the European states.

To this aim representatives of the most ambitious western nations were sent to the emerging trading centre Zanzibar to keep an eye on its development and to pursue and improve national interests at this important gateway to eastern and central Africa.

When Sultan Said ibn Sultan died in 1856 on board his ship sailing from Muscat to Zanzibar, this opened a door for the British to boost their standing within the Indian Ocean. It was due to prominent British political influence that his son Majid was proclaimed as his successor and that the Omani dominions were split in two: the Sultanate of Zanzibar and the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman, which was ruled by Sultan Majid's brother Thuwaini living in Muscat.



Aware of the fact that the basis of his wealth and power was on the African mainland, Sultan Majid determined to transfer his seat of government from the island to the coast. Beginning in 1862 he started turning the small village Msisima, just opposite Zanzibar into a city with governmental buildings, a palace and a *boma*, used for official meetings and dinners. He named the city Dar es Salaam, meaning Place of Peace. Every year Sultan Majid spent several months on the mainland, even before construction work was finished and during the holy month of Ramadhan, thus demonstrating the importance he was giving to his project. Soon all who belonged to the upper echelons of society proceeded with the Sultan's Court to the new capital: upper-class Omanis from all along the coastal dominions, the non-trading consuls and other Europeans, as well as many of the Indian creditors.

The boma in Dar es Salaam which was built by Sultan Majid still exists today.

The reign of Sultan Majid was in continuation of the open-minded spirit of his father towards other cultures. He also maintained Sultan Said's religious legacy, which was described by the American diplomat Edmund Roberts in 1833 as follows:

All religions, within the Sultan's dominions, are not merely tolerated, but they are protected by his highness; and there is no obstacle whatever to prevent the Christians, the Jew, or the Gentile, from preaching their peculiar doctrines, or erecting temples.²



Dr Johann Ludwig Krapf

Sultan Said also supported the work of the German missionary and linguist Dr Johann Ludwig Krapf, who was sent to East Africa by the British Church Missionary Society in 1844. Krapf not only compiled the first grammar and dictionary of the Swahili language, but also translated the Book of Genesis and parts of the Bible into Kiswahili.

This spirit of religious tolerance, mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence in combination with a well-established European community made Zanzibar an ideal starting point for missionaries to enter East Africa, who also enjoyed support in their efforts by the Sultan and many of those serving under him.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

ما جلدك الى كافد من تراه ولعد قد
منحنا محبا الا مقف الفرنساوي موير
سوبرير ارضا فتلنا باج موي ليزرع
فيها ومقدار اتساعها من محل بيته الى كل
جهة فلهجات الاربع خمسمائة ذراع
الا ما كان له ارب فحمد مجاورة ذلك
لجابه ولو لم يبلغ خمسمائة ذراع واللام
مخاله باوم سيات عليه في ربيع الآخر
١٢١٦



In this document with the seal of Sultan Majid the territorial extension of the land near Bagamoyo is recorded, which he bequeathed to the French missionaries.

Right
*The first mission in Bagamoyo,
founded by the 'Fathers of the
Holy Ghost' is still active today.*

In 1868 Sultan Majid bestowed to French missionaries a vast tract of land on the mainland coast north of Bagamoyo to build the first mission in East Africa, which would then be under the direct protection of the ruler.



Out of respect and esteem for the followers of Hinduism on Zanzibar, Sultan Majid banned the slaughter of cows in Stone Town – another example of his fostering religious tolerance and coexistence.

The most prominent person to take advantage of this open-minded spirit was the British missionary and explorer Dr David Livingstone, who arrived in Zanzibar in 1866. He would become famous in the western world for having 'opened up' Africa.

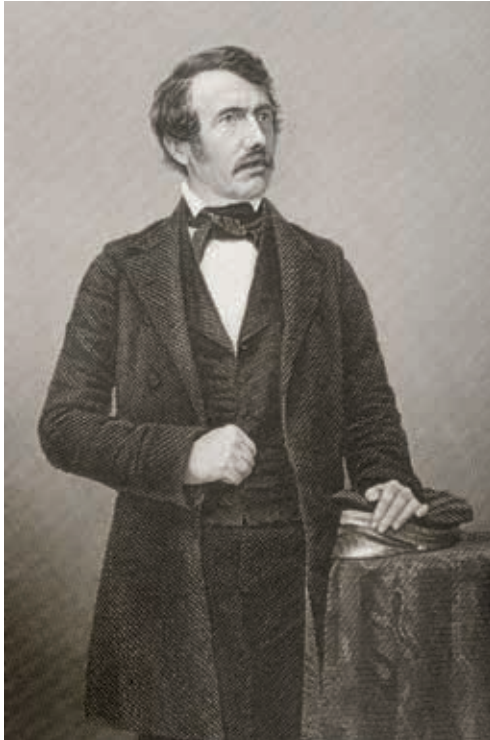
While he may be in fact the first European to cross south-central Africa and to map most of the course of the Zambezi River, years earlier, in 1853/1854 Omani traders had already crossed the continent from Zanzibar to Benguela at Angola's east coast. Native traders had crossed from Angola to Mozambique already in the beginning of the 19th century and the Portuguese had penetrated into central Africa from the western and the eastern coast. But all these ventures were simply widely ignored in Europe's writing of history.

Crossroads in the lifelines of Livingstone, Stanley and Tippu Tip

The 'discoveries' and observations being made at this time around the world were recorded in general in notes and writings of mostly European explorers, who disseminated their very personal interpretations of incidents they happened to witness. Often the observations were misinterpreted due to a lack of knowledge of deeper cultural background or language. Moreover many of the explorers tended to portray their adventures in a light which reflected their own bravery and cleverness. In fact, though, they had seen only a small glimpse of the world, its cultures, and peoples.

In spite of that, their reports were widely distributed, creating a distorted picture of the world and its peoples, which was taken for reality and influenced the perceptions not only of the man on the street but also the political decision-makers and upper classes of society – in some respects still influencing perceptions today.

In regard specifically to East and Central Africa, the picture is much more differentiated. The three most knowledgeable explorers of this part of the world were a Scot, Dr David Livingstone; an Anglo-American, Henry Morton Stanley; and an Omani, Hamad ibn Muhammad ibn Juma ibn Rajab Al Murjebi, better known as *Tippu Tip*. All three of them were active in this region in roughly the same time frame, they had fateful encounters with one another and they each laid down in writing specific views about the things they experienced – thus providing a unique insight into



From left to right:
Dr David Livingstone, Tippu Tip
and Henry Morton Stanley

precolonial and early colonial East Africa in the second half of the 19th century. Three different viewpoints, as seen from Western and Arabian perspectives.

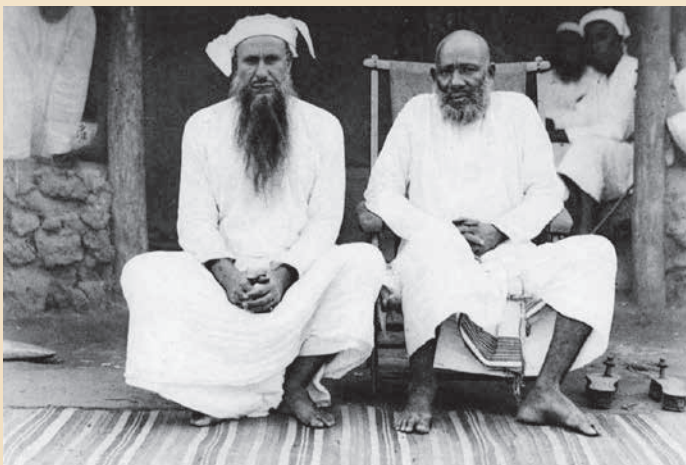
Heinrich Brode, a German linguist and representative of the German imperial government in Zanzibar, convinced Tippu Tip, after he had retired from trade and was spending his declining years on Zanzibar, to write down his recollections of his eventful life. *Maisha*, the autobiography of Tippu Tip, is the first biography in Kiswahili. It was written using Arabic letters. Brode transcribed it into Latin script and also published a German translation. It is a unique document and a legacy without which little would be known about the hazards, challenges and organisation of the African trade caravans. Brode's own book '*Tippu Tipp – the Story of his Career in Zanzibar and Central Africa*' is based on his personal experiences with Tippu Tip, his autobiography, and other, often controversial sources, such as Morton Stanley's reports.

Joachim Puls

The Greatest Ivory Trader of All Time

Hamed ibn Muhammed Al Murjebi was already famous during his own lifetime, under the name *Tippu Tip*, and was by far the most successful caravan leader in the 19th century. But he was much more than just a trader.

Tippu Tip was a glorious warlord, confidante of the Sultan, head of the family and benefactor, African tribal prince and governor of the Congo Free State. At the end of his life he was one of the richest and most respected men in Zanzibar.



'The uncrowned king of Central Africa' is what the European missionaries and Africa explorers called him, and they often needed his help and protection on their travels.

After the fall of the Sultanate in 1964 and the violent persecution and expulsion of the Omani population in Zanzibar, the historical view changed. The new rulers justified their actions with anti-Arab propaganda, just as had been done previously under the colonial powers.

The Swahili culture, in which African, Omani and Indian influences melded over the centuries to create something completely new, was presumed to be in league with the Africans only.

Tippu-Tip and his relative Bwana Nzige (1889)

Suddenly the name Tippu Tip became anathema from the African point of view, as a synonym for everything that was reprehensible about the Omani hegemony. His fame turned to infamy.

There is currently, however, a re-evaluation underway, and the positive aspects of Omani influence in East Africa are being recognized by historians and scholars around the world. A new and impartial look at the era of the great caravans, and thus also perhaps the most famous son of Zanzibar, seems to be possible.

There has been more written about him than any other man from that time period. Even Tippu Tip himself contributed to his later fame with his autobiography *'Maisha' ('My life')*. Numerous reports from contemporaries and companions give an insight

into a life that is rich in tales and adventures as few are.

Hamed ibn Muhammed Al Murjebi was born in a time of tremendous political and economic upheaval, in which not only family and ancestry determined one's access to the higher social classes, but also wealth and success. As if driven by an inner force, he pushed ahead his entire life as if nothing could stop him; he himself would struggle and strive for success.

Even on his first trip inland, he defied his father's express wishes and assumed the leadership of a caravan. In an area still largely unknown and feared by coastal traders, the young man acquired his first experience in trading for ivory. Although the more experienced caravan guides did not take >

him seriously and even mocked him, months later, he, the newcomer, made a far higher profit than anyone else in Zanzibar. Hamed ibn Muhammed did not have to learn the laws of supply and demand from anyone. The passion for action was in his blood his whole life long. With this early success he became his own boss and could conduct business on his own behalf. His breathtaking rise had begun.

The era of the great caravans was a dangerous time, and death was a daily companion on the often long trade journeys. The months-long hikes, full of privation, were not only exhausting, but also life-threatening. Enemy warriors could attack any day. Epidemics, famines, tropical diseases and accidents played their part. Survival was assured only if you were strong and ready to fight with everything you had. Success in safely delivering the goods was dependent on the trader being intrepid and master of the trade routes.

Tippu Tip was a new type of trader, one who used the political situation to his advantage. He did not avoid conflicts, but would seek the outcome which would best ensure his

success in the long term. The Bantu king Nsama was notorious for his cruelty and bloody raids on the trade caravans. When a peaceful trade negotiation with him failed, Hamed the good strategist turned from trader into fighter.

Although the warriors of the Nsama vastly outnumbered Hamed's men, they had no experience with firearms. Hamed knew to exploit this advantage and had his men armed with rifles, and they prevailed. During the fighting, Hamed was hit by several arrows and seriously wounded. He continued to fight side by side with his men, thus earning their respect and loyalty, since he was ready to risk his own life.



Tippu Tip in 1837

News of the triumphant victory over the Nsama spread like wildfire and made him a living legend. From then on everyone would know him by his new name: Tippu Tip!

The spoils of war made him a rich man. He joined the elite of Zanzibar, enjoyed the goodwill of the sultan and the trust of the Indian financiers. His achievements were not due to his origins, a marriage or a title, but due to his own wiles: Hamed recreated himself as Tippu Tip.

In 1887 the Scottish missionary David Livingstone wrote in a letter to John Kirk, the British consul on Zanzibar, after his rescue by Tippu Tip and his men from hunger and disease: *'I met Hamidi Mahamad (Tippu Tip) ... and was very kindly treated by him and his brother headmen ... they generously gave me cloth, beads and provisions.'*

That a famous man like Livingstone, who was celebrated and revered in England, spoke so

kindly about him made Tippu Tip known throughout Europe. From then on missionaries and Africa explorers would seek his help and protection on their travels. In their reports they spoke of a curious and friendly man who could listen well and was always well informed. Tippu Tip obviously loved to discuss things with Europeans. If you believe their stories, he could be very forceful, but also extremely witty.

In just a few years Hamed succeeded in building a huge empire in the heart of Africa. In Kasongo on the Lualaba, the upper reaches of the Congo, he built his powerful headquarters and showed his qualities as a founder and builder. In the middle of the jungle, he created almost out of nowhere a supply and logistics centre with administrative structures and a kind of court to settle disputes. It became a highly developed trading centre with connections via Zanzibar all over the world.

The English doctor Sidney Hinde described the city's wealth almost in disbelief: *'Our whole force* >

found new outfits, and even the common soldier slept on silk and satin mattresses, in carved beds with silk mosquito curtains. The room I took possession of was eighteen feet long and fifteen feet wide, with a door leading into an orange garden, beyond which was a view extending over five miles. Here we found many European luxuries the use of which we had almost forgotten; candles, sugar, matches, silver and glass goblets and decanters were in profusion’.

Today Kasongo, which almost seems to be hidden under the huge canopy of old mango trees, is an insignificant provincial town, far away in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and cut off from the old traditions and once important lifelines to the east.

It may be the longing for the great past which causes people of Kasongo today to view the Omani reign far less critically than one might assume. On the contrary, they like to list the improvements the Omanis brought: advancements in agriculture, espe-

cially rice and other crops, mango trees, shoes, soap, comfortable and colourful cotton fabrics (*merikani*) and, last but not least, a new religion.

On the outskirts of the city, in a small white house with a tin roof, is the *Maman Tippu-Tip* Association. Aruna Shada, the head of *Maman Tippu-Tip*, explains that the name *Tippu Tip* stands for a social aid organization that is particularly committed to promoting the rights of women and children.

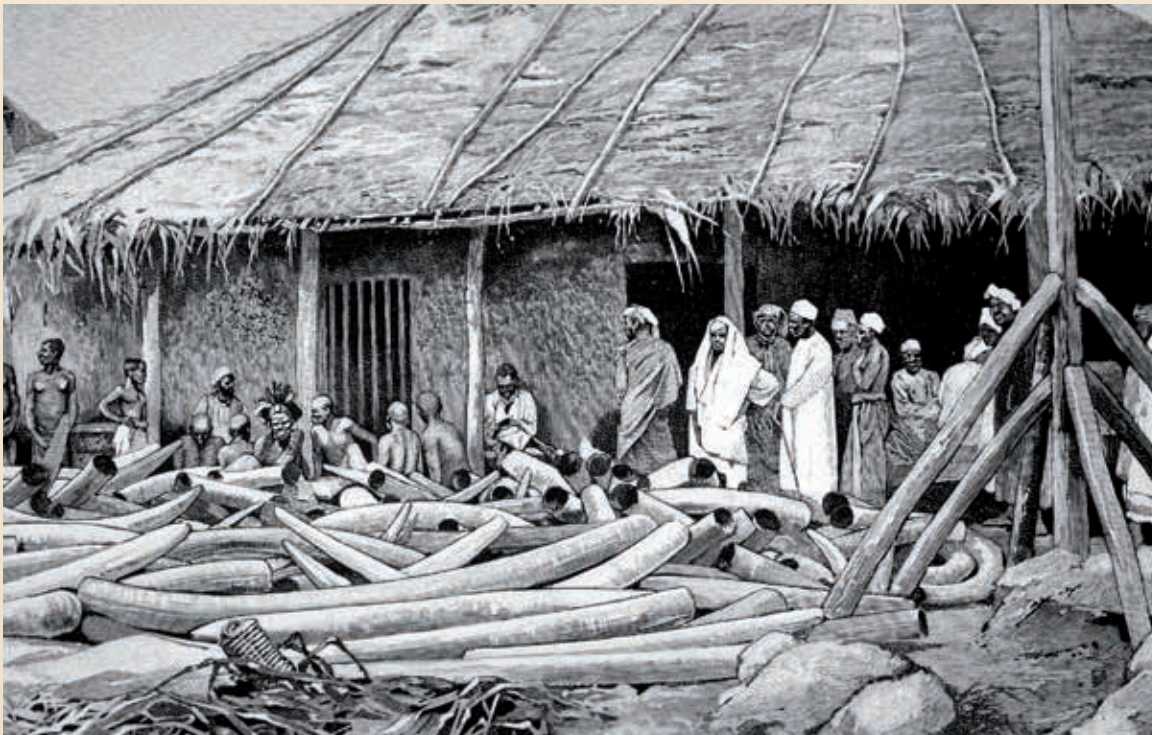
What is surprising at first is the deep connection with Omani tradition, which can still be felt everywhere here and which is also associated with the name Tippu Tip. A sense of cultural belonging has grown over the years!

The words that have come down to us from Tippu Tip when he left the Congo for good in 1890 and returned forever to Zanzibar seem almost a little wistful.

'The white man is stronger than I am; they will eat my possessions as I ate those of the pagans, I see clouds in the sky! The thunder is near! I am going.'

He, the realist, could foresee what would happen, could see that the Europeans would use their military superiority to divide Africa among themselves.

He knew it was time for him to go. Tippu Tip is and will remain an outstanding figure in the history of East Africa. He was a child of his time, a tough epoch of privation, in which much could be achieved with courage and boldness. A self-made man who, if you believe his own words, only ever wanted to be one thing: The greatest ivory trader of all time!



Engraving showing Tippu Tip's camp in Stanley Falls, Congo, with an accumulation of ivory waiting to be exported.



Emergency relief for Dr Livingstone

In autumn 1865 Dr Livingstone departed for Zanzibar with the support of the Royal Geographical Society in London. His mission was ostensibly to solve the mystery about the sources of the river Nile, but he was still determined to do what he could to end the slave trade in East Africa.

Soon after his arrival he began his explorations. Livingstone travelled with only a small group of porters as he wanted to avoid the risk of being seen as a threat by local chiefs and villagers. Following the river Ruvuma towards the interior, he reached Lake Mweru not far from Lake Tanganyika. There he was stuck in place and running out of supplies due to fighting between the Omani trader Tippu Tip and King Nsama III.

Tippu Tip had set off from Tabora with a caravan of about 2,000 persons to collect ivory in farther areas where it could still be acquired for a good price. Against the good advice from many other traders, who tried to keep him from doing this, he travelled to a land called Urungu, ruled by King Nsama III, whom the merchants and local tribes feared and hated. He was known as barbarous and unpredictable.

Nsama's power in this area was an obstacle for trade to everybody. Tippu Tip wanted to get rid of it. He trusted in his strength and his dominance. Nevertheless he first tried to reach an agreement as per the insistence of the Sultan in Zanzibar on peaceful contacts with the local people. After negotiations regarding the price of ivory failed, Tippu Tip and his companions were attacked by the warriors of Nsama. The battle which ensued ended in favour of Tippu Tip: his fighters were equipped with guns, a weapon which was till then unknown to the local tribe.

It was in these struggles that Hamed ibn Muhammed Al Murjebi received his name *Tippu Tip*. He himself declared that people, unaccustomed to the sound of the firing of guns, called him so because his muskets always went 'tip, tip.' This fight had two major consequences for Tippu Tip: first of all he captured a huge trove of ivory, which was very valuable – thus making him quite wealthy – and second, the



Warlike conflicts between the tribes happened quite often.

news that he had defeated Nsama, who was reputedly invincible, had spread like wildfire in all the bordering districts, which meant everyone now wanted to curry his favour.

Shortly after this important event Tippu Tip's men found the half-starved Livingstone near Lake Mweru and brought him to their camp. On July 29, 1868, the two personalities met for the first time at Ponda, a village three days' journey from Lake Mweru. According



to Livingstone's journal, Tippu Tip presented him with a goat, a bolt of white cotton, four large bushels of beads, a bag of sorghum, and begged him to excuse his not being able to give more. Livingstone also records that Tippu Tip had received two wounds in the fighting with Nsama and that Tippu Tip met him in a very friendly spirit.

According to Tippu Tip's descriptions, Livingstone was found destitute of all supplies and was saved from probable death. Tippu Tip arranged for a few boxes of Livingstone's goods to be sent at his own expense to Ujiji on Lake Tanganyika, and a letter from Livingstone was conveyed to the British consul John Kirk, at Zanzibar. In this letter Livingstone mentioned Tippu Tip in very complimentary terms.

David Livingstone, *Annotations on Map from John H. Speke, 'Journal of the Discovery of the Source of the Nile'* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1863), detail. Livingstone never visited the majority of areas depicted in this map but rather drew on conversations with Arab and African travelers.



Both Livingstone and Tippu Tip explored Central Africa. However, the European and Arab worldviews differed fundamentally. The following fictitious little dialogue has not been handed down exactly in this form, but it brings their different views to the point and may have actually taken place in this way:

You Europeans amaze me. You risk your lives to explore mountains, rivers and lakes. What is that good for?

It is the nature and the unexplored that excites us. We want to discover new places, new countries and areas that nobody has seen before.

Well, if you ask me, dear Livingstone, there were mountains and rivers before you discovered them – and also somebody who has already seen them.³

For Tippu Tip the helpful and friendly hosting of Livingstone had far-reaching consequences. From then on almost all European travellers and researchers to Africa petitioned him for protection and help: Verney Lovett Cameron (1874), Henry Morton Stanley (1876), Jérôme Becker (1881) and Herrmann von Wissmann (1882) to name some of them. While this may have been beneficial to Tippu Tip the businessman, Livingstone's reports triggered a great enthusiasm for Africa in Europe that would have a dramatic and eventually negative impact on Africa.



This illustration by Stanley published in his book 'How I found Livingstone' was copied and varied many times, thus contributing to his fame. One may doubt that the situation really was like this. The American flag which is depicted may be an acknowledgement of his financial backers. The supposed phrase of his first encounter with Livingstone: 'Dr Livingstone, I presume?' was published first in a New York Herald editorial dated August 10, 1872. The editor had got his top story – and a trivial welcome phrase became world famous.

Of the many encounters with western adventurers, Tippu Tip's support for Henry Morton Stanley turned out to be the one which had the most far-reaching consequences. Adam Hochschild sums up Stanley's character in his book 'Leopold's Ghost':

*Unlike the uncombative and paternalistic Livingstone, who traveled without a huge retinue of heavily armed followers, Stanley was a harsh and brutal taskmaster. (...) He was after more than fame as an explorer. (...) With every step he took in Africa, Stanley planned how to tell the story once he got home. In a twentieth-century way, he was always sculpting the details of his own celebrity.'*⁴

His reckless and deceitful behaviour and his books would make him famous in the western hemisphere and made him the spearhead of the colonisation of Africa.

Tippu Tip sets foot in the Congo

To get a better idea about the man who supported many of the European adventurers in their attempts to traverse the difficult terrain of central Africa, it is worthwhile to take a closer look at the career of Hamed ibn Muhammed Al Mujebi, also known as Tippu Tip. In 1869, returning from his second expedition to the coast he learned that Sultan Majid had begun construction of a new capital for his Sultanate on the mainland and that many prominent people were already residing there for portions of the year. Thus he decided not to return to Bagamoyo but to this new place known now as Dar es Salaam.

Heinrich Brode, the German diplomat who convinced Tippu Tip to write his memoirs, reported about the arrival of the caravan in January 1869 as follows:

(...) the arrival of the caravan naturally evoked great delight; for on seeing the rich spoil in ivory they (the Indian creditors of Tippu Tip) felt certain of receiving back the money they had advanced with high interest. But besides this the coming of the caravan excited the greatest interest in all circles as being the first one bound for the coast to reach the new capital. The Sultan himself showed interest in the daring voyager, whom he loaded with high honours and entertained as his guest until the 'Great Feast,' which concludes the month of fasting.⁵

The arrival in Dar es Salaam was a great moment for Tippu Tip at the age of only 32. The Sultan and his entire court were in the city, as well as most of the emissaries of other states, including England and Germany. Tippu Tip's successful return from the expedition meant an immense social rise for him.

Having made a good profit, it was his duty as a responsible Muslim to donate a certain amount for the benefit of society. To thank Allah for his triumph over Nsama he financed the building of a mosque in Dar es Salaam, which was named after Jabir ibn Zayd, the founder of the Ibadhi school of Islam prevalent in Oman.

The bountiful cargo made Tippu Tip rich and famous, and engendered the belief that he would be a reliable business partner. As a result, he managed to borrow a large sum of money to purchase goods to barter for ivory on his next expedition. This venture started in Zanzibar in early 1870 and wound up taking twelve years.

Tippu Tip now decided to concentrate on ivory trade with the Upper Congo. Due to years of intensive hunting, elephants had become rare east of Lake Victoria which resulted in soaring prices for the sought-after product. However, in the region west of Lake Tanganyika, between the rivers Lualaba and Lumami, there were still many elephants, and an Omani trading post had been set up at Nyangwe. It was a vast area with very dense forests, physically very difficult to pass through, inhabited by native Africans who were much more hostile than those east of the lake.



Above
Inscription over the main door of the mosque, with reference to its founder.

Right
Over the decades the Jabir ibn Zayd mosque was steadily renewed and enlarged, making it now one of the biggest in town.



To gain a certain control over this region, Tippu Tip had to establish his authority, which meant fighting in some cases, and negotiating with local chiefs and tribes in others. For those who paid tribute, his well-armed men would come to their aid as required to squelch trouble and keep the peace. This approach created a level of safety for trade, enjoyed by everyone, which also in turn enhanced his reputation within the Arab and African communities.

He used a different strategy to gain influence within the kingdom of Utetera in the Upper Congo area: Tippu Tip freed several hundred slaves who had been taken from Utetera, and returned them home. After the elderly ruler of Utetera heard Tippu Tip's story of their alleged common family ties, he relinquished his role entirely, declaring Tippu Tip as his successor.

Heinrich Brode

The New Sultan of Utetera

After the travellers had made themselves at home on the camping-ground assigned to them, a relative of the Sultan, named Ribwe, visited them, who struck Tippoo Tib by his exceptionally large build.

To him Tippoo Tib again dished up his well-prepared tissue of lies as to his relationship with the Sultan, and recounted in a touching way how year by year, not shrinking from war or privations, he had journeyed in order to see the relatives of his much-loved mother.

Ribwe, whom the vast knowledge of the stranger must have fully convinced, was so touched by this proof of his kinsman's affection that he at once sent his new cousin 300 goats and 20 elephants' tusks, and informed the Sultan, who lived four marches away, of the joyful discovery.

Kasongo, equally convinced, at once sent envoys to fetch Tippoo Tib. He did not require much pressing, and hastened to the capital, which was of moderate size, and inhabited only by Kasongo and his wives; it was, however, completely surrounded by larger towns.

Kasongo himself, the ruler of an important tract between Lomami and Sankurru, was an old man of eccentric habits. The only beings that he regarded as his social equals were the sun and the elephant. He considered both these as Sultans like himself. He demonstrated his respect for the sun by never looking at the sunrise or the sunset, for he considered it improper to watch the toilet of his royal brother. His regard for his brothers the elephants he displayed by never eating their flesh or touching their tusks.

If one may believe Tippoo Tib, Kasongo voluntarily resigned the sovereignty over the whole country in his favour the very morning after his arrival. Extraordinary as this may seem, yet it appears to have been the truth that our traveller with his clumsy artifice found credence, and at once became ruler of the country.

To the simple Shensis, who till then had scarcely come into contact with civilised tribes, it must have seemed inexplicable how a stranger come from afar should on his first entry into the country be acquainted with the whole genealogy of the Sultan's family. Moreover, it stood Tippoo Tib in very good stead that he had had the opportunity at Mkahuja of making prisoners of several hundreds of Watetera. These he brought back to his adopted grandfather as a present, and was thus enabled to show his



Tippu Tib

family feelings in a most disinterested fashion, and so destroy any possible doubt of the genuineness of his blood-relationship. So he became Sultan of Utetera in full legal sovereignty.⁶



As Sultan of Utetera, Tippu Tip decided to establish his headquarters for the Congo at the former Sultan's residence, which carried his name, Kasongo. From mid 1872 until late 1874 Tippu Tip turned it into a trading post and transit point for caravans. The new village Kasongo should become a magnificent city that would impress passing Europeans. Modern brick houses were built and agriculture extended along the fertile fields on the riverside. For the local population this was a boost into an other way of life, introducing brick architecture, new forms of farming and of dressing oneself, such as wearing shoes.

By choosing Kasongo as his capital instead of Nyangwe, some 40 kilometres distant, Tippu Tip was surrounded by a hospitable tribe that provided him support and some defence. In addition the physical location near the banks of the Lualaba opened the opportunity for transport and communication with the interior by river.

An essential aspect for the success of Tippu's plan was to be able to supply the huge number of porters with food. Plantation economy and rice cultivation were the key to the growth of this city which at its zenith had more than twenty thousand inhabitants.

Rice was the staple food of the traders and their caravans. Cultivating the crop on a big scale in central Africa at the shore of Lake Tanganyika and in the Upper Congo made their lives significantly easier. Rice no longer needed to be imported from India and carried the long way to the interior. Furthermore the crop was fresher and

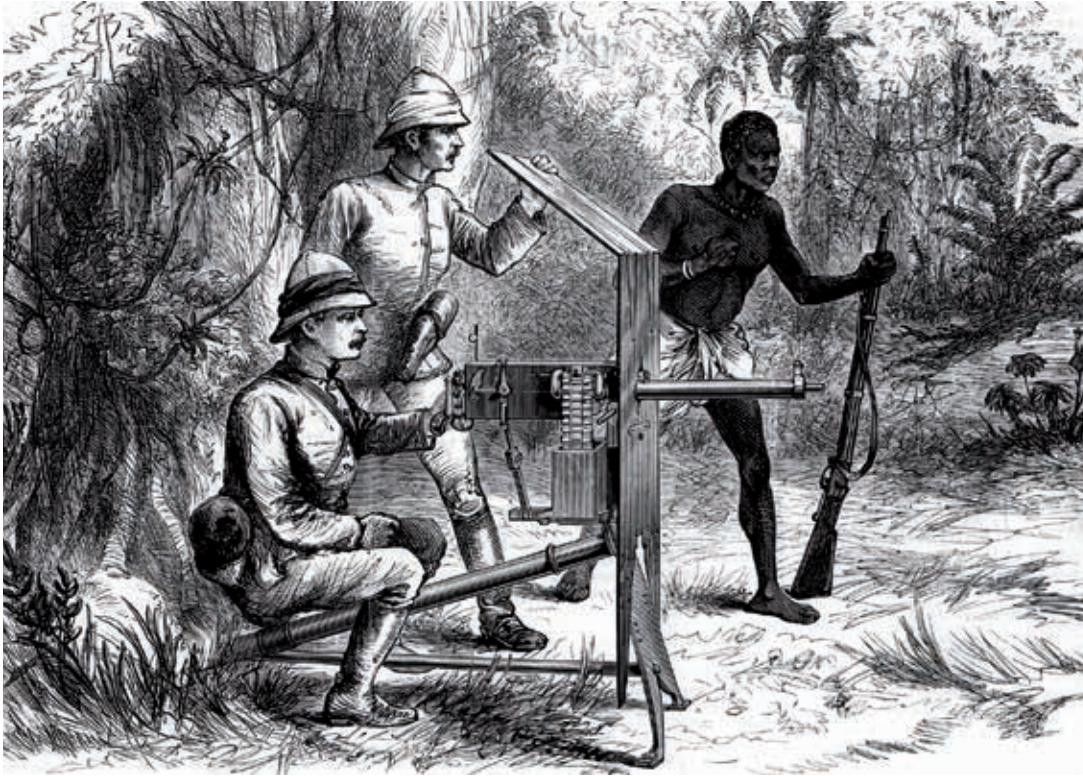




Clay bricks are still produced today at Kasongo as in former times.

therefore did not spoil in transit. The rice plantations made the places self-sufficient in food in a way that had not been known before. Due to the many and vast rice fields around the city, Kasongo was sometimes referred to as *New Bengal*.

With the Omani traders a new religion appeared in the region: Islam. With the faith came hygienic standards, thus reducing the spread of diseases like dysentery, cholera and malaria. Swahili was introduced as a commercial language and is spoken still today in this region of the Congo – and all over east and central Africa. Today Swahili is spoken by about 150 million people in Africa and is gradually becoming a *lingua franca* for the whole continent.



Drawing by Henry Morton Stanley of the presentation of the machine gun.

Stanley's drawings and stories found international circulation through newspapers and his books.

A joint venture with far-reaching consequences

After the death of Dr Livingstone in 1873, Stanley, realizing the importance and magnitude of the endeavor, decided to follow in the footsteps of the doctor. Stanley's character was altogether different from Livingstone's, with his insecurities he yearned for the prestige which would come if he were successful in mapping Africa's interior. Although a lot was known about the geography of central Africa, many cartographic facts remained unclear, like the sources of the rivers Nile and Congo, as well as the various connections between the many lakes in the region.

On November 12, 1874, Stanley's caravan left Zanzibar. In addition to the regular expedition supplies, the porters had to haul the individual parts of the wooden river boat *Lady Alice* which he wanted to use for shipping on the Congo river, if possible. After circumnavigating Lake Victoria he continued to Lake Tanganyika.

Brutal clashes with hostile local tribes took place en route. His willingness to resort to violence was so pronounced that it even raised doubt and criticism in British society.

Having proved that there is no connection between these two big lakes and the Nile system the next target for Stanley was to refute Livingstone's theory that the river Lualaba was the source of the Nile. He thought of the Lualaba as being the headstream of the river Congo. But to enter this extremely difficult territory he knew that he would need help from the most respected and powerful man of the Upper Congo – a person known as the Sultan of Utetera.

In the memoirs of Tippu Tip his first meeting with Stanley in October 1876 is described as follows:

At the end of another month Stanley appeared one afternoon. I bade him welcome, and we allotted him a house. Next morning we visited him and he showed us a gun and said: "With this gun you can fire fifteen shots at a time". But we knew nothing of a fifteen-shot gun; we had neither heard of such a thing nor seen one. I asked him: 'From one barrel?' And he replied: "They come out of one barrel". Then I said to him, 'Fire it off, that we may see'. But he said: "I will sooner pay twenty or thirty dollars than fire off a single cartridge"

*Then I thought in my heart: 'He is lying. That is a rifle with one barrel, and the second thing there must be the ramrod. How can the bullets come one after another out of the one barrel?' And I told him in turn: 'On the Lomami is a bow on which you place twenty arrows, and when you shoot it off the whole twenty fly at once, and every arrow strikes a man'! Then he rose at once, went outside and fired twelve shots. He also seized a pistol and let off six shots. After this he came back and seated himself on the barasa. We were mightily astonished. I begged him: 'Show me how you load' Then he showed me.'*⁷

Right
The river Lualaba at Kasongo.
It is considered the actual source
river of the Congo.

Stanley does not mention this episode in his writings. It seems that to him it was normal to demonstrate his superior arms as a sort of welcome present. But Tippu Tip immediately understood the impact that this kind of weapon would have on the course of the history of East Africa and his own life in the years to come.

Stanley was most impressed by Tippu Tip:

He was a tall, black-bearded man of negroid complexion, in the prime of life, straight and quick in his movements, a picture of energy and strength. He had a fine, intelligent face, with a nervous twitching of the eyes, and gleaming white, perfectly formed teeth. He was attended by a large retinue of young Arabs, who looked up to him as chief, and a score of Wangwana and Wanyamwezi followers, whom he had led over thousands of miles through Africa.



With the air of a well-bred Arab and almost courtier-like in his manner, he welcomed me to Mwana Wambe's village, and with his slaves being ready at hand with mat and bolster, he reclined vis-à-vis, while a buzz of admiration of his style was perceptible from the onlookers.

After regarding him for a few minutes I came to the conclusion that this Arab was a remarkable man, the most remarkable that I had met among Arabs, Wa-Swahili, and half-castes in Africa. He was neat in his person: his clothes were of a spotless white, his fez-cap brand-new, his waist was encircled by a rich dowe (dagger-belt), his dagger was splendid with silver filigree, and his tout ensemble was that of an Arab gentleman in very comfortable circumstances.⁸



After several days of negotiation Tippu Tip agreed to Stanley's request for support, although all the other Arabs strongly advised him against it. The territory the expedition was to enter was known to be inhabited by very hostile people armed with poisonous arrows. The river itself was impossible to be used for shipping due to its many cataracts. With so many obstacles hindering access to the region, it remained a *terra incognita* also to the Arab traders. It was this fact that raised the interest of Tippu Tip. The expedition would open to him the opportunity to search for new lucrative business relations while being paid by Stanley.

Even today many areas along the river Lualaba are almost impassable.

With this joint venture one of the most difficult and momentous expeditions in Central Africa began. It was characterized by extreme external conditions and unclear and often non-observable contract details resulting in differences of opinion, even revolts, between the contracting parties.



Tippu Tip's honorarium for supporting Stanley and his porters with about 140 armed men and 70 reserves would have been 5,000 dollars, even if they should find it impracticable to continue the journey. As per the reports of Tippu Tip this compact was never actually signed and the honorarium agreed upon was 7,000 dollars. In the end there was much space for interpretation.

In his book about Tippu Tip, Brode gives an impressive literary description of the jungle the expedition party had to traverse:

On November 5 the caravan left Nyangwe, and in the afternoon, after journeying a distance of nine and a half miles over a rolling plain covered with grass, reached the villages of Na-Kasimbi, in which they made their first halt. On the 6th they found themselves in face of Mitamba, a thick, black forest, in whose shade, which no ray of sunlight illumined, the travellers were swallowed up. He who has not seen with his own eyes a tropical primeval forest can scarcely form an idea of the horrors of such a wilderness. There is none of the refreshing breath of our native forests; a stifling, mouldy atmosphere meets the intruder. Between stout and gigantic trees wind creepers as high as a man, which mock the axe as laboriously it seeks to make its way, and grasp with their octopus-like arms at the garments of the wanderer, who worms his way through the less matted spots. The primeval tree-trunks, disturbed in their sleep, shake down their dew in great drops, and the groping foot seeks vainly for a firm hold on the viscous soil.⁹



The porters had extreme difficulties making their way through the dense jungle. Progress was so slow that the negotiated marching time of four hours per day had to be extended. The daily stages could only be achieved in eight to nine hours for the regular porters. Those carrying the many heavy parts of the boat had to march many hours more. The march of November 11 was not concluded until the following day, with the second group of porters managing to reach the camp at noon, completely exhausted.

Left
*The expedition struggling
through the dense forest.*

It is no wonder that the porters started to revolt and refused to continue. On November 16 they announced their determination to turn back. For them, the jungle they were trying to pass through was not made for travel. Only wild beasts, monkeys and vile pagans could live there. After a short time it became clear that the expedition could not be carried out under the contractually agreed conditions. Tippu Tip and Stanley, however, apparently had very different views on how to proceed.

Brode reports in detail about their dispute:

After two hours' debate, in which Stanley exerted all his eloquence, he succeeded apparently in inducing Tippoo Tib to accompany him further. It was decided to strike off to the river, and march along its left bank. Tippoo Tib pledged himself, setting aside the first contract, to twenty more marches from their present camping-ground, in return for a wage of 2,600 dollars, and it was decided to discuss later a possible further extension.

Tippoo Tib's statements here again vary widely from Stanley's version. He says that the American, in face of the difficulties of the march and the unwillingness of the carriers, lost his head completely, and himself made the proposal to diverge to the Congo. He entirely disputes any reversal of the compact, to which he had from the first given only a qualified assent, let alone the lowering of the wage promised him.¹⁰

Tippu Tip managed to placate the porters of Stanley in this and more critical situations to come and they agreed to continue towards the river. It was only due to the clever advice and persuasiveness of Tippu Tip that Stanley was finally able to continue the journey by the river, setting off on December 27, 1876. Here the two protagonists parted ways. When Stanley and the few of his accompanying men who survived finally reached the west coast of Africa at the beginning of August 1877, it was proven that the river Lualaba was the source of the river Congo and that it could be used for shipping over a long distance.

Tippu Tip and Stanley apparently never resolved their contractual disputes. Tippu Tip was not dependent on Stanley's money and did manage to open new trading areas, but he was surprised at the breaches of contract and false promises.

Brode reports:

Thus our hero (Tippu Tip) received a voucher for 2,600 dollars, a riding ass, a chest, a gold chain, a revolver, ammunition, and a great store of beads, copper wire, and clothes. (...)

Tippoo Tib in his autobiography says not a word of these presents of Stanley's, though he admitted to this author verbally that he received a draft for money, but the amount was not communicated to him. (...) He sent the cheque to his business friend Taria Topan to be cashed, and was highly astonished to receive only 2,000–3,000 dollars on it, instead of the expected 7,000.

He disputes having received the presents enumerated by Stanley; (...)
Stanley had, it seems, four riding asses, of which he took the two best with him. He could not ship the other two, and so gave them away. The stuffs that Stanley enumerates as presented to him and his men were really so given, but were not gratuitous. They represented the payment of the keep, which, according to compact, Stanley was to supply for the return of the escort. But he had indeed made him lying promises, and said:

Stanley's controversial and often criticised style of expedition leadership was best illustrated by himself in this drawing, subtitled 'Watch out, you drop that box – I'll shoot you', published in his book 'How I Found Livingstone'.



'I do not know how I can possibly repay your goodness, nor do I know what I am to give you in money. For when I return to Europe I shall receive high honours and much money. I will present you with a watch worth 1,000 dollars, with diamonds, and how much money I shall give you I cannot reckon.'

Finally Stanley begged him to wait for a month where he was, to be at hand with help in case he should be forced to turn back.¹¹

We do not know what crossed Tippu Tip's mind, when instead of the promised watch, he received a letter with a photograph of Henry Morton Stanley and a few expressions of thanks. He certainly would not have imagined that he would meet this man again later, coming with another urgent request for support, and carrying a letter addressed to him from one of Europe's kings.



The Scramble for Africa

Stanley's exploration of the river Congo as a possible trade route from Central Africa to the west would have dramatic consequences for the trade of ivory and other goods. The old caravan route to the east would lose more and more of its importance and the Sultanate of Zanzibar would lose substantial income. The gateway for the exploitation of Africa by European powers now stood wide open.

The first monarch who showed strong ambitions to put his hand on the now easily accessible wealth hidden in the heart of the continent was King Leopold II of Belgium. When England rejected the offer of Stanley to cooperate in the colonisation of the Congo, the King of Belgium immediately engaged him. Officially he sent him to the Congo basin to carry on scientific research, but in fact he was building a road from the Congo Estuary to a place named Malebo Pool, from where the Congo is

At the Africa Conference in Berlin the foundation was laid for the division of the continent among the European powers.

In its aftermath the British and Germans actually began negotiations to limit the territory of the Sultanate of Zanzibar to a ten-mile coastal strip, and the Zanzibar archipelago – one more undertaking that would have consequences for the Sultan of Zanzibar as well as the Omani traders.

navigable to launch steamers on the upper river. More importantly, he was ordered to secretly acquire land. In only a few years Stanley managed to conclude fraudulent contracts with about 450 tribal chieftains in which they agreed to sign over their land to Leopold II, along with a work force of their people. Of course none of these local rulers was aware of the contents of the agreement as it was written in a language unknown to them.

King Leopold II had to justify the acquisition of the Congo as his personal colony. The explanation advanced by him was to go there to civilise the poor people who are subject to Arab slave traders. He argued that it was his duty as a Christian monarch to expel these Muslims and to rescue the Congolese people, bringing to them development and also free trade. He denied having any personal economic interest. In this way he sold his proposition to the major powers in Europe in 1884/85 at the Berlin Conference under the leadership of German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck.

This high profile meeting of the powerhouses of Europe and the USA was held for the purpose of limiting the slave trade and promoting humanitarian idealism in Africa, although slave trade over the Atlantic had been ongoing for centuries by the nations present in Berlin. No wonder that the conference passed only empty resolutions for Africa's welfare. In reality the European colonial powers negotiated how to carve out their areas of control in Africa and formed a set of rules for the orderly exploitation of the resources of the continent. Needless to say, none of the African rulers had been invited to Berlin and critical voices were ignored.

At Berlin, the darkest chapter of the Congo's history was opened. In 1885 Leopold II gave his African possessions, which were 70 times as big as Belgium, the name *Congo Free State*. The name of the state was misleading as there was nothing 'free' about it save for the freedom of the king's agents to exploit nature and people.



The main commodity the Belgian merchants demanded at first was ivory, but when John Boyd Dunlop invented the rubber tire in 1888, this changed. The demand and price for rubber exploded – and rubber was a natural material quite common in the Congo. Its harvest however was dangerous and labour intensive.

King Leopold II was the only man in history to claim a colony as his personal possession.

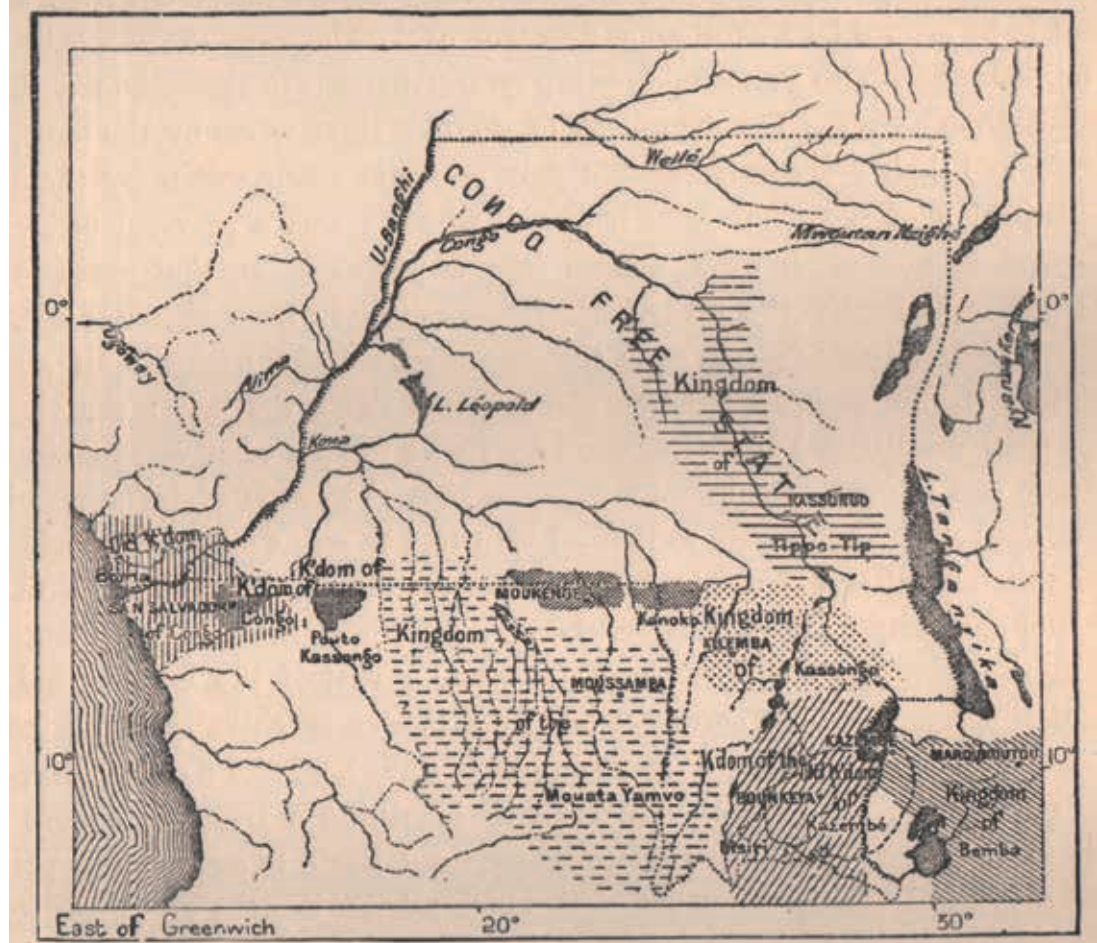
To get full access to the treasures of the Congo, the Belgians first had to cooperate with the Omani traders who knew the region, the trading routes, the languages, the people, how to get food, and how to navigate this difficult terrain. The Belgians simply were helpless without the Omani's knowledge, as was Stanley before.

So it had a certain logic that King Leopold II requested Tippu Tip to officially become the Governor of the Upper Congo district. This way he was able to take advantage of Tippu Tip's key position within the Arab trading community. As governor it was expected of the Omani trader to ensure that the trade flow was all directed to the Congo and the west coast and also to restrict slave trade. In fact he commanded Tippu Tip to coerce his Arab trading colleagues to act according to the king's will.

In spite of the risk of being taken advantage of, after consultation with Sultan Barghash in Zanzibar, Tippu Tip accepted the offer. Both men clearly realised that this was the only way for the Omanis to keep some influence on the development in Upper Congo and thus also to continue long-lasting business relations. The collaboration, however, was destined to end in a direct military confrontation with the Belgians.

Fig. 248.—LARGE STATES IN THE CONGO BASIN.

Scale 1 : 24,000,000.



This map, dating from 1885, shows not only the vast territory of the Congo Free State, but also in the West the area of the kingdom of Kasongo, headed by Tippu Tip.

Additionally it shows the immense network of rivers flowing into the Congo river, thus creating a perfect fluvial trade network throughout West Africa.

The Congo-Arab War between the forces of Belgian King Leopold II's Congo Free State and various Zanzibari Arab traders led by Sefu ibn Hamid, the son of Tippu Tip, lasted from 1892 until 1894. It was a proxy war, with most of the fighting being done by native Congolese, who aligned themselves with either side. In the end, Kasongo, Nyangwe and other villages were completely destroyed by the Belgian troops, the Arab traders were cut off from Upper Congo, and Tippu Tip had lost his two sons Sefu and Msiri in the fighting.

In Europe the victory over the Arab slave traders was celebrated as an act of humanity, with Tippu Tip, the man who had opened the door to central Africa for the Europeans, being stigmatized as the most notorious slave trader of all times, a propaganda image unfortunately still floating about the world.

For the people of the Congo the darkest chapter in their history was still to come. The population as a whole was coerced into forced labour. The Belgian rubber agents and the Congo Free State military – the Force Publique – forced them to work under the most cruel and harsh conditions. Taking hostages, looting villages and burning crops and cutting off hands was very much part of the punishment repertoire. The population loss in the period of Belgian colonial rule in Congo during Leopold II's rule is estimated today to have been 50 percent, about ten million people. No doubt, slave trade was also practised as part of the regular business of those days, but the cruelty and mortality reached by the colonial powers after having 'ended' slavery in Africa would today be labelled genocide.



'In the Rubber Coils'
Cartoon from the British satirical magazine *Punch*, 1906, depicting King Leopold II as a snake squeezing a Congolese to death.

Leopold II invested the profits from the Congo in palaces and museums at home. One of them was the Museum of the Congo at Tervuren, opened in 1897 as an instrument for colonial propaganda. Arab Swahili were portrayed as slave traders opposed to European Christians, who were bringing civilisation and light into darkest Africa.

It is only in the last few years that Europe has begun to take a more differentiated and critical look at its own colonial past and the associated exploitation and atrocities. For the reopening after renovation in December 2018, the displays and exhibitions of the Museum of the Congo were revised, now introducing a more critical view to the public in this dark chapter of Belgian colonialism. Maybe the most symbolic act in this context was the relegation of the huge statue of King Leopold II from the entrance foyer into the museum depot in the basement. The museum was renamed the *Royal Museum for Central Africa*. ('AfricaMuseum')



Sefu's khanjar on display at the 'AfricaMuseum' at Tervuren. Its typical Omani design is still in use in the Sultanate today.

The role of Tippu Tip, his sons and the other Arabs is now presented in a different light, and interest in the Omani culture which was brought to Africa is raised. Among the objects that Belgian soldiers brought home from the war as booty are Omani doors from Kasongo (which are now being restored), an impressive necklace that is said to have belonged to Tippu Tip and the Omani dagger, the *khanjar*, of his son Sefu who died in the fighting.

Dr Guido Gryseels

The mission of the 'AfricaMuseum'

We want to become a museum of contemporary Africa with a permanent exhibition based on modern themes with a direct link to sustainable development but, more importantly, we want to give a much greater voice to Africans and present a more critical view of the colonial past of Belgium.



The Royal Museum for Central Africa at Tervuren, Belgium

There has been very little criticism of that colonial past and so it was time to make a change, to give a new vision on that, and to start the process of decolonisation of the museum and the broader institute.

You can look at the colonial past with the eyes of the past but you can also look at it with the eyes of today. And when you look at colonialism today, you can only conclude that colonialism is a system of governance which by definition is based on military occupation, on racist and authoritarian rule and on exploitation of a country.

It was not until our temporary exhibition (*The Memory of Congo. The colonial era*) in 2005 that the debate in Belgium took place on that colonial past because until then if you would ask the average Belgian how they felt about their colonial past most said, we did good things there. We built roads, we built hospitals, we sent kids to school. In 1960 Congo was the second richest country of Africa and it had the GNP as large as that of Canada. So what's wrong with it, they said.

A lot of the attitudes that we have vis-à-vis Africans or vis-à-vis foreigners result from colonial attitudes of western cultural superiority. It is very important therefore to provide a much more realistic and truthful picture of that colonial past in order to generate the dialogue that is necessary to overcome the problems of the multicultural society that we have here in Belgium today. And it is important that we all make our own confrontation and accept responsibility. It is a very difficult debate because of its complexity and also because it is very emotional. There is hardly any Belgian family that did not have somebody who went to the colonies.

A lot of people until ten years ago felt very sympathetic towards that colonial system while now, thanks to the debate surrounding the opening of our museum, a majority of Belgians have a much more critical attitude and realise that the colonial system was in fact an immoral system, that it was a dominant system and it was a system which is based on the inequality of people.

We have a worldwide reputation for the quality of our scientific work but at the time of our origin we had the mission of spreading colonial propaganda and of blaming the Arabs for slave trade. We had several examples of works of art in our museum here where Arabs are really shown as being very cruel vicious people, with Africans or Congolese laying on the ground being captured, being bound, women being carried away by the Arabs. This artwork was made to frighten people. Arabs ran the slave trade but they were traders; they were not always racist in themselves. So it is a different way of looking at it. We have problems in our multicultural society vis-à-vis people of African origin, at the same time we also have that uneasy feeling towards people of Arab origin. And that originates partly from that colonial propaganda from Leopold II, and the Belgian political system until Congo's independence in 1960. So until today the effects of that propaganda are tangible in our difficulties dealing with the multicultural society of today such as racism.





To get a deeper knowledge about the life of the Omani merchants at Kasongo and what happened during the fighting, excavations by the research team were begun in 2018. Still on-going, these excavations are a difficult task, due to the actual political environment and concerns about safety situation in this part of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The team of the museum focused first on the part of the city where the Omani traders lived. No houses are left from the former city of about 25,000 inhabitants, only stone foundations. Excavations proved that many of the buildings had been surrounded by heavy wooden fences, making the place difficult to capture.

Tippu Tip himself did not witness the fall of Kasongo and the destruction of his house. After returning to Zanzibar from his last expedition around 1890, he retired and wrote an account of his life, which is the first autobiography in the Swahili

Aerial view of the excavation site at Kasongo of the 'Royal Museum for Central Africa'. Among the objects found so far are pottery, bullets, remains from food and a skeleton, probably dating from the last days of the war.

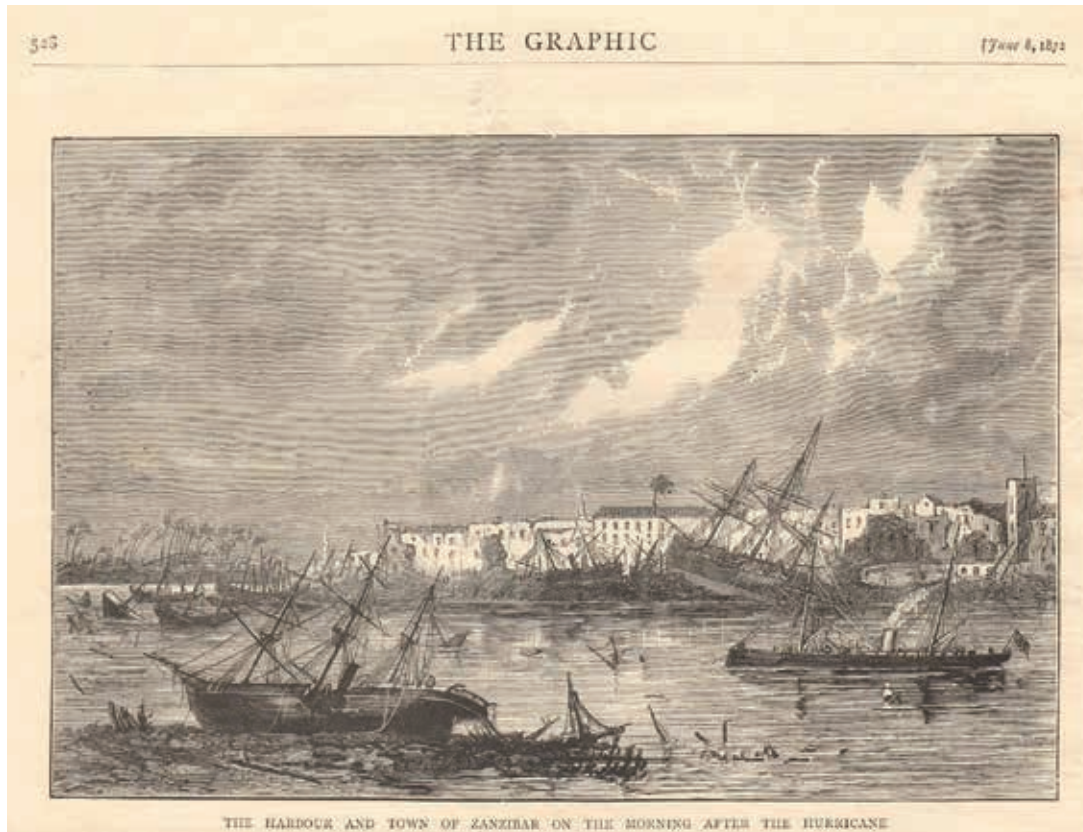


language. Heinrich Brode, who knew him in Zanzibar, transcribed the manuscript into Latin script and translated it into German. It was subsequently translated into English and published in Britain in 1907.

On June 13, 1905, Tippu Tip died of malaria in his home in Stone Town. Over the decades of his travels and stays in central Africa, the town was transformed by Sultan Barghash to the most modern place in Africa south of the Sahara, next to Cape Town in South Africa.



Signpost marking the compound which archaeologists believe was the house of Tippu Tip at Kasongo.



The harbour and town of Zanzibar on the morning after the hurricane.

Modernisation under harsh conditions

When Sultan Barghash ibn Said took over power from his departed brother Majid in 1870, he began his reign with ambitious plans for a splendid future of his Sultanate. His vision comprised a growing political influence as well as the introduction of the latest technical innovations. During the two years of his exile in India, he experienced the advantages and conveniences of modern technology introduced there by the British. The modernisation taking place in Egypt at that time served him as a model.

But an unusual natural phenomena made it most difficult for him to accomplish his plans. Although being situated about two degrees north of the normal cyclonic zone, a devastating cyclone hit the Zanzibar archipelago on April 15, 1872. At daybreak a strong south-westerly wind increased to cyclone force raging with undiminished frenzy until nightfall.

The damage from the cyclone to the local community was immense, but damage to the revenues of the Sultanate turned out to be the biggest disaster possible. At least two-thirds of the clove and coconut plantations were destroyed. Since new trees would not bear fruit for many years, the loss was incalculable. Only one steamboat managed to escape the storm on open water, while about 150 Arab, Indian and European ships were sunk or stranded, many of them full of cargo. Just having arrived from Bombay, the Sultan's navy was also badly hit. Three steamships and a corvette were thrown ashore and damaged. The Sultan's naval power as well as his financial possibilities had been seriously affected.

Against all odds Sultan Barghash tried to make the best out of his now heavily weakened position. Having realised that international diplomacy and trade required connection to the modern global communication networks, he spurred the integration of Zanzibar into this growing system of international exchange, a development that continued under his successors.

Steamboat lines carrying passengers, mail and freight began to regularly call at Zanzibar: first the *British India Steam Navigation Company* (1872); followed by the French *Messageries Maritimes* (1888); the Portuguese *Mala Real Line* (1889) and the *German East-Africa Line* (1890). They linked the island with Bombay, Aden and Suez and other cities around the Indian Ocean.

Also in 1872 the first telegraph cables were laid at Zanzibar. A further telegraph cable to Aden linked Zanzibar directly to the global communication network in 1879.

To act within a worldwide community it also seemed important to him to introduce global time standards. To help people adapt to these global standards a clock tower was erected at the harbour in 1879. The physical abstract time measurement with 24 hours per day thus existed parallel to the traditional time measurement based on 12 hours per day beginning at sunrise and 12 hours per night starting at sunset. With the introduction of global time zones in 1884 Zanzibar was included in Moscow time (GMT plus two hours). As the steamboat liners followed their schedules based on the new regime, the activities in the harbour became more and more adjusted to this time regulation. Even today one will find both time systems being used by the people and some institutions of Zanzibar.

Another important project on the agenda of Sultan Barghash was the improvement of the sanitary conditions on the island. Just a year before he began his reign, Zanzibar succumbed to the global cholera pandemic. It had begun in 1863 in the Ganges delta, reached northern Africa in 1865 and spread to sub-Saharan Africa. About 70,000 people were killed by the disease in Zanzibar in 1869–70. The high death toll was caused by poor hygiene standards, lack of clean fresh water and a sewage system.



The freshwater pipeline is still today part of the water supply system of Stone Town.



The 'Hamamni Persian bath' was maintained until 1920 and is nowadays a Stone Town tourist attraction.

Accordingly he commissioned the construction of a sewage system and a big freshwater pipeline, fed by a reservoir that collected spring water from the hinterland of Stone Town. Public hydrants distributed in the city gave the inhabitants access to clean water.

A public bath known as the *Hamamni Persian Baths* added to the improvement of the sanitary conditions in town. The building was comprised of several rooms, including hot and cold baths, toilets, shaving areas, and a restaurant. Hot water was provided through an underground system. It was open to both men and women, but with different hours of admittance.

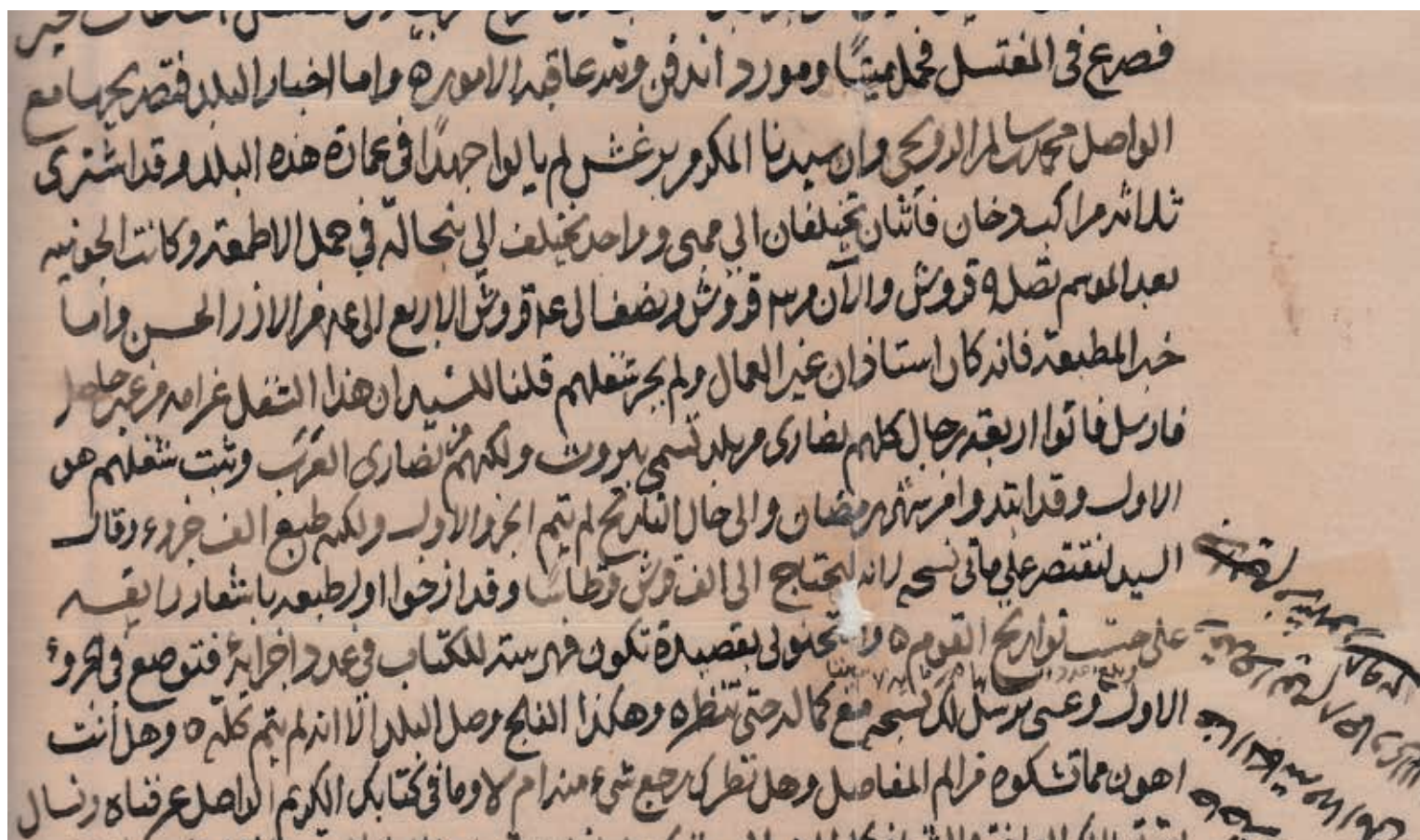
Sultan Barghash was also very much aware of the important role of a printing press working with Arabic typefaces – not only for communicating news to his subjects, but also to save and promulgate academic and scientific works, and religious tracts.

In 1865 American Christian missionaries introduced the first printing press in East Africa, at Zanzibar. They published mostly Christian texts in English and translations of the Gospels and the Old Testament in Swahili using Latin letters. Over the years, the missionaries were helped with the translations by local scholars like Sheikh Abd al-Aziz ibn Abd Al Ghani Al Amawy, a leading Islamic scholar in Zanzibar. Earlier, during the reign of Sultan Majid, he assisted in the translation of the Gospel of St. Luke, and in 1872 he collaborated with Bishop Steere on a translation of the Bible into Swahili.

When the Sultan embarked on a state visit to England in 1875 he included a sojourn in Egypt. Under the ruling Khedive Ismail, the Arabic press in that country had grown rapidly. Arabic newspapers were published as well as new and classical Arabic texts. Returning from this voyage Sultan Barghash brought with him the first printing presses using Arabic typefaces. Professional printing staff was hired, comprised of four Christians from Beirut. Printing reached its apogee after the purchase of a new Arab press from the famous Jesuit Father's Press in Beirut in 1884.



*Sultan Barghash ibn Said
ibn Sultan Al Busaidi*



Excerpt of a letter from Yahya ibn Khalfan ibn Abi Nabhan Al Kharousi dated 1297 AH (1879 AD) in which he describes the problems of establishing a printing press in Zanzibar, the arrival of printers from Beirut and the publication of a dictionary of the Islamic law.

This Omani scholar, poet and judge edited the first ten volumes of the complete system of Islamic theology and law according to the Ibadhi school, which was the very first major publication project by the Arab printing press in Zanzibar.

The main importance of the Sultan's Arabic press in the ensuing years lay in the publication and circulation of texts of the Ibadhi school of Islam, thus evoking a renaissance in Ibadhi literature and theological discourse. In addition to contemporary works of scholarship, the press also printed a number of canonical works, considered as primary texts on the Ibadhi religious sciences.

Philip Sadgrove from the University of Manchester summarized the impact of the Sultan's Arabic press in his very detailed article 'The Press: Engine of a Mini-renaissance in Zanzibar' as follows:

(...) Though the number of Ibadhi texts published over the next forty years by the press was not large, the works chosen for publication were significant for the Ibadhi community at large, which up to then had had no access in printed form



This undated historic photograph gives a glimpse of the type-setting room at one of the Stone Town's printing houses.

probable that the largest number of copies of the print runs of the Ibadhi texts, though not large, were exported to Ibadhi communities in Oman and beyond. Though Oman had the largest Ibadhi community, there were no printing presses there in this period and Omani writers had to arrange publication of their works 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 one of its principal tasks to stimulate contemporary Ibadhi scholarship by authors thousands of miles away in Oman and Algeria.¹²

Over the years more printing presses were established on the island, some of them serving local ethnic communities or producing magazines and gazettes. All in all the introduction of print in Zanzibar resulted in a boost of religious and intellectual publications that also continued under Sultan Barghash's successors.

Another technical innovation introduced in Stone Town by Sultan Barghash for the benefit of the population was the installation of gas lighting along the dark and narrow alleys. To make travelling over the island more easy he commissioned the construction of roads and in 1879 of a seven-mile railway track running south from his palace at Stone Town to Chukwani. Initially the two Pullman cars were hauled by mules but in 1881 the Sultan ordered a tender locomotive from England – the first of

its kind in East Africa. The railway was in service until the Sultan died in 1888 and the track and locomotive were scrapped, but his idea of railway transport over the island lived on.

Fifteen years later, in 1905, a new seven-mile track was built by the American firm Arnold Cheyney & Co., from Stone Town to the northern coastal village of Bububu. The Bububu Railway plied up to seven times a day. Its service was extremely popular and largely used by the local population. A special first-class coach was provided for passengers from steamers who wished to obtain a glimpse of the island.

The Bububu Railway was extremely popular and largely used by the local population.

During the railway construction electrical power lines were also installed along the track and by 1906 the lanterns in the city had been replaced by electric street lights – long before even London obtained them. As roads improved and motor vehicles on the island increased, the popularity of the Bububu Railway diminished and in 1930 its service was finally stopped.





Beit al-Ajaib – the House of Wonders

The illuminated Beit al-Ajaib in the early 20th century.

Out of the six palaces built by Sultan Barghash across the island Beit al-Ajaib is the most prominent and significant. It was built in 1883 as the tallest building on the island dominating the seafront facing the harbour. It was used by the sultan as a palace celebrating modernity and became a symbol for the Omani presence in Zanzibar and East Africa.

Beit al-Ajaib was the first building on Zanzibar having electricity. At night the front was brightly illuminated. Inside the palace the different storeys of the building were linked together by an elevator, the first in East Africa. It was mostly due to these features that the building soon became widely known as the House of Wonders.



Most of its erratic history and more state of the art architectural features of the palace are well described by *Archnet*, a partnership between the Aga Khan Trust for Culture and the Aga Khan Documentation Center:

(...) The building of Beit al-Ajaib is attributed to a British marine engineer and indeed its form introduced new architectural elements into the Zanzibar repertoire including the wide external verandahs supported by cast iron columns which wrapped around the second storey and which allowed for uniquely high ceilings. The palace was electrified and operated an elevator and many sconce lamps project from the exterior walls along the verandahs. The construction materials of the palace consisted of an original combination of coral rag, concrete slabs, mangrove shoots or boriti, and steel beams. Though this building served to attest to the modernity of the Sultan, other elements made it a functional palace, such as the covered passages or wikios which connect the palace

Historic photograph taken before 1896. Beit al-Ajaib in its original state. The separately-standing lighthouse was incorporated into the facade of the House of Wonders after the demolition of the Tower in the Anglo-Zanzibari war of August 27, 1896.

The war lasted no longer than 40 minutes, making it the shortest war in recorded history. The immediate cause of the war was the death of the pro-British Sultan Hamad ibn Thuwaini on 25 August, 1896 and the subsequent succession of Sultan Khalid ibn Barghash.



Historic photograph taken 1896. After an ultimatum sent to Khalid ibn Barghash to withdraw as sultan by 09:00 war broke out. At 09:02 bombardment from five gunboats began. It set the palace on fire and disabled the defending artillery.

The sultan's forces sustained roughly 500 casualties, while only one British sailor was injured. Sultan Khalid received asylum in the German consulate before escaping to German East Africa.

The British quickly appointed Hamud ibn Mohammed ibn Said as the new sovereign of Zanzibar.

to the Beit al-Hukum and then on to the Beit al-Sahel above street level allowing the royal ladies to move about unseen. The building is arranged around a large covered courtyard surrounded by open galleries. Some of the inner doors of the palace are beautifully carved with inscriptions from the Quran. The marble floors and most of the silver decoration inside were imported from Europe.

The bombardment destroyed the Beit al-Hukum and most of the Beit al-Sahel palace, with less severe damage done to the Beit al-Ajaib. The lighthouse in front was destroyed, however, and in its stead the addition of a clock tower was made at the front of the Beit al-Ajaib in 1897. The space where the Beit al-Hukum stood was transformed into a garden and the older palace beside it greatly reduced, increasing the dominance of the Beit al-Ajaib (...) ¹³

In 1911 Beit al-Ajaib was transformed into government offices and later on served as a museum until the building was closed to the public due to danger of collapsing. Although it was on the UNESCO World Heritage list since 2000 as part of historic Stone Town, the local authorities undertook no big efforts to keep its structure intact. The roof was leaking, parts even collapsed as did some of the verandahs. Due to the decay of the House of Wonders and of other historic buildings in the city UNESCO threatened to remove Stone Town from the World Heritage List in 2016.

As a result a conservation plan was developed in cooperation with UNESCO. In 2019 the Sultanate of Oman decided to join the efforts for the preservation of Beit al-Ajaib and the other historic Omani buildings at the harbour front with additional funding and expertise.

But on December 25, 2020, after three days of heavy rainfall, the outer wall at the northwest corner of the House of Wonders and the clock tower collapsed. Two people were killed. About 30 per cent of the building was in ruins.

Fortunately, in the summer of 2019, geodesists from the University of Cape Town had made a centimetre-level lidar scan of the entire building. Another scan was done by the same team in February 2021 on behalf of UNESCO. The comparison of the measurement data before and after the collapse now also reveals damage that cannot be seen with the naked eye; possible misalignment of the columns, changed angles of inclination or subsidence of floors.



Left
Aerial view of the partially collapsed House of Wonders taken in February 2021.



Right
The lidar scans done by the Zamani project of the University of Cape Town are invaluable for the planning of the reconstruction.

For Tirso Dos Santos, Head of Office UNESCO Tanzania, the House of Wonders is central to the universal value of Stone Town as a World Heritage Site. Therefore UNESCO is endeavouring to have it restored to its former glory. The government of Zanzibar has now also made saving the famous building a top priority. Lela Mohamed Mussa, Minister of Heritage and Tourism of Zanzibar, illustrates the possible consequences of the loss of the House of Wonders with the statement: *'The building is presenting the face of Zanzibar. So the collapse of the building is like our face is being wiped out from the world map.'*

The Omani Riadh Abdalla Said Al Busaidi is a member of *'The Scientific Research Committee for the Restoration of Beit Al Ajaib'* at the Omani Ministry of Heritage and Culture. He grew up in Stone Town in close proximity to the palace and today is one of the few persons who still know about the interior design, furniture and objects on display of the House of Wonders. He is an important asset for the renovation project.

Riadh Abdalla Said Al Busaidi

A Marvelous Modest Palace

Beit al-Ajaib does not boast the architectural grandeur of many of celebrated palaces of Europe and the Orient. However, the modest façade belies the magnificent interior.

It is a typical, traditional square building with the emphasis on an internal courtyard and several rooms alongside it. The architecture is modest and inconspicuous and like all the other royal residences, including Beit Mtoni, it is not referred to as a 'Palace' but as 'Beit' (house). This is very much in keeping with the modest Omani tradition and culture. It is therefore quite likely that Sayyid Barghash was involved in designing this building.

The interior is typically dominated by a large covered atrium surrounded by wide open galleries. Construction engineers and masonry workers were

brought from India. A British Royal Marine Engineer was also involved in designing and placing orders for the umpteen cast iron columns and iron beams.

The Throne Room was on the first floor facing the sea. It was carpeted with the best carpets and lined with sofas. The ceiling of the Throne Room was lined with crystal chandeliers imported from Austria.

The alcoves on the inner walls were decorated with precious decorative items that the Sultan had purchased, or that were given to him as presents. The walls between the doors to the veranda were draped with velvet curtains.

After the bombardment by the British, the Throne Room was completely removed and divided into two in order to make room for the new tower.



Aerial view of the Beit al-Ajaib taken in 2019.

The residential rooms were lavishly furnished with a mixture of oriental and European furniture and decorations and had several doors that open to the veranda allowing the tropical breeze to cool the rooms.

In many narratives, Beit al-Ajaib has been described as a ceremonial palace. This is not entirely correct. Sayyid Barghash used to spend at least three weeks a month at this palace attending to the affairs of the state.

Beit al-Ajaib had private apartments for the monarch and a retinue of household staff for the daily chores. On Mondays and Fridays he used to hold two informal *barazas* – the Sultan’s audiences and reception. A formal baraza during his reign was a grand display: a colourful parade of the honour guard with military band. Attendance was by royal invitation only, with formal attire required. This is probably what prompted the European writers to think of Beit al-Ajaib as a ceremonial palace.



Against all odds – Omani and African culture survived

The devastation of the navy and trading fleet by the cyclone of 1872 resulted in a significant weakening of the military and economic position of the Sultan of Zanzibar. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 intensified the critical situation as important trade routes within the Indian ocean shifted towards the Red Sea. The newly established trade route from central Africa to the west coast via the Congo River also adversely affected business on the land routes.

It became more and more difficult for Sultan Barghash and his successors to offer resistance to the increasingly aggressive efforts of European colonial powers to gain control over the territories of East Africa and local politics on Zanzibar.

In June 1873, under threat of a blockade, the sultan signed a treaty with John Kirk, the acting British Consul, prohibiting slave trade in his kingdom. The slave market of Stone Town had to be closed immediately.

Only one year later Carl Peters, a German adventurer, travelled with a few companions throughout East Africa east of Lake Tanganyika. He dreamt of the German Empire becoming a colonial power comparable to the British Empire. Before starting his trip, he founded the Society for German Colonisation which was represented in his person. He had carefully read the books of Henry Morton Stanley and learned how he had acquired land for King Leopold II.



Carl Peters became known within the local East African community as mkonu wa damu, 'bloody hand'.

After the exchange of some gifts, and under the influence of alcohol, Peters would have the African chiefs sign friendship documents written in German which declared their areas to be under German '*protection*'. In detail the contracts promised each chief protection from enemies; conversely, the rights of the colonisation society were described in such a way that it had the sole and unrestricted rights to levy duties and taxes, to set up a judiciary and administration, to bring armed troops into the country and to allow settlers to exploit the resources found in the mountains, rivers, lakes and forests in any way they liked.




Peters put his deeds and contracts under his newly founded German East Africa Company (Deutsch Ostafrika Gesellschaft, DOAG) and in February 1885 his acquisitions were ratified by the German government through an imperial letter of protection. Only two months later, the town of Witu, on the Kenya Coast near Lamu, was also put under official German protection.

When Sultan Barghash tried to protest against the partition of East Africa between Germany and Britain, Chancellor Bismarck sent five warships to Zanzibar, turning their cannons towards his palace. He had no other choice but to accept it.

The agreement between Britain and Germany dated October 29, 1886, restricted the Sultan's rule to a 10-mile-wide strip along the coast from Portuguese Mozambique up to the Tana River and some towns on the Somali coast. This agreement, however, was only short-lived as it cut off the German areas of influence from the sea.



MAP. 15. Partition of East Africa, 1884-1891

- Agreements of 1885/1886. - - - - - Agreements of 1890/1891.
-  Approximate area claimed by Germany as Witu Protectorate October 1889. German claim renounced, July 1890.
-  Approximate area claimed by Germany under protectorate of February 1885.
-  Sultan of Zanzibar's coastal dominions as acknowledged by Anglo-German-French Delimitation Commission, 1886.
- 1 Zanzibar northern Ports leased to I.B.E.A. Co. 1889.
- 2 Northern coastline of Zanzibar leased to I.B.E.A. Co. 1887.
- 3 Southern coastline of Zanzibar leased to German E.A. Co. April 1888. Sold to Germany December 1890.

Map printed in: *History of East Africa, Volume one*, Oxford University Press 1963



Albushiri ibn Salim Al Harthi

Only four weeks after Sultan Barghash's death on March 26, 1888, his brother and successor Sultan Khalifah ibn Said was finally coerced into signing a treaty in which the German East Africa Company rented part of the coast for an annual fee. This contract came into effect in August 1888. The population of the coast strongly opposed the agreement. When the German administrator of Pangani, Emil von Zelewski, deeply offended the people by entering a mosque with his dog during the Eid celebration, the situation escalated. He was able to raise the DOAG flag over the city only by force supported by the German military.

A revolt quickly spread all along the coast from the town of Tanga in the north to Lindi and Mikidani in the south. The uprising against both the German '*protectors*' and the sultan in Zanzibar was headed by the Omani farmer Albushiri ibn Salim Al Harthi who gained the support of both the Arabs of the area and the local Swahili tribes. By December 1888 almost all members of the DOAG had fled the country or had been killed. Bagamoyo and Dar es Salaam were held only due to the presence of the German navy. It became obvious that the DOAG was not able to protect the German interests in East Africa. Therefore Peters applied for help to the German government.

As a result German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck decided in February 1889 to install a special regiment at East Africa led by Lieutenant Hermann Wissmann in the position of German Commissioner of East Africa. His troops consisted of German officers and mercenary soldiers hired in Egypt and Mozambique. Additionally Wissmann was supported by the German Navy and the British Royal Navy.

Despite all the military power Wissmann was not able to counter the uprising as quickly as he wished. It was only thanks to a be-

trayal that Albushiri Al Harthi was captured in December 1889. He was sentenced to death by a court-martial and publicly hanged in Pangani.



Albushiri ibn Salim Al Harthi was publicly hanged in Pangani, the place where the revolt against German presence began.

On November 20, 1890, the German East Africa Company had to hand over Tanganyika's administration to the German government. It was, however, not until early 1891 that Wissmann was able to report to Berlin that the rebellion had been fully suppressed. Germany now had full control over its protectorate's coast.

Not all Omani Arabs on the coast had joined Albushiri in his uprising against the Germans. The Arab aristocrats and land owners feared that the uprising would result in the overturning of all state authority thus leading to the loss of their properties and revenues. This group was headed by Suleiman ibn Nasr Al Lemki, the Wali of Pangani.

Both the German and the Omani administrators realized that collaboration and a certain level of mutual acceptance would be vital for the future. The German colonial administration was restructured in the following years, based on the experiences of the Sultan's administration and integrating the African and Arab elites into established positions.



Suleyman ibn Nasr Al Lemki

In this respect Suleiman ibn Nasr Al Lemki began acting as a mediator between the two sides. He quickly was regarded by the Germans as their 'direct agent' and he served for more than two decades as Wali of Pangani, Bagamoyo and Dar es Salaam, the city that was developed as the capital of German East Africa.

As had happened in the Congo Free State, the 'freed' slaves of East Africa were impressed into forced labour by the German colonial regime. In 1891 Carl Peters was appointed Commissioner for the Kilimanjaro area. His conduct of office was characterized by cruelty towards the local population and the arbitrary use of the death penalty. This brutal behavior, often for purely personal reasons, led to his Swahili nickname *mkono wa damu* – *bloody hand* – and finally cost Peters his office.

Peters was ordered back to Germany in 1892. The investigations of the imperial disciplinary court ended with his dishonourable discharge from service. Although Peters had to leave Tanganyika, for the time being the empires of Germany and Great Britain kept full control over East Africa. When on November 1, 1890, Zanzibar was declared a British Protectorate, the Sultan of Zanzibar had lost almost all political authority.

The many examples of cultural and material exchange and influence between the Omani, African and Swahili cultures, developed and nurtured over many centuries, would not be eradicated by interlopers or force of arms.



Chapter 4



The Omani Legacy in the Present

Maintaining influence under British administration

Most of the Sultan's East African coastal possessions had been administered by the British since 1887, when a fifty-year concession was granted to the British East Africa Association to administer and govern trade in the area. However, all activities of the association were to be done under the Sultan's name and flag.

Over the years the legal status changed and the British-governed coast, known as the Province of Seyyidi, became part of the British East Africa Protectorate. Its capital was the old city of Mombasa, situated at the end of one of the important trading routes into central Africa.

Although British officers held all key positions in the administration, the sovereignty of the Sultan was still respected and upheld. An agreement from 1895 stipulated, that the Sultan's established form of judicial and civic administration were to be kept in place including having its officials appointed by the Sultan. These judges, *kadis*, and governors, *walis*, acting as the Sultan's representatives had to listen to the sorrows and wishes of the people, ensure law and order and the continuation of trade and tax flow to their sovereign. For the people of the coast in particular the *walis* were the direct link to the Sultan in Zanzibar, as they were also for the British administration. *Walis* held offices in all major towns of the Province of Seyyidi with a *Wali for the Coast* being on top of the administrative system, residing in Mombasa.

Left
For 22 years, Mbarak Al Hinawy (1896–1959) in Mombasa was deputy to the Sultan in Zanzibar. First as Wali of Mombasa (1937–1941), then as Wali for the Coast (1941–1959). During this time, he made significant contributions to understanding between the diverse population groups and to the preservation of the unique Swahili culture, which was strongly influenced by the lengthy presence of the Omanis in East Africa.

Fostering secular education

The establishment of the protectorate led to the existence of two parallel working administrations – the new British colonial system and the administration and the bureaucracy created by Sultan Said ibn Sultan. The two systems were very different but could not function independently from each other and the local population. From the beginning there were communication problems, which could not be easily solved.



Sayyid Ali ibn Salim Al Busaidi

Professor Zulfikar Hirji, who examined many historical sources in this regard, summarizes the problem as follows:

Under the British, the English language quickly replaced the Arabic and Swahili (often written in Arabic script) in matters of day-to-day administration. Finding only a limited number of locals who could meet their language requirements, the British regularly recruited clerks from India for the local civil service; these men already spoke and wrote English and were well trained in British colonial administration as it had been established in British India. Among the Arabic leadership, it was Sir Ali ibn Salim who recognized that, if Arabs and other local communities were to retain a respectable degree of prominence in the coast's administration, they had to have a good knowledge of English and gain a secular education. However, that kind of education was not available, except in schools run by local Christian Mission Stations (CMS), and most Muslims of the coast spurned CMS schools for fear that they brought the pupils near to the religion

and the culture of the teachers and thus estranged the young from their own beliefs.¹

Sayyid Ali ibn Salim represented the Sultan of Zanzibar from 1920 to 1922 as Wali of Mombasa and from 1922 until 1930 as Wali for the Coast. He had succeeded his father in this position, who had governed during the introduction of British colonial rule. Thus he was quite familiar with the British ways, their language and also the problems arising on the horizon.

Seeing the need to adapt the traditional Arab ways of life and education to the ever-growing international standards, Sayyid Ali ibn Salim set about achieving this goal. Under his rule Mombasa was restructured to serve future needs. The harbour was relocated from the Old Town to Kilindini. The old markets were replaced by a large airy covered meat and vegetable market, the MacKinnon Market, which conformed to more modern health standards, and is still in use today. He endowed the first maternity hospital in Mombasa, which was built in 1929.



Right
A glimpse at the MacKinnon Market in Mombasa today.

But he saw the most need in general education and for the introduction of secular schools



The neighbourhood of Old Kilindini Road in Mombasa, where Mbarak Al Hinawy grew up.

for the education of the Arab communities. In 1903 he established the *Seif Ibn Salem Library*, the first public library in Mombasa. Finally in 1912 the first Arab school opened its doors in Mombasa. In 1919 he founded the Arab school in Malindi, which carries his name even today.

These efforts did not change the fact that the Christian Mission schools, teaching in English, were mostly attended by Christianized Africans, while the Muslims kept mainly to the *madrasas*, the Quranic schools. The Arab population was growing ever more estranged from the bureaucracy of the coastal administration. Misunderstandings and the lack of communication between the two ruling systems could only be prevented if a new secular-educated generation of Arabs could be recruited in due time.

In this respect Sayyid Ali ibn Salim supported the plan of a young widow of the Al Hinawy tribe, Binti Mohamed bin Ali Mansoor, to send her only child Mbarak to Buxton High School, a Christian Missionary School. Here, all lessons were given in English. Young Mbarak soon realized the importance of the secular education for himself and his companions of the same age.

When the British opened their own Arab school in Mombasa, the members of the Arab community were reluctant to send their children. Mbarak advised the headmaster that instruction in Arabic must also be included, in addition to English. The teachings of Islam could also not be ignored, as this too discouraged parents from enrolling their children. Accepting the advice, and needing someone to help persuade the parents, the headmaster appointed Mbarak. In agreeing to this, Mbarak convinced the headmaster to personally teach him in the afternoon.



Young Mbarak Al Hinawy

After the first world war, in 1918, Mbarak came to the attention of the British. He was fluent in English, Arabic and Swahili and had proven his abilities. He was asked to join the British civil service. His acceptance should not be interpreted as any disloyalty to the Sultan or as an affront or denial of his Arab heritage, but rather as recognition that he could most effectively influence the ruling elite and look after the interests of his family and community by serving as a liaison between the British, Arab and Swahili communities. It could not have occurred to him then that one day he would succeed Sayyid Ali ibn Salim as the Sultan's representative of the coast.

Prof Zulfikar Hirji

Between Empires, and Nationalism

Sheikh Mbarak's role was defined for him as he went through life and as he gained more responsibilities and began to understand the problems and challenges of traversing the extremely difficult relationship that had developed between the British and local communities as well as the British and their relationship with the Sultanate of Zanzibar.

He found himself at the confluence of these different forces and as time moved on, his aspirations and hopes and ambitions changed for his community, which was the Arab community of the coastal strip of East Africa. But it was also a question of

how he could preserve in some ways the composite cosmopolitan culture, which he himself had grown up with.

He was probably quite surprised that he was appointed Wali of the Coast by his predecessor Sayyid Ali ibn Salim. I think he did not actually imagine this because typically most of these posts would go to the son or the closest first cousin. Having found himself in this position, he had to focus on those things that he felt mattered – duty, honour, principles, taking care of his community, responsibilities for various kinds of interest groups that came to him



The members of the Sultan's administration of the Coast Protectorate and British officials at Mombasa's State House in 1959. Mbarak Al Hinawy sitting third from left in the front row.

and asked to have a voice in government in matters of civic life. He was responsive to all of them in the way that he understood he should be.

His focus was on ensuring that he remained true to his principles and that he did not come across as someone who was taking sides and if that meant criticizing his own family members or putting honour and duty before allegiances that could make people perceive that he was not being fair.

Sheikh Mbarak was probably fully aware that the British were playing divide-and-conquer in East

Africa on the coast as they had done in other places. His strictly correct political work was to ensure that the British did not have the opportunity to play those divide-and-conquer politics on the ground. In that sense he was trying to stay one step ahead of them and not allow them to make inroads. Because if they did make inroads on the ground to those local politics, they might actually end up dismantling that fragile set of alliances that had been built up over many years between the local communities of Arab Swahilis and others who lived on the coast of East Africa and Mombasa in particular.

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Mbarak Al Hinawy accompanying the Queen Mother on the occasion of her visit to the British Coast Protectorate in February 1959.

Sheikh Mbarak's self-image was formed by many factors. He recognized that he himself was of Omani Arab heritage, but he was equally at home with Swahili culture. In East Africa at that time, Arab culture was Swahili culture and Swahili culture was Arab culture.

He was a very good Swahili speaker and the main Swahili examiner in East Africa. He collected Swahili language manuscripts, poetry and various kinds of writing. He was interested in Swahili norms and customs and practices and he wrote about them. For a man who thought or stated that Arab cul-

ture was important, he was not saying that it was more important. He was telling the British that it was equally as important as the Swahili communities which were living on the coast who the British considered as natives. In Sheikh Mbarak's mind the Arab communities of East Africa were as native as the African communities which resided there prior to the arrival of the Arabs in various waves over many centuries.

Sheikh Mbarak was appointed by the Sultan of Zanzibar to represent him on the coastal strip of East Africa based at Mombasa. That was his primary

allegiance. His heart was with the Sultanate and not with the British, but he recognized that the British were there to stay. He was responsible for making sure that the British knew that the Sultan of Zanzibar was the main ruler of this coastal strip along with the island of Zanzibar and other regions and that his role as an administrator was to ensure that the British were keeping their role as administrators of the protectorate quite clear.



Mbarak Al Hinawy (second row, fifth from the right) with King George IV and various members of the Legislative Councils at the British African Protectorates and Colonies on the occasion of the Africa Conference at London 1948.

In the 1940s there were major changes happening in the British Empire. One of the major shifts which happened in South Asia was the eventual rise of Indian Nationalism and the division of India and Pakistan. Soon many African countries were also calling for their own independence from the British. In that context the All Africa Conference, in which Sheikh Mbarak was present and which was held in 1948 made him realize that nationalism could have

the potential in certain parts of the world to become a kind of an ethnic or racial nationalism.

He recognized that in places like East Africa, where there were composite groups of people who did not fit the paradigm of a particular kind of nation, this was going to be a serious problem. >



Sheikh Mbarak inspecting the Honour Guard at the annual Eid Baraza, mid-1950s.

On the East African coast the Afro-Asian Association, the Comoran Association and other civic society groups began to have a very political agenda and started to petition to be representatives of their ethnic communities. Everybody wanted to ensure that their identities were the ones that are most represented. This development had the power to lead to a great deal of fragmentation of the population of the coast, a process being fostered by the British. They already had a policy of native and non-native. And for them native meant black African.



Sheikh Mbarak began to realize that this was an opportunity and a challenge. An opportunity because he could now present himself as someone who represented all these different groups, or a challenge, because of his own identity. He would be seen as a member of only one of these groups.

He did the best he could in the circumstances to define a politics of representation that was inclusive and not exclusive, but in the end because of the way nationalism was going in East Africa and other places, there was no chance for his approach.

Left

Whenever Sultan Khalifa ibn Harub was visiting his domains in Kenya, he would usually be invited to have luncheon at Mbarak Al Hinawy's house.

If there is anything that we should remember about Sheikh Mbarak's life is that he actually shaped the world view of a community, and that he had a major impact on language, culture, politics, his children, and on everyday communities that he worked with. People still do remember him as someone who brought people together, which is a really important legacy.



At the behest of the Wali for the Coast, Mbarak Al Hinawy, the radio station 'Sauti ya Mvita' (SYM), Voice of Mvita (Mombasa), began delivering a one-hour program for Arabs and Muslims in 1952. Programming on SYM included an Arabic language news service, Arabic and Swahili music, a broadcast of the Muslim festivals of Eid and the annual Maulidi celebrations on Lamu. Mbarak Al Hinawy regularly used the radio station to spread his messages fostering Swahili identity in times of rising nationalism. By the mid-1950s SYM was transmitting to Somalia, Tanganyika, Zanzibar and Pemba, and across the Indian Ocean to southern Arabia.





The Mombasa Institute of Muslim Education (MIOME) in the early 1950's.

Improving educational opportunities and introducing technical education

At the end of the year 1928 Mbarak travelled to Zanzibar to marry Saadah Al Harrasy, a cousin of the second wife of the Sultan. This was the occasion for him to meet for the first time with Sultan Khalifa ibn Harub Al Busaidi, a modern and open-minded ruler, interested in the latest technology and diplomatic activities as well as modern education.

About one year before this meeting, *The Arab Girls' School* – the first government school for girls in Zanzibar – opened its doors. Support from the Sultan and the Arab elites who collaborated with British officials were crucial to open the school and win over sceptical parents. The early success of the school, in terms of gradually increasing both enrolments and public accolades, surprised officials who assumed



Saadah bint Ali ibn Salim Al Harrasy was a cousin of the Sultana Nunuu bint Ahmed ibn Salim Al Busaidi, the second wife of Sultan Khalifah ibn Harub Al Busaidi.

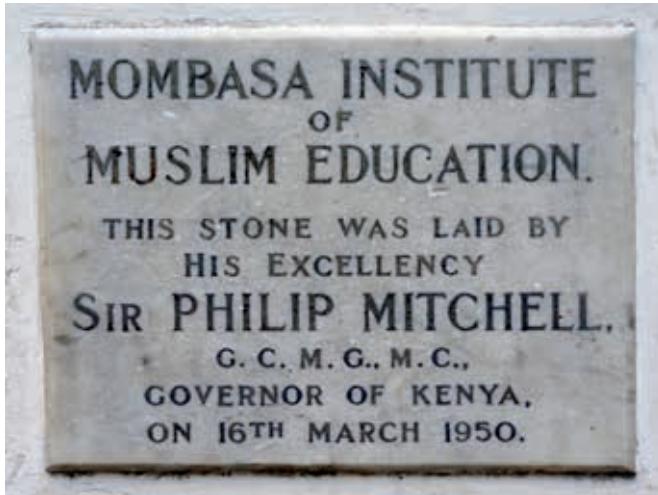
that Muslims would oppose educating their daughters. The sentiment within the Arab population meanwhile had changed. It became a question of prestige for the upper class Arab and Swahili to invest in the education of their boys and girls.

Nonetheless it was still a long way to reach the goal of a modern technical education, meeting western standards, and suitable for the Arab community, conforming with the duties of a practising Muslim.

It was only in 1950 that Sultan Khalifa, at the age of 70, travelled to Mombasa to officially inaugurate the Mombasa Institute of Muslim Education (MIOME), the first institution for higher education established specifically for the technical and vocational skills of coastal Muslims. In 1941 Mbarak Al Hinawy was appointed by the Sultan as Wali for the Coast, and started working on the idea of the institute. As a founding member of the MIOME he managed to bring together the various parties of the coastal society. Crucial to the project's realisation was his success in securing a donation of 34 acres of land at a top location in Mombasa for the MIOME's premises.

*Impressions of MIOME
taken in 2019*

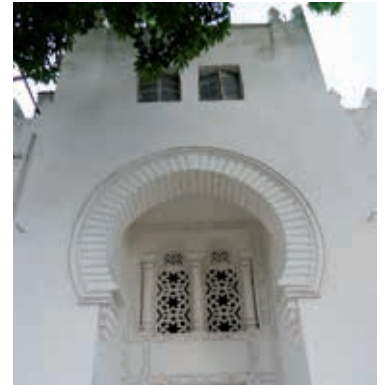




MIOME was purpose-built in the Indo-saracenic or Moorish style, signalling the heritage and aspirations of its Muslim patrons. Like the East African Welfare Society, MIOME exemplified the cooperation between the leaders of different Muslim communities in East Africa, including the Sultan of Zanzibar, the Aga Khan and leaders of the Bohora community. Additionally, the project was supported by the British government through its Treasury and Sir Phillip Mitchell, who served as MIOME's first Chairman. The school's motto was 'Endeavor and Achieve'. Its initial curriculum included woodworking, engineering, seamanship and navigation, and the marine trades. In addition, the school made provisions for the 'regular performance of religious worship'. The curriculum included religious instruction as well as Arabic language.²

In May 1951, the Mombasa Institute of Muslim Education enrolled its first batch of 200 students in its technical education programme.

Right
Students at MIOME campus,
2019.



*Impressions of MIOME
taken 2019*



The original emblem of MIOME with symbols for engineering and seafaring on top and the motto 'Endeavor and Achieve'.

The institution passed through a number of modifications and name changes: in 1966, now with the Seyyidi, the coastal residents formerly subjects of the Sultan, belonging to the state of Kenya, MIOME became the Mombasa Technical Institute (MTI) and started to admit students regardless of religion. In the year 1976, MTI became Mombasa Polytechnic. It consisted of departments for Business Studies, Electrical and Electronics Engineering, Building and Civil Engineering, Mechanical Engineering and Applied Sciences. On August 23, 2007, Mombasa Polytechnic was elevated to a University College. In 2013 former MIOME was finally elevated to Technical University of Mombasa (TUM).

In spite of all these changes, the campus structure developed in the 1940s is still serving the needs of the country. Today 14,000 students are enrolled at the university, studying in two shifts per day.

Passing on a personal conviction

For Mbarak Al Hinawy, providing the best secular education possible for his children was a priority. He was one of the first Arabs in Mombasa to enrol his daughters in a convent school. Three of them later on enrolled at university. His eldest son Farid enjoyed a unique education, which led to a very special career.

In 1938 Mbarak travelled to Egypt to enrol his son, Farid, only 5 years old, at the prestigious Victoria College at Alexandria, an institution built by the British to educate future leaders in the region. Famous graduates from Victoria College include the scholar Edward Said and King Hussein I of Jordan. The college motto is: *Cuncti Gens Una Sumus* – We Are All One People.

This very young boy, Farid, became the first 'East African' to be accepted as a student at Victoria College, thus facing many years living thousands of kilometres away from his family and home. This was only possible because his father's close friend Mustafa al Nahas Pasha took over the tutelage and integrated him like a son into his family. Between 1928 and 1952 Mustafa al Nahas Pasha intermittently served as Prime Minister of Egypt. This way Farid grew up in an international and at same time highly political atmosphere. After his graduation in 1948 he went to London for two years to study and read law before returning to Kenya in 1960, joining the country's diplomatic corps.

On December 12, 1963, Kenya became independent with Jomo Kenyatta as the first president. Prior to independence Kenyatta and Mbarak Al Hinawy conferred on several occasions to discuss measures to ensure a peaceful transition of the coastal strip into the new state.

When Kenyatta finally led Kenya into independence, he emphasized the importance of the culture of dialogue, which Mbarak Al Hinawy was also promoting. In one of his speeches to the people Kenyatta said:



Farid bin Mbarak Al Hinawy with Jomo Kenyatta, late-1960s.

I appeal to all of you – white, brown, black – as citizens of Kenya to unite and work harmoniously for the progress of our country.

I wish to tell you that without this cooperation, without this working together, we can not benefit our country.

We cannot make progress in any direction, unless we work as one team.

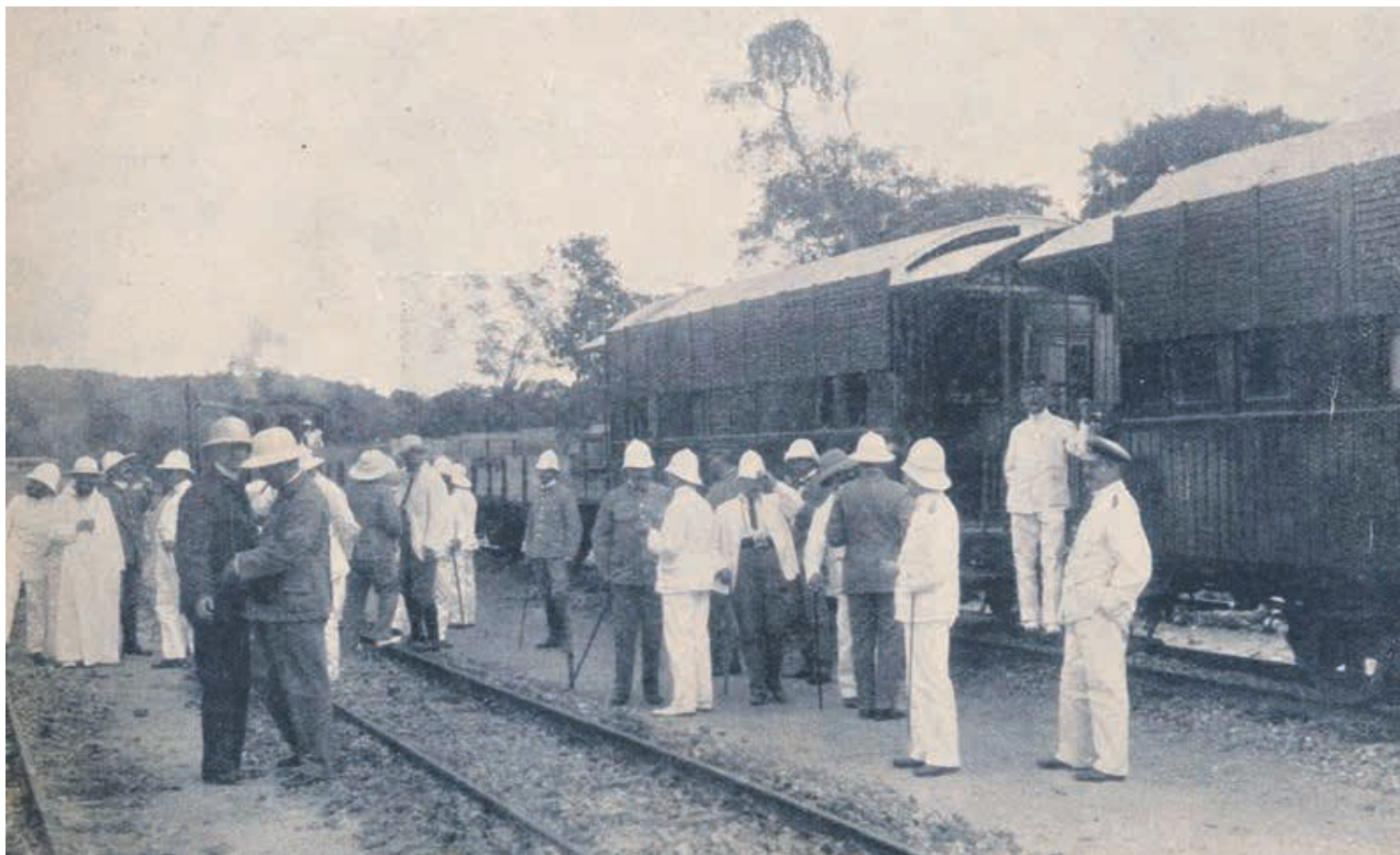
We must learn to forgive one another. We must adapt the method of give and take.³

The spirit of working together became exemplary in the person of Farid Al Hinawy, when Kenyatta appointed him first as his Chief of Protocol and later on as ambassador to Congo, Egypt and other Arab states. When Sultan Qaboos began to build up a modern Sultanate of Oman in the 1970s, Farid immigrated to Oman, the home of his ancestors. There, Sultan Qaboos called on him to serve in Oman's newly built diplomatic corps. Farid Al Hinawy again became ambassador in Egypt, but this time for the Sultanate of Oman.

Mediating conflicts and divergent interests

By 1890 the colonial powers Germany and Britain had managed to install their protectorates throughout the territory that was formerly controlled by the Sultan of Zanzibar. To exploit the land and its valuable natural resources both nations started to build railways from the coast to the hinterland. The tracks of the German Tanganyika Railway ran 1250 kilometres from Dar es Salaam to Kigoma on the east coast of Lake Tanganyika. It was completed there in February 1914, only a few months before the beginning of the First World War. Already in 1901 the 940 kilometer track of the British Uganda Railway connected Mombasa with Kisumu on the east coast of Lake Victoria. Both railways quickly became the backbone of the respective protectorates. Their construction had a dramatic impact on the development of the region and the coast, particularly the Uganda Railway.

Before the railway, Nairobi was an uninhabited swamp. Today Nairobi is the largest city of Kenya with a population of over 4 million. Construction of the railway began at Mombasa, in 1896. The small harbour city was turned into a buzzing modern port. Warehouses were constructed, accommodations for the workers were built, repair shops and workshops opened. But the enormous cost of the construction – some 5.3 million British pounds – was almost double the planned budget.



Passengers waiting at the starting point of the Tanganyika Railway at Dar es Salaam. Photograph taken from an article about the completion of the German Tanganyika Railway in the German weekly magazine 'Die Wochenschau', February 14, 1914. When Germany lost the war in 1918, the territory of German East Africa and the Tanganyika Railway became part of British East Africa.

To the British, one option to cover part of the unexpected costs was to sell abandoned land along the coast to develop a colonial plantation economy. The lush greenery and the rich soil which can be cultivated several times a year and is what had drawn Omani Arabs to the coast centuries ago, now attracted many Europeans. For them, too, East Africa seemed like a Garden of Eden. But their claims to the land often resulted in prolonged and protracted disputes.

Vast tracts of land that had been declared unoccupied or abandoned and subsequently sold to planters actually still belonged to local Arab, African and Swahili families. It just was not under cultivation at the time of the British land survey.

Before the arrival of the British, land tenure along the coast was based on Swahili and African customary law and Islamic law, none of which had been put in writing. Therefore the British implementation of land titles in East Africa failed almost completely, leading to thousands of disputes. Within the period from 1910 to 1921 the Land Registration Court dealt with 9,367 claims.

Nothing like this happened when the Omanis settled in the area, centuries before the British. It must be deduced that the immigrants from Arabia acquired the land rights by observing local claims and customs, through payments or marriage.

To settle the flood of conflicts of land claims the British administration installed regional Land Arbitration Boards. Those legal bodies however were dependent on trained survey staff and clerks who were familiar with the culture and traditions of the coastal people, cognizant of the rules of the British administration, and able to communicate directly with the conflicting parties in Swahili, Arabic and English.

One of the few people capable of doing so in those days was Mbarak Al Hinawy. He had joined the British Civil Service after his military service in the British army in World War I, in which he was protecting the Uganda Railway. Soon thereafter he was appointed Arab Assistant to the Land Arbitration Board and in 1921, at an age of only 25, he became a member of the Arbitration Board for Mombasa Island and Deputy Chairman of Arbitration Boards of the *Seyyidi*, the 10-mile strip officially belonging to the Sultanate of Zanzibar.

Filling these and other positions within the British administration, Mbarak gained valuable experience in mediation between the British administration and the different ethnic groups, their approaches to conflicting situations, modes and strategies in discussions.

In 1931, Mbarak was selected by the British administration as one of two representatives of the local Arab and Swahili communities to be invited to the *Joint Select Committee of the two Houses of British Parliament on Closer Union in East Africa* in London. The aim of this committee was to consider prospects of political and economic cooperation between Britain's various colonies and protectorates and to get first-hand information about the situation on the ground. In his speech, Mbarak complained about the situation of the poor people who suffered from the loss of their homes due to road construction and who received no compensation. He also emphasized the fact that the 10-mile coastal strip, the *Protectorate of Kenya*, was by British agreement under the sovereignty of the Sultan of Zanzibar. Any cession of this territory to other East African entities would violate the terms of the agreement and impinge on the authority of Sultan Khalifa ibn Harub Al Busaidi.

Riadh Abdalla Said Al Busaidi

Sultan Khalifa ibn Harub Al Busaidi



In May 1911 Sayyid Khalifa accompanied his cousin and brother-in-law

Sultan Ali ibn Hamoud, to attend the coronation of King George V in London. Due to illness Sultan Ali broke his journey in Paris where he decided to abdicate. Sayyid Khalifa ended up representing the Sultanate of Zanzibar at the coronation. The British offered him the throne in December 1911. Like the previous four sultans, he was made to sign an oath of obedience to the British crown. Sultan Khalifa became the longest reigning Sultan in Zanzibar from 1911 to 1960.

Sultan Khalifa enjoyed sports but did not have much opportunity to participate in the sports he liked the most, such as horse riding. He was an enthusiastic sailor and was often on his sailing yacht, which was sleek and fast. When participating in the local yacht races, which he would win, he would then withdraw – as a gentleman and sportsman – to allow others to win the race. There are many such distinguishing examples of his character.

Among other things, he was a keen stamp collector with many well-kept stamp albums. As his state duties became more onerous, he stopped

collecting. When he learned that I liked to collect stamps, he used to keep for me the stamps from letters and from the many Christmas cards he used to receive from many parts of the world.

During his reign Sultan Khalifa used to regularly visit the territories still under the Sultanate of Zanzibar. Apart from attending two other coronations of British monarchs, King George VI and Queen Elizabeth II, he visited several other countries during his reign. He was highly respected and honored wherever he went. In many ways he was flamboyant and full of life.

He was not only a wise ruler but a patient one who knew how to balance his limited authority to the benefit of his country and subjects. For example, in 1913 the British Government decided that Zanzibar, like the rest of the colonies, will come under the Colonial Office. Sultan Khalifa realized that henceforth Zanzibar would come under the rule of a British Governor. He was not happy with this deci-



At Cumberland Hotel, London, August 1960. Meeting Sultan Said ibn Taimur of Oman. From left to right: Omar (Sultan Khalifa's butler), Sheikh Said ibn Ali Al Mugheiry (a companion of Sultan Khalifa), a representative of British Government, Sultan Khalifa ibn Harub, Sultan of Zanzibar, ADC to Sultan of Oman, Sultan Said ibn Taimur, Sultan of Oman (the father of Sultan Qaboos) and Col. Alexander, ADC to Sultan of Zanzibar.



Sultan Khalifa ibn Harub chairing the 'Privy Council' at Beit al-Ajaib around 1920. The Privy Council used to meet once a month, on the first Monday of every month.

Below

A flag with the monogram of Sultan Khalifa.

Right

Sultan Khalifa before getting into his black Austin.



sion. He persuaded the British to create instead a Protectorate Council and the Sultan would be its Chairman and the British Resident would be the vice-chairman. The reality is that Zanzibar would still be run by the British officials but the Sultan would be there as the figurehead with limited authority.

He commanded much respect from his subjects. This was very apparent during the years when the country started having opposing political parties and political changes. He was able to stay above politics and act as a stabilizing force. During

World War I the British requested him to convince his subjects not to support the Germans.

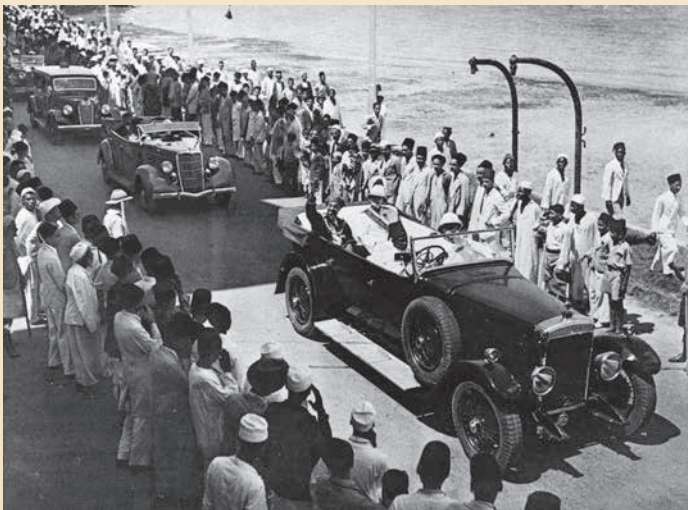
Sultan Khalifa had very good relations with various monarchs. I remember whenever the Aga Khan, Muhammad Shah III used to come to Zanzibar, they would spend time together. In the afternoon they would either drive together or meet at Kibweni Palace, just the two of them. The other monarch who used to visit him was the Kabaka of Buganda who had greatly admired Sultan Khalifa. In 1956 the Kabaka came to Zanzibar with his young son, the present Kabaka Mutebi II.

I was asked to spend time with him as I was still young then.

Sultan Khalifa had three boys with his first wife Sayyida Matuka bint Hamud Al Busaidi. Two of them passed away while still young. The one who

survived was Sayyid Abdalla who succeeded him in 1960. After his first wife passed away, he married Sayyida Nunuu bint Ahmed Al Busaidi.

Sultan Khalifa ibn Harub Al Busaidi died in Stone Town at the age of 81 on October 9, 1960.



Celebrating the Silver Jubilee in 1936.



Sultan Khalifa on the Throne with his consort, Sayyidah Nunuu standing next to him.



Mbarak Al Hinawy's skills to balance and unite the various fractions of society further advanced and grew in importance after his appointment as Wali of Mombasa in 1937 and Wali for the Coast in 1941. However, in a certain way his efforts stood in direct contrast to the British policy of 'divide-and-rule' through which they gained and maintained power by breaking up the strong alliances between the various ethnic and social structures in East Africa. Step by step their policy led to a growing uncertainty among the peoples about their social status and where they belonged.

Until 1910 Arabs, Africans from local tribes and people of mixed background all were treated equally according to British law. About ten years later, Arabs found themselves being defined as non-natives for tax purposes but as natives under the Criminal Procedure Ordinance. But how to define who is Arab and who is Swahili or African within a society that unites people of different origin, cultural background and language? Colonialism demanded a rigid fixing of identities based on European hierarchies of race, class, religion and ethnicity. This was essential for the British to assure white supremacy over the colonised populations – thus splintering a centuries-old heterogeneous society.

These insecurities even increased when World War II turned Mombasa into the main logistic hub for the British Navy and Air Force for the African and Asian region. With thousands of soldiers coming and going, there was a shortage of food and other provisions. People believed that Mbarak would be able to help them by speaking on their behalf with the British.



Sheikh Mbarak as 2nd Lieutenant, 1940. After only a few months of service in the army, he applied for release to be able to fully concentrate on the demands and needs of the population.



An informal baraza
at Mbarak's home

Mbarak's son Khalifa Al Hinai remembers: *'During the war my father hosted a baraza almost daily here in his home to listen to the elders, learn of people's*

concerns and fears, and trying to find ways to calm them and to solve their problems.'

The baraza is an old Swahili and Arab tradition of neighbourhoods to meet on a regular basis to exchange news and to discuss and solve problems within the community. This custom to meet at his house continued even after the war.

Prof Zulfikar Hirji, who wrote Mbarak Al Hinawy's biography, reports:

Such gatherings involved male members of the Arab, Swahili and other communities, and were a time when they could meet with the Wali to discuss a range of issues. In the daily baraza, one could get local news as well as circulate it. For the Wali it was a form of feedback from the very people he represented. In addition, barazas were occasions when marriages could be arranged, when births and deaths were announced, and a forum in which locals could settle minor disputes. A decade after Sheikh Mbarak's appointment as Wali for the Coast, he was holding his baraza at his new house on the waterfront side of Old Mombasa's Vasco da Gama Street, the street that would later be renamed 'Sir Mbarak Hinawy Road'.⁴

Still today, the place in front of Mbarak's house at the waterfront of old Mombasa's harbour is a vivid meeting place. The children of Mbarak created a space for daily neighbourhood barazas. Late every afternoon men gather in vivacious discussion or just telling jokes. Young people listen to music and exchange the latest trends and news.



The baraza place in front of the house where Mbarak Al Hinawy lived until his death and which is still owned by his descendents.





Sheikh Mbarak leaving Jubilee Hall with members of the Arab community of Mombasa at an Eid Baraza, late 1950's.

Sheikh Mbarak's leadership of the official Eid Barazas in Mombasa was significant for the population. They took place twice a year, at the end of Ramadan, the Islamic month of fasting (Eid al-Fitr) and the day commemorating Prophet Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son Ismail to God (Eid al-Adha). These ceremonies were an expression of the recognition of the contractual sovereignty of the Sultan over the coast. On this occasion the Wali for the Coast inspected the guard of honour that would be considered personal to him. *'In this sense the Eid Barazas became the time when the British publicly reaffirmed the Sultanate's ascendant role in the Protectorate. By extension, at these occasions the Wali for the Coast was a symbolic reminder for the British of the 1895 treaty to which they and the Sultanate had been signatories.'*⁵

Sheikh Mbarak's reception of the dignitaries following the formal part took place at the Jubilee Hall. This was always an opportunity for dialogue with representatives of the many different ethnic groups living in his area of responsibility.



Continuing the old tradition, Mbarak's son Khalifa Al Hinai still today invites friends and members of the Muslim community of Mombasa to Mbarak's house after the Eid al Fitr Baraza.

After the meeting at the Jubilee Hall he used to visit the Al Mandhri mosque for prayer with members of the Muslim community of Mombasa, before inviting them to his home for a coffee and a snack. This ritual took place every year until Sheikh Mbarak Al Hinawy's death in 1959.

At the end of the 20th century the Eid al Fitr Baraza was revived with a low profile by then mayor of Mombasa, Najib Balala. Since the Kenyan politician Hassan Ali Joho was governor of Mombasa County in 2013, Eid Barazas have become of ever growing importance for the local society.



Prior to each year's Eid Baraza a committee of Mombasa citizens collects requests and demands as well as noting the effects or results of recent political and social decisions. At the baraza itself the governor is then publicly confronted with the points of criticism and is expected to respond appropriately. Women also take the floor on this occasion.



Governor Hassan Ali Joho explaining himself in front of the audience of the Eid al Fitr Baraza 2019.

In an interview given in 2019 the governor shared his thoughts about the importance of the annual Eid Baraza of Mombasa today:

Eid Baraza was first introduced by Sir Mbarak Al Hinawy. He brought the gathering together, most importantly to reflect over the year from Ramadhan to Ramadhan and also to express the plans they had for the city of that time.

Thus we have carried on in this conversation. First to reflect about our history, second to take this opportunity to reflect more politically and socially where we are as a city and where we want to go.

The point is to talk together, to live together, to respect each other and each other's culture and to appreciate one another.

The people of Mombasa and even the entire 10-mile strip are heavily connected to the Omani people. Families are tied together. For us historical connection is important and we have been able to carry it on. We have not lost our identity as a people. We have not lost our influence and the culture over the period. And that is our strength. Our diversity is our strength.⁶



Every year more than a thousand inhabitants of Mombasa – male and female, young and old – join the religious festivities and debates at the Eid al Fitr Baraza.



One of the major issues discussed in public at the Eid Baraza at Mombasa in 2019 was the shortage of fresh water in the city. Governor Joho had already started a project to build a desalination plant for Mombasa but people were afraid that it would be mired in the bureaucracy and never completed. They therefore strongly requested him to concentrate all his efforts to see that the project was realized within the final three years of his rule.

About 60 years earlier a different water issue led to heated discussions in the City Council and almost resulted in the complete destruction of the Old Town of Mombasa.



Detail of one of the original planning maps for Mombasa's sanitation system. The plan shows the location of houses, between which are red lines, marking the course of the new sewage pipes and their direction of flow.

The terrain of Mombasa Old Town is sloping to the coastline. All water collected in the pipes under the streets and the surface water during heavy rainfalls pours into the sea.



The immense population growth in Mombasa required an urgent modernisation of the infrastructure. With just 27,000 inhabitants in 1900, 47,000 in 1930 – mostly due to the construction of the Uganda Railway – this number doubled by 1946 to 100,000. A major problem to solve was the lack of a proper sanitation system. In those days all households of Mombasa Old Town had pit latrines. This was a serious health hazard that could be no longer ignored. To solve this issue some British voices in the administration recommended razing Old Mombasa to the ground and relocating the people living there. Wali Mbarak Al Hinawy strongly opposed this idea. To him, Mombasa Old Town was an important symbol of the unique multicultural heritage of the coast that had to be preserved. Thus he persuaded the British government to design and implement a comprehensive sewage system.



The arrow head shaped sewer covers show where the main channels are situated and in which direction it flows.

The planning and realization took many years. To make the system work, all households were forced by the Health Department to connect to the sewage pipes and to fill up the pits, covering them with concrete. The many small sewage pipes of the houses were grouped in five major main lines and then passed through four pumping stations to the treatment plant.

Sheikh Mbarak Al Hinawy was the driving force behind it, but sadly did not live to see it in operation. He died in November 1959, whereas the sewage system started to work in the early 1960's.

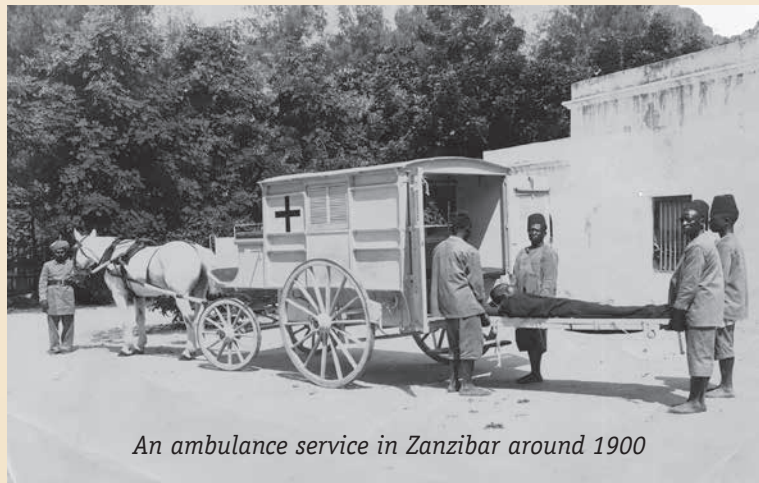
Dr Kalandar Khan, Coordinator of the Coastal Research Unit of the National Museums of Kenya and since many years involved in the preservation of Mombasa Old Town summarizes:

The full-hearted engagement of Wali Mbarak Al Hinawy definitely did and still pays off for the continuation of Swahili culture and the architecture of this city. Fort Jesus is a registered World Heritage Site and Mombasa Old Town is now found on the Tentative List of UNESCO World Heritage. Hopefully, when having done most of the work described in our Conservation Plan, Mombasa Old Town will be also fully registered as a World Heritage site.⁷

Improving sanitary conditions and setting up a functional health care system were important tasks also for the city of Stone Town on Zanzibar island. After the introduction of a fresh water pipeline by Sultan Barghash in the 1870s the situation was enhanced and the danger of cholera epidemics – which had happened regularly in previous decades – decreased significantly. With the set-up of hospitals, training for nurses and education of doctors in Europe, Zanzibar even turned into the centre of medical care on the East African coast.

Riadh Abdalla Said Al Busaidi

Health Care in Zanzibar



An ambulance service in Zanzibar around 1900

The history of Zanzibar hospitals goes back to mid-1800 when the

Mambo Msiige building was converted to a European style hospital. Additionally, the Zanzibar government built a hospital in early 1930s on the sea side of Mnazi Mmoja. Apart from the out-patient department, the hospital had an operating room and wards for admitting patients, isolation wing for treatment of tuberculosis patients and an out-patient dental clinic. A maternity wing was funded by a donation from the Karimjee Jivanjee Foundation. Zanzibar had the best medical care in East Africa.

Apart from hospitals and medical centres both in Zanzibar and

Pemba, it also had a separate department in charge of community health services for prevention and eradication of communicable diseases.

The government worked with the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) to train Zanzibaris as health inspectors and midwives. As a result of UNICEF training, a Maternity centre was opened in Makunduchi in 1950 by Sayyidah Nunuu, the wife of the Sultan Khalifa.

In July 1955 a new hospital was opened next to the old Mnazi Mmoja Government Hospital. This new hospital was named after its funder *Hassanali Karimjee Jivanjee Hospital* (It was renamed *V.I. Lenin Hospital* after 1964). The hospital had the state of the art equipment and facilities of that time. The old hospital continued to function and was referred to as *The West Wing* which catered to senior Government officials. The Sultan of Zanzibar and his family were all cared for by the doctors at this hospital. The medical care was free with nearly all kinds of medicine available.

Among the East African countries, Zanzibar had an advanced Dental Service for school children. It also had an infectious disease hospital which was located at Changu Island (or Prison Island).

Many of the local doctors and nurses were highly trained and specialized. In 1960, Dr Rashaad ibn Nasser Al Lamki, who is an FRCS (Fellowship of the Royal Colleges of Surgeons *The Royal College of*

Surgeons of England), performed open heart surgery at this hospital. I mentioned Dr Rashaad only to highlight the fact that Zanzibar Hospital was well equipped to carry out such delicate operations. However, there were many other Zanzibari doctors who were in service on both Unguja and Pemba.

The Community Health Services division had a long and professional relationship with the World Health Organization (WHO) to help eradicate malaria and other communicable diseases. As a result, in 1963 WHO declared Zanzibar '*malaria free*.'



The 'Hassanali Karimjee Jivanjee Hospital'





The Peace Memorial Museum, locally known as Beit al-Amaan (House of Peace). Photograph taken on the occasion of its inauguration by Sultan Khalifa in 1925.

Archiving documents of a shared history

After World War I, in 1925, the Peace Memorial Museum was inaugurated in Stone Town on Zanzibar. The purpose of this architectural landmark was to commemorate World War I and to create a place to collect and preserve documents of the Omani and colonial history in East Africa. First of all it served as an archive for the British Protectorate, but in time it also hosted more and more literary materials such as manuscripts and books coming from family and individual donations.

In 1954 the administration of the British Protectorate decided to establish the *Zanzibar Archives*, which took over the duties of the Peace Memorial Museum and in 1963, shortly before Zanzibar's independence, a special building was erected to house the archival collections, all material preserved at the Peace Memorial Museum as well as acquired Arabic books printed by lithography, Arabic manuscripts, letters

and correspondence, and, in addition to that, all official papers coming from the Sultan's Palace and the Zanzibar High Court.

After the revolution on Zanzibar, the new state of Tanzania showed no real interest in this archive. The documents were not maintained and began to deteriorate. This situation only changed when in the mid-1980's two international missions set up a recovery programme. The archive was renamed *Zanzibar National Archives* and became a public organization under the Archives Act.

Although the archive now also restarted collecting documents, books, magazines and photographs, the budget and care for the archive in the following decades was still insufficient. The building began to decay, with water dripping from the roof into the rooms, endangering once more the collections and historic documents.

Due to the damage to the building structure, many documents had to be stacked in a hurry in safe places and now have to be filed again and ordered correctly.



The professional restoration of the books and documents requires highly trained staff and patience.



Since the history of Zanzibar and East Africa is closely linked to that of Oman, the government of the Sultanate of Oman decided in 2018 to help save the archives with financial and technical support. The building was renovated and a collaboration between the *Zanzibar National Archives* and the *National Records and Archives Authority* of the Sultanate of Oman was agreed upon to rescue the common history of both nations.

The often severely damaged documents are undergoing a professional conservation now onsite with the help of experts and state of the art conservation equipment both sent from Oman to Zanzibar. At the same time staff from Zanzibar will be trained in Muscat in handling and preserving the documents according to modern scientific archival standards.

Parallel to the conservation process, all documents are being scanned to make them available to the international community of researchers, while preserving the originals from further damage.

It is a big task that has to be undertaken. By 2019 about 600 documents had been scanned and saved – with thousands still to come. It is estimated that it will take about ten years to process all of the collections.

In the Zanzibar National Archives alongside historical documents and writings also old postcards and private records can be found, such as this page from a diary dated 1894.





A living common cultural heritage

A glimpse into Abdullah Khalfan Mahrouqy's halwa production in Stone Town.

It is said that when Sultan Said ibn Sultan first arrived on the island of Zanzibar in 1828, he distributed a special sweet to the curious people standing on the beach, *Omani halwa*. It is assumed that until then, the only sweets the local population had known were fruits such as bananas or mangoes.

For his warm welcome in Stone Town, *Omani halwa* certainly was not decisive, but this gesture of generosity – a crucial part of the traditional welcome ritual in Omani society – will not have hurt, either. In fact, this custom, and with it Omani *halwa*, was to spread from Zanzibar throughout East Africa in the following decades. Even today, *halwa* cooking sites can be found in many places, especially on Zanzibar and in the cities on the coast.

In Arabic, *halwa* means sweet. The basic ingredients for *Omani halwa* are clarified butter, caramelized sugar and starch. With constant stirring, the viscous mass is cooked for hours over a fire in a large copper kettle until it is finally filled into plastic or enamel bowls.

In East Africa *halwa* is still cooked according to the original, very purist recipe. You only have the choice between a dark or light variant, depending on the degree of caramelization of the sugar. In contrast to that, in today's Oman you will find many variations flavoured with saffron, cardamom, almonds or rose water.

The art of cooking *halwa* is often handed down within the families of Omani origin from generation to generation. Abdullah Khalfan Mahrouqy's *halwa* factory in the centre of Stone Town is over 120 years old. As he has no successor himself, he intends to pass on his business to his loyal employees. For him, it is most important that the tradition introduced by Omanis a long time ago continues and the business is run by competent *halwa* cooks.



Abdullah Khalfan Mahrouqy



The finished halwa is usually portioned into small plastic cups for street sale or for celebrations.



Another legacy of the Omani presence in Zanzibar and East Africa that is still alive today is traced back to the reign of Sultan Barghash ibn Said. He used the time of his exile for extensive travels to other lands, including Egypt. What particularly impressed him there, apart from the Arabic printing presses, was the courtly life, especially a music described as *taraab*. The Arabic word *taraab* means joy, pleasure, delight, entertainment. It therefore does not stand for a certain style of music, but rather for an emotion or mood brought about through music.

When Barghash was finally appointed Sultan of Zanzibar in 1870, he brought musicians from Egypt to his court, and also sent his own musicians to Egypt so that they could learn to play instruments that had not previously been used in East Africa, such as the Arabic zither, the *kanun*. In this way, the music of the court of Egypt was introduced to Zanzibar.

Within a few years, however, this music began to develop into a musical genre of its own, called *Zanzibari taarab*. Instead of using exclusively Arab rhythms, musicians began to incorporate African rhythms. The accompanying songs were no longer sung only in Arabic, but also in Swahili. Interaction took place between musicians on Zanzibar and along the coast with musicians on boats, who came in through the Indian Ocean trade network, and those working on the docks.

In general, 'taarab' is played by an orchestra of up to 25 musicians combining European and African musical instruments – several violins, cello, double bass and the Indian harmonium, the Arabic zither 'kanun', the Arabic long flute 'nay', the short-necked lute 'oud', African drums and other percussion instruments. In addition, there is often a choir of female voices.





The driving force behind this development and the international fame of *Zanzibari taraab* was the singer Sinti Binti Saad. She started life with very little, but ended up as one of the first women invited to perform as court musician for Sultan Barghash at his palace Beit al Ajaib. There she sang not only in Arabic, as had been customary until then, but also in Swahili.



There was actually a rule prohibiting performing *taraab* outside the palace, but still it was done and her house became a place of gathering for people to listen to *taraab*. The on-the-spot improvisation of the Swahili lyrics drew attention to whatever was happening of importance in the neighbourhood or at court. It was an opportunity to talk about political matters and to criticise in an indirect way, without expressing what it is that you were really talking about.

With the support of Sultan Ali ibn Hamud, between 1928 and 1930 Sint Binti Saad recorded 131 titles in three sessions for the labels HMS (*'His Master's Voice'*) and Columbia Records at Bombay, today's Mumbai. By 1931 some 72,000 records were sold. The number could have been much higher had it not been that only the wealthy could afford gramophones and discs in those days. Nevertheless, her music was widespread and her influence was felt throughout the general population.

Taraab thus developed into a unique music style of Zanzibar and the coast, which unified the lively melodic diversity of the Indian Ocean. It is the musical expression of a Swahili identity, the result of mutual cultural influence around the Indian Ocean.



Mohamed Ilyas is one of the most famous and influential Taarab musicians in Zanzibar today.



Mariam Hamdani, Ilyas' wife, leads Zanzibar's only all-women's taraab orchestra, the Tausi Women's Taraab Orchestra.

Historical photographs from the Zanzibar National Archives document that Kangas were worn by well-situated ladies as well as by girls of lower status.



The cultural exchange and the strong connection that still exists today between many people in East Africa and Oman is most obvious when looking at the clothing of the women and men. Both have special items of clothing that are part of many people's everyday outfits here and there.

For women, this is the often vibrantly colourful *kanga*. A *kanga* is a rectangular cotton cloth, comprising of a central design motif (*mji*); a patterned border (*pindo*); and a Swahili proverb, aphorism or contemporary statement printed in an extra frame within the central motif (*jina*).

Usually the garment is sold in 1,5 x 1 meter pairs. Most women cut and separate the pairs at the middle and wear one piece as a head covering or shawl while the other piece of cloth is wrapped around the waist.

Legend has it that in the first half of the 18th century, when Zanzibar became a main market place for white Indian cotton cloth, women from Zanzibar began to cover the textile with patterns printed with woodblocks. The colours came from indigo, henna, turmeric and tree dyes. Designs were inspired by nature, symbols and geometric shapes. Design elements from India, Persia, Oman and other cultures around the Indian Ocean were incorporated.

One of the early more popular border patterns, white spots on dark background, resembled the plumage of the guinea fowl, called in Swahili language *kanga* – thus becoming a moniker for this type of fabric.

Within only a few years these hand-printed *kangas* became very popular not only within the society of Zanzibar, but all along the East African coast. The industrial revolution accelerated the spread. *Kangas* could now be mass produced more cheaply in India, England and Germany in many different designs for the African market.



Various patterns for kangas on display at markets in Stone Town and Tabora.

One of the main reasons for the extreme popularity of this garment, apart from its low price, was certainly its versatility. *Kangas* can be used as mosquito nets, blankets, curtains, baby slings, as room decoration or even for catching small fish. In general, there are no limits in its use, unless the words on the *kanga* are deemed inappropriate.

The words printed on each *kanga* are of particular importance. They can be seen as an early form of social media. When choosing to wear a *kanga*, the woman consciously decides what message she wants to convey in public, and to whom, without expressing it verbally. It is a unique form of silent social communication. The *kanga* is the message.

Young woman of Kilwa Kivinji wearing a kanga.





Anyone who travels through the countries of East Africa and is also familiar with the Sultanate of Oman will quickly notice that the men's clothing often looks very similar. This is because the

Left
The tradition of wearing a dishdasha is continued by the younger generation of descendants of Omani traders.

Omani 'dishdasha' is also widely worn in Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Burundi, Rwanda and also parts of the Democratic Republic of Congo, especially in places along the old trade routes.

The Omani dishdasha is an almost floor-length, monochrome gown, with white or neutral colours preferred. It may not have a collar, but may be embroidered on the cuffs, neckline and chest. The tassel at the neckline is often scented with perfume.

There is no doubt that the sense of belonging to the motherland is strong among the descendants of the Omani traders. They consider themselves Omanis even though they are citizens of the regional states. Most of them are proud of the Omani history in East Africa. At the same time, they are loyal to their national governments and have very good relations with their African communities. Many of them are traders and sometimes have two or more businesses. But wearing the Omani dishdasha expresses their deep connectedness with Oman.

Most people who wear dishdashas have obtained or bought them in Oman. Those who can afford it visit their Omani relatives there, but those who have low income are generally unable to do so. In this case, the Omani relatives may visit them in Africa. Such visits between relatives take place on a frequent basis.

The Omani dishdasha is not always worn in everyday life, as it is not very suitable for some activities, such as working in the fields. It is also expensive to buy as there are only a few tailors.

In recent years, however, the first tailoring companies from Oman specialising in the production of dishdashas have opened branches in East Africa. Previously they had consistently exported large numbers of dishdashas to East Africa especially leading up to major Islamic festivals. Today in East Africa the Omani dress has become more and more ceremonial, especially for Friday prayers and religious, social, and family celebrations.



Promoting traditional crafts

The Swahili Cultural Centre in Mombasa, Kenya, plays an important role in the preservation and continuation of the Swahili Coast's craft culture, which has grown over the centuries and is often shaped by Omani influences.

The first Swahili Cultural Centre was established in 1993 in Mombasa as a joint project of the National Museums of Kenya (NMK), the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Shortly afterwards one more centre was opened in Lamu town.

The aim of these centres is to train local youth in traditional crafts so that they can be self employed and generate their own income. They encourage micro-enterprise development for the youth not only in Mombasa and Lamu, but in the

Young people of Mombasa learning the craft of 'kofia' making at the Swahili Cultural Centre, officially referred to as the Kenya Heritage Training Institute.

coastal region as a whole. At the same time these educational programmes revive, preserve and promote Swahili culture.

The Mombasa Centre offers professional education in fashion design, woodworking, *kofia* making and wood carving. In the latter two crafts the traces of Omani influence can be most clearly seen.

The *kofia* is an embroidered cap worn by men of all ages, with different professions or social status. It is an element of dress that is ubiquitous in everyday life throughout East Africa, the Comoros and in Oman, where it is known as *kumma*. This specific kind of headwear was introduced to Zanzibar and East Africa by the Arab traders, mostly Omani, and spread among the people in parallel with Islam.

Both 'kofia' and 'kumma' accompany men throughout their lives as everyday headgear – from the first years of childhood to the grave.



Whereas in the past mostly Swahili Muslim men wore the *kofia*, it has meanwhile become fashion for all.

Both men and women are involved in *kofia* making. Traditionally it is men who are responsible for the preparation and design. The labour-intensive embroidery is mainly done by women. But in former times men in Zanzibar often did stitch their *kofia* while sitting on the harbour docks and waiting for ships to come to unload.

The great demand for this headgear, which is also popular among tourists as a souvenir, has led in recent years to more and more machine-made versions circulating in the market for little money. But for the local population in East Africa and Oman, it is still important to wear an unique handmade *kofia* or *kumma*.

A *kofia* is made of two parts of thin bleached cotton cloth: a band and a crown. After having drawn the design on the cloth with a pencil, a porcupine quill or needle is used to pierce the fabric with tiny perforations according to the design. In a next step a silk or polyester thread is used to sew around each perforation with button-hole stitches. The resulting tiny sewn perforation is called a flower.



Regarding the colour of 'kofias' there are significant differences in preference between East Africa and Oman today. Most men in East Africa prefer designs in only one colour with shades varying between light and dark brown. In Oman, multi-coloured motifs are increasingly preferred.



The lines drawn on the fabric are traced with the sewing machine and white thread before the areas between the lines are filled with embroidery.

On average, there are fifteen stitches per flower. Depending on the design, a *kofia* consists of one thousand to three thousand stars. If you work intensively on it every day, it takes about a month to complete. For complex individual special orders, however, the effort can increase considerably.

Almost all patterns of the various designs are drawn from the environment, like stylised leaves and flowers. Some styles of design even have their own motif names, e.g. *Muscati*. This specific design was mostly ordered by Omanis from Muscat to be imported from Zanzibar in large numbers.

Like the *kanga* of the women, the choice and the way of wearing the *kofia* offers to men the possibility to send messages without speaking. Professor Zulfikar Hirji in his study *'The kofia tradition of Zanzibar'* summarizes the possibilities of hidden communication as follows:

By wearing or not wearing a kofia, wearing a particular type of kofia, or wearing a kofia in a particular way, a man offers cues to his audience about himself. His kofia speaks for him. Statements may be about his religious or ethnic affiliation, the extent of his piety, fashion sense, national pride, sexual prowess, economic status, kinship ties or business connections. A kofia allows a man to make one or more of these statements at the same time. Hence, how the audience reads or interprets these statements appears to be another matter.⁸



A glimpse into the woodworking and carving workshop of the Cultural Centre in Mombasa.

Wood work, especially the manufacturing of carved doors, is another craft tradition related to the common cultural heritage of Oman and coastal East Africa, which is taught and promoted at the Swahili Cultural Centre in Mombasa. The wood workshop even takes orders for customised Omani doors, the sale of which contributes to the upkeep of the training centre. Most of the wood carvers along the Kenyan Coast have been educated here.

For centuries, ornately carved wooden doors were an important feature of Omani architecture. While traditional Omani architecture is usually characterised by simplicity, the entrance door was and often still is the owner's calling card. It serves as a symbol of the wealth of the household.



This old door in Omani design tradition was reintegrated into a new building in Malindi. Because of the very high durability of the doors, this is a popular choice in both East Africa and Oman.

The production of carved entrance doors on Zanzibar flourished most in the second half of the 19th century. Sultan Barghash had not only brought musicians from Egypt to Zanzibar, but also carvers from India, who brought their skills and designs. The Indian influenced doors are topped with a semi circular field, with the carving in these arches sometimes perforated to allow air and light to pass through.

In contrast to that, Omani doors usually have a square frame over the door, containing an ornamental frieze with a plaque bearing the house owner's or artist's monogram, the date of production, carvings of quotes from the Holy Quran or Arabic poems. The door frame and the central beam, installed in one of the two shutters, are richly decorated with carvings.



The type of wood used for the massive doors and carvings was mainly local hardwood such as bread fruit tree, but also teak and mahogany wood imported from India.





Left
Typical Omani door at the entrance to the Lamu market.

Right
Carved door of a simple dwelling house in the Old Town of Lamu.

Commonly used motifs for carving, next to geometric patterns, include chains as a symbol for security and waving lines and fish as a reference to the maritime trade tradition. Date trees, palm tree branches and stylised backwards 'S', which represent the smoke of frankincense, are symbols of prosperity. Designs of lotus and flowers are also quite common on Omani doors.

Often the door was the first part of a house to be built. It took time to procure the necessary wood from India or Central Africa, to determine the details for the ornamentation and to manufacture the individual components of the door to fit precisely.

Rich Omani merchants ordered doors in Zanzibar for their residential palaces in Oman. These were then shipped in pieces to Sur or Muscat, and from there taken by camel to the rich oasis towns in the al-Sharqiyya region such as Ibra and al-Mudayrib.

The existence of these doors in Oman reflects the cultural exchange between Oman and the cultural centres that were established by Omanis along the East African coast between Mogadishu in the north and Cape Delgado in the south. But no region on this coast has been able to preserve as much material and immaterial evidence of this shared cultural heritage as the Lamu Archipelago of Kenya.



The lanes through Lamu Old Town are very narrow and are therefore only suitable for pedestrians and transport by donkey or bicycle.

The house façades are all very plain and often appear neglected, quite the opposite of the interior of the houses, which is often in very good condition.

Lamu – where cultural heritage and traditions are preserved

For centuries, the Lamu archipelago was an integral part of the Indian Ocean trade but largely isolated from the African mainland. Until about 60 years ago, it was only accessible by boat. Its most important islands are Lamu, Manda and Pate. Apart from the small airfield on Manda Island, modern transport today consists of bicycles, mopeds and very few public service cars on Lamu.

Thanks to this isolation Lamu Old Town did not lose its rich cultural heritage to modernity and was listed as a World Heritage Site by the UNESCO in 2001.



The buildings on the Lamu harbour front are almost all dating from the 19th century.

UNESCO is stating its outstanding universal value as follows:

Lamu Old Town, located on an island known by the same name on the coast of East Africa some 350 km north of Mombasa, is the oldest and best preserved example of Swahili settlement in East Africa. (...)

The town is characterized by narrow streets and magnificent stone buildings with impressive carved doors, influenced by unique fusion of Swahili, Arabic, Persian, Indian and European building styles. The buildings on the seafront with their arcades and open verandas provide a unified visual impression of the town when approaching it from the sea. While the vernacular buildings are internally decorated with painted ceilings, large niches (madaka), small niches (zidaka), and pieces of Chinese porcelain. The buildings are well preserved and carry a long history that represents the development of Swahili building technology, based on coral, lime and mangrove poles. (...)



A large inner courtyard with rooms arranged around it is typical of Lamu's architecture.

Attributed by eminent Swahili researchers as the cradle of Swahili civilization, Lamu has been an important religious centre in East and Central Africa since the 19th century, attracting scholars of Islamic religion and Swahili culture.

Today it is a major reservoir of Swahili culture whose inhabitants have managed to sustain their traditional values as depicted by a sense of social unity and cohesion.⁹

Of great importance for the good preservation of Lamu Old Town is the material from which the houses are built and how it is processed. As in other towns along the Swahili coast, stone blocks cut from coral reefs, and wood poles from mangrove trees were considered the best possible building materials, with both abundantly available at the Lamu Archipelago.

The islands mainly consist of coralline cliffs, which were formed in prehistoric times when the sea level was much higher. Coralline limestone blocks needed for the preservation and refurbishment of the buildings are still quarried on the island of Manda. As in former times, the blocks together with rags are bonded with burnt and slaked coral lime mortar.

The blocks cut out of the Manda quarry are taken by boat to the port of Lamu. From there they are transported to the construction site by donkey.





The façades of some of the houses in Lamu Old Town were and still are covered with beautiful coral chunks.

Houses built in this way can also be found in parts of Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Oman. Therefore it is assumed that this building technology found its way to the coast of East Africa as part of the exchange that took place through the trade contacts.

During the 10th century the Lamu region was an important trading hub for the long-distance trade. Omani traders obtained ivory from here, which they then transported on their ships to India and as far as China. In the 13th century, there is evidence that members of the Al Nabhani tribe emigrated from Oman to the island of Pate.

Under the reign of Sultan Said ibn Sultan, not only in Stone Town on Zanzibar, but also on Lamu, a lively building activity developed. Most of today's town dates back to the 19th century.

Right
The former palace of the Omani governor of Lamu on the waterfront now houses the museum.





The architecture of Lamu is famous for its elaborately designed decorative wall niches, called 'zidaka'. These 'wall cupboards' were used to display the wealth of the family. But even normal walls are often decorated with stucco ornaments.

While the residential architecture in Oman is characterised by simplicity and lack of any decoration, in the old houses of the Omani African trading families one usually finds decorative mud stucco around doors, passages or even on the walls, in addition to the carved doors. Probably a design idea imported from East Africa to Oman.



Lamu District has a mangrove cover of 33,500 hectares, about 60 percent of Kenya's total. Mangrove trees create habitats for important crustaceans, fish and birdlife, store massive amounts of carbon, as well as protect the fragile coastline from erosion and the risk of flooding.

The large reserves of mangroves along the coast of East Africa were not only crucial for the construction of the about

750 very solid stone houses of Lamu and other places along the coast of East Africa, but far beyond this region to the Arabian Gulf and Iraq.

Mangrove wood has a very high density. Therefore mangrove poles are very heavy and also very strong. This makes them the ideal material for ceiling construction. In addition, mangrove wood is not attacked by termites, which are otherwise omnipresent in tropical climates and whose infestation poses a great danger to the statics of a house.

In great contrast to the stability and durability of mangrove poles are beams made of halved or quartered date palm trunks, which were commonly used in Oman for the construction of ceilings, as this building material was abundant. Date palms belong botanically to the grasses; their wood is very light, very fibrous and a favourite meal for termites.

Mangrove poles therefore became one of the most important commodities in trade between East Africa and Oman, but this fact was largely neglected by researchers in the western world. This cargo was too cheap and unspectacular to be considered significant.



For the architecture in Oman, however, this trade was of great importance. Mangrove timber was used in almost all of the large residential palaces of the former African traders in Oman and also in the fortifications of the

country. It may be said that the size of the rooms in Oman were determined on the Lamu coast, based on the length of the mangrove poles, which were rarely longer than seven metres.

The two largest mangrove forests of East Africa are found in the extensive delta of the Rufiji River, about 120 kilometres south of Zanzibar and in the Lamu District, both areas which were under the rule of the Sultan of Zanzibar. The first figures on the volume of trade in mangrove poles date back to 1901, when some 400,000 individual poles were exported in that year alone. They were Lamu's most important export.

However, the commercial value of mangrove wood was not only in its use as ceiling beams. East African mangroves contain the highest content of tannins world wide. The tannins were extracted from the bark of the poles and exported for leather processing. Furthermore, out of the seven different commercially valuable species of mangroves growing on that coast, one was considered excellent for dhow masts, another one for boat ribs. Charcoal made from mangrove wood was also a sought-after commodity for export to the Middle East, as it was considered superior to that of acacia trees.

Left
Historical photograph of mangrove poles stored in a square in Stone Town. By the 1870's the Sultan of Zanzibar laid claim to the mangrove trade, imposing ten percent toll on rafter exports.



Ceiling construction with mangrove wood in a renovated residential palace of an Omani trader in Ibra, Oman.

Right, Below

Members of a reforestation and conservation initiative at Lamu not only plant new mangrove trees, but also selectively fell individual trees, which are then put to local use.



Under German and British colonial rule, the exploitation of mangrove by European companies was massively promoted, leading to the decimation of the mangrove forests. To restore the mangrove to a level which would again permit harvests, both Kenya and Tanzania were forced to ban the trade of mangrove poles in the 1980's. This was certainly a positive decision for the regeneration of this natural resource, but for many inhabitants of Lamu it had far-reaching negative economic consequences. Only in the last few years have there been government and private initiatives for the reforestation and controlled management of the mangrove forests. Trade in mangrove wood is now possible again to a limited extent.

Celebrating Lamu Cultural Festival and Maulidi

Lamu's calendar of events features two annual highlights that are of great importance for the preservation of Lamu's intangible cultural heritage, its conservation for future generations and the social cohesion of the archipelago's population – the Lamu Cultural Festival and Maulidi, the celebration of the birthday of Prophet Mohammed.

The Lamu Cultural Festival was held for the first time in 2001. It is dedicated to celebrating and preserving the local cultural heritage and has since attracted not only visitors from all areas of the Lamu District, but also tourists from all over the world, whose money is an important contribution to the running of the event.

Not only for tourists, but for the local population, the dhow races are the highlight of the Cultural Festival.

Participants from different parts of the archipelago perform their dances, share their music and special customs, while storytellers captivate curious listeners. Besides the presentation of traditional crafts such as henna painting, wood carving, boat building, mat making and palm weaving, there are also various competitions. Participants prepare well in advance and are enthusiastically cheered on by the locals. There is a swimming competition, a canoe race and a donkey race along the sea front.





The first boat has reached the finish line to great cheers.

Of greatest importance, however, are the two dhow races. These Arab sailing boats are still the most important means of transport within the archipelago, as they were in previous centuries during the time of Omani dominance in East Africa. The only difference is that today the boats are much smaller. The festival is specially timed to coincide with the local high tide to create ideal conditions for these races.



A very special event of the festival is taking place in the Lamu Fort: a poetry competition. The participants are given a specific theme, which they then incorporate in a classic Swahili poetry form. The results are then judged

Left
This woman is working on her entry for the 2019 poetry competition at Lamu fort. The given theme that year was 'Traces of Arabic culture and technology in Swahili life'.

by a jury of experts and the winner is chosen. A victory bestows great social prestige, because Lamu is also the birthplace of Professor Ahmed Sheikh Nabhani, who was born in Lamu November 27, 1927, and is widely referred to as the modern father of Swahili poetry.

He was a self-trained scholar who has assisted many renowned academics researching Swahili culture and poetry. Nabhani is also credited with assisting in the collection of Swahili and Arabic Manuscripts for the University of Dar es Salaam as well as the translation of Swahili Arabic manuscripts for Hamburg University, Germany.

When he died in Lamu in February 2017, the president of Kenya, Uhuru Kenyatta, paid tribute to him with the following words: *We will always appreciate the late Nabhani's writing and teaching of the Kiswahili language, poetry and culture which gained recognition globally.*

In one of his poems he refers to the Cultural Festival:

We Dance Because

*As Lamu celebrates, Swahili culture
is renewed. Each year the people gather
to watch and learn the ways of Waswahili.*

*Craftsmen perfect woven hats and robes.
The great ships race, dancers spin with abandon,
donkeys parade on show. Swimmers
tout their skill in clear water, while visitors
revel in the fine display. From the past*

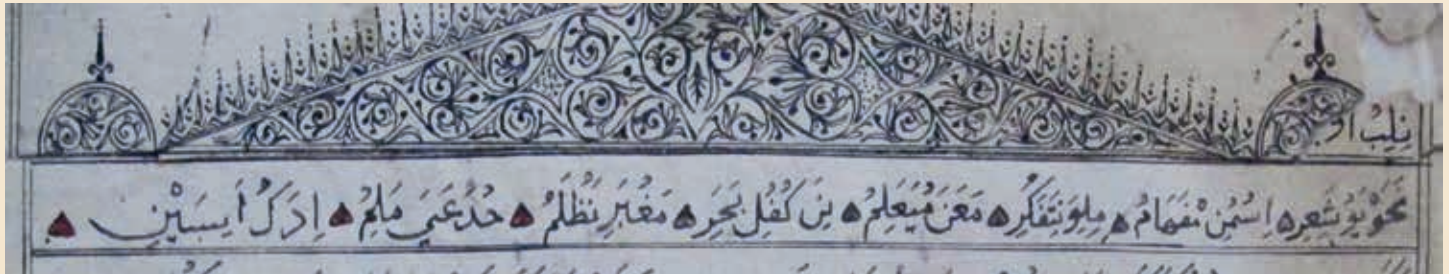
*our heritage guides us. We hold our history
close, a gift to those who follow
in Lamu.*

Ahmed Sheikh Nabhani

(Translation by Marguerite Serkin)¹⁰

Drs. Ridder H. Samsom

Poetry (*Ushairi*) in Swahili Culture



[from a ca. hundred years old manuscript in the EACROTANAL collection at the National Archives on Zanzibar]

<i>Nahau ya ushairi isomeni mufahamu</i>	*	<i>m(w)elewa na tafakuri maana muyaalimu</i>
<i>inakufuli bahari maghubari na dhulamu</i>	*	<i>hudu'aya m(w)alimu endako asibaini</i>
<i>read and comprehend the art of poetry</i>	*	<i>understand and think so you grasp the meaning</i>
<i>rhyme or genres hidden in misty clouds</i>	*	<i>the teacher's invocation gets it clear</i>

The above first lines of an old poem to be sung, chanted or recited, were written down in Arabic script long after its composition – we don't know how long. Poems were memorized and handed over orally from one generation to the next one. 'Reading' (*kusoma*) of poetry in Swahili, called Kiswahili as in the language itself, also means 'singing' of the poem.

Kiswahili is spoken as a first or second language by more than 200 million people in the world. It has a wide variety of verbal arts, with poetry having a special place because of its primarily oral performance at many occasions, privately as well as publicly. At weddings, in memorial services and in religious rituals, poetical performances play an important part,

but also at social occasions where official guests may be welcomed by a recital of long poems, or where awards are handed out accompanied by singing a praise poem especially composed for the prize winner. Several small and big *taarab* orchestras perform songs at various occasions, often composed with high poetical skills.

People along the East Coast of Africa and on the islands in the Western Indian Ocean lived and expressed their lives in Kiswahili already before the arrival of Islam in the 7th century CE. Songs said to have been composed by the legendary master poet Fumo Liyongo, who lived between the 15th and 18th century, were not captured in writing before the late 18th century. Epic poems (*tendi* or *tenzi*), often translations of Arabic religious poetry, were written down in Arabic script till the Latin script took over at the end of the 19th century.

Tendi, a genre defined by a specific scheme of rhyme and metre, may be very long, up to 4000 verses, like the 4583 verses of *Utenzi wa Rasi 'lGhuli* from 1855 CE, but the genre also developed shorter forms that are in use till today.

Chuo cha Herkal, probably the oldest *tendi* which survived in written form, is dated 1233 AH/1755 CE. Like all *tendis* written before beginning of the 20th century, it is written in Arabic script in which one verse corresponds to one written line.

Tendi have a prominent place in the Swahili society, not only in the literary history of the language, but also as a mirror of its values, views of the world and people's place in it.

A living example is *Utenzi wa Mwana Kupona*, Mwana Kupona's Poem, composed in 1275 AH/1858 CE on Pate by Mwana Kupona binti Msham. It became famous not only locally, but also by the editions of the manuscripts written in the 1920s and 1930s by

the artist Muhammed Kijuma from Lamu. In the first verses of the 102 verses with advice of the ailing composer to her daughter she sets out her situation:

In Swahili culture poems are perceived as ‘Strings of Pearls’ (*tungo za lulu*). Stringing of pearls by “divers who go deep in the sea” (as poets are seen) results in



[Library University of Hamburg, Utenzi wa Mwana Kupona, Manuscript by Muhammed Kijuma, Lamu 1331 AH/1912 CE]

*negema wangu binti * mchachefu wa sanati * upulike wasiati * asa ukazingatiya
maradhi yamenshika * hatta yametimu mwaka * sikupata kutamka * neno lema kukwambiya*

Come here, my daughter, and listen to my advice;

young though you are, perhaps you will pay attention to it.

I have been ill for a whole year and

have not had an opportunity to talk properly to you.

150 years later, in 2011, Ali El-Maawy composed an answer (*jawabu*) in 575 verses to Mwana Kupona, *Jawabu la Mwana Kupona*, demonstrating how alive poetry based on old poetical traditions is in modern Swahili society.

many genres at the heart of this culture. These genres of Kiswahili poetry range from brief, one-verse long poems as texts (*majina*) on women’s cotton wraps (*kanga/leso*) to thousands of verses of *tendi*. In between we find short quatrains (*mashairi*) of patriotic and war songs of poets like Muyaka (1776–1840) or

the songs (*nyimbo*) and the verses of Ahmad Nassir Juma Bhalo (1936–2019). Many poets proved to be great translators mainly from classical Arabic poetry in Kiswahili verse forms. A manuscript of the translation by Aydarus Othman of the chanted Arabic praise poem (*kasida*) *Al-Hamziyya* has been dated as one of the oldest in Kiswahili literature.

On the other hand, during the course of time thousands of poems were printed in Swahili newspapers as letters to the editor and in the form of dialogues (*mashairi ya kujibizana*) about almost all themes one can think of, ranging from love to politics, nature to sea faring, education to history, religion to philosophy.

Sheikh Abdallah Saleh Al Farsy (1912–1982), who translated the Holy Quran into Kiswahili, was the editor of poetry in the Zanzibari weekly *Mwongozi* (1941–1964) that published high quality poems by their readers. Especially in Tanganyika many poems of Shaaban Robert (1909–1962), which started being

published in the newspaper *Mambo Leo*, found a wide readership.

Kiswahili poetry is a sign of purity, a highly appreciated skill particularly open to women among whom many prefer to stay anonymous. Expertise in archaic Kiswahili (*Kingozi*) and its many dialects, and skill in complicated metre and rhyme patterns is a prerequisite to being called a master poet (*bingwa*). Over centuries Swahili poetry has been regarded as the most highly valued form of knowledge production, learning and dissemination.

The ‘Hurricane’, Haji Gora Haji (1933–2021 CE), master poet from Tumbatu, answered a fellow poet from Mombasa who questioned to whom Kiswahili belongs:

*listen my dear mate * see with both your eyes*
*what in this world * did not come from afar*
*if you think of that * oppression will not befall you*
*this Kiswahili language * belongs to the coast*





Spiritual music and religious recitations are an important part of the Maulidi festival.

Probably the most important festival in the Lamu calendar and an impressive example of the cultural exchange between Omani Arab and Swahili culture is Maulidi. Maulidi is the popular name given to the feast Milad-an-Nabi, held during the third month of the Muslim calendar to celebrate the birth of the prophet Mohammed. This holiday is celebrated throughout the Muslim world, but in a special way in Lamu.

This unique East African version is traced back to the Muslim scholar Swaleh ibn Alawy ibn Abdullah Jamal Al Lail, commonly known as Sharif Habib Swaleh, who was a direct descendant of Prophet Mohammed. He came from the Comoros to Lamu in 1866 during the reign of Sultan Majid ibn Said. The open-mindedness and tolerance of the Omani sultans found an intellectual counterpart in Sharif Habib Swaleh. The Riyadhha Mosque, which he founded, was and still is the centre of the Maulidi festivities. He invited all the inhabitants of the archipelago to dance at the mosque and to celebrate Maulidi, regardless of their ethnic background or social status. In this

way, a festive but also joyous version of Maulidi developed, which strengthened the cultural ties of Lamu's diverse communities. This is still the case today.

During the week-long celebration, Lamu is filled with the prayers of the faithful, the varied sounds of drums accompanying the dances and the songs of the visitors from all over the archipelago. The highlight is the procession on the last Friday of the festival from the Riyadhha Mosque to the tomb of Sharif Habib Swaleh and back again.

The 'Dance with the stick' is also very popular in Oman.

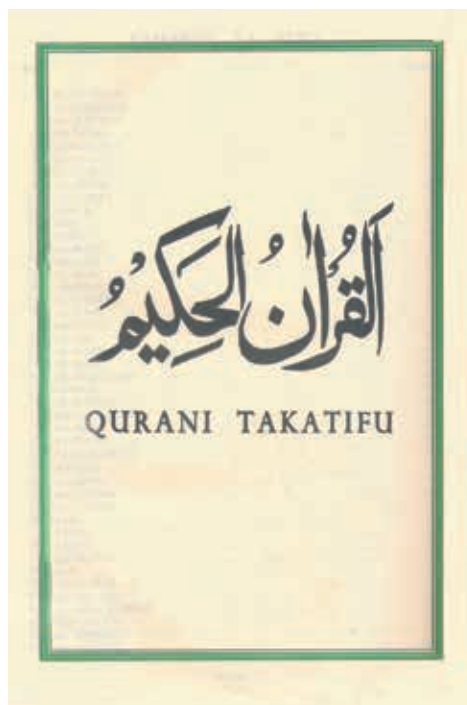
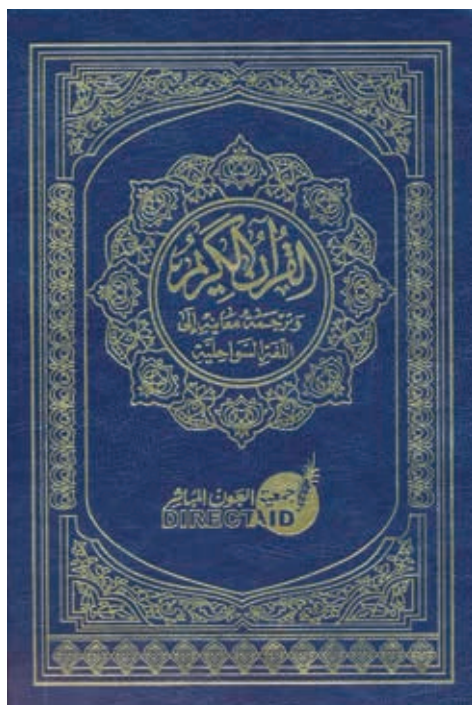


However, Maulidi does not only bring together the inhabitants of the archipelago, it is also a popular occasion for relatives living further away to meet and celebrate the holidays together, including many Omanis from the distant Sultanate of Oman.

Sheikh Abdullah Al Farsy and the Qurani Takatifu

Probably the most important unifying element for the Muslims in the whole of today's East Africa is the Holy Quran in the Swahili language, which forms the basis for their faith in everyday life.

A first translation of the Holy Quran into Swahili was made by Rev. Godfrey Dale, a Christian missionary in Zanzibar. It was published in 1923 by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge in London and was intended as a resource for African Christian teachers employed by the University Mission of Central Africa. This translation was not acceptable to Muslims because it reflected the Christian apologetics.





Although Sheikh Abdullah Al Farsy was very famous and active, it seems there are no photographs of him other than this one in an old newspaper.

It was not until 1953 that a second translation was published in Swahili. The author of this work was Sheikh Mbarak ibn Ahmed ibn Ahmad, Head of the Ahmadiyah Muslim in East Africa. His interpretation of certain verses in the Ahmadiyah tradition led to the strict rejection of the translation by the Sunni community of East Africa.

After these two failed attempts at translation, it was clear that the preparation of an officially Muslim-authorised translation was of great urgency. This difficult and very time-consuming task was taken up by Sheikh Abdullah Saleh Al Farsy, who was born on December 1st, 1912 on the island of Zanzibar to an Omani family.

After memorising the Holy Quran, he attended the local primary school in 1924. Later on, he studied Islamic sciences in Zanzibar with many famous scholars of his time among his instructors.

In 1960, he was appointed Chief Qadi of Zanzibar. In the aftermath of the Zanzibar revolution, he resigned from this post in 1967 and accepted an official invitation from President Kenyatta to immigrate to Kenya. There he served as Chief Qadi for 14 years until his retirement in 1981. He died on November 9, 1982, about eight months after he had left Kenya to join his Omani family in Muscat.

Left
One version of the Qurani Takatifu currently circulating in East Africa

The first edition of Sheikh Abdullah Al Farsy's translation and commentary of the Holy Quran under the name Qurani Takatifu (Glorious Quran) was published in 1969.

This first edition comprised 7,000 copies. About 100,000 more copies were printed in subsequent editions until 1987.

The recognition of his translation by the highest possible Muslim authority, however, did not take place until after his death. On October 28, 1994, the Qurani Takatifu was officially approved by the Al Azhar University in Cairo, Department of African Languages and Translations, after three examinations.

Sheikh Ahmed Mohdar, current Chief Qadi of Kenya, emphasises that in today's Kenya not only students of Islamic education in governmental schools take the Qurani Takatifu as a reference but also the Qadi's Courts rely on this translation. For him, Sheikh Abdullah Al Farsy opened up the real meaning of the Holy Quran to Swahili-speaking Muslims. For them it is no longer a reading without understanding. Through his translation and commentaries, they now understand the meaning of each and every single word in this holy book. An important impact on society in East Africa today.



*Sheikh Ahmed Mohdar,
Chief Qadi of Kenya*

Omanis – a part of East African society today

Arab traders had been visiting and settling on the coast of East Africa for centuries. In the 19th century, it was mainly Omani traders who opened up the region as far as the Great Lakes in Central Africa for themselves and their trade. However, the lively exchange with the African population and culture never had the spread of Islam as its target. This was in stark contrast to the efforts of the Christian missionaries, who were greatly assisted in gaining a foothold in East Africa through the active support of the Omani sultans and traders.



Placide Lubamba Ndjibu Bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Kasongo stated in an interview: 'The arrival of Muslims in this area has influenced the history of Kasongo. We learned that these Muslims came from Oman. They lived here an Islam full of conviviality. There is no problem, there is no conflict of religion. Within the same family you can find Christians and Muslims. The philosophy is simple: everyone says that before being Christians or Muslims we are brothers'.¹¹

As a result, the majority of the population of East Africa today professes Christianity. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, the proportion of Christians is even more than 90 per cent. The Muslims living in the country are concentrated in the Maniema district, especially the cities of Kasongo and Kindu – the area that was once dominated by Omani traders like Tippu Tip, and still is inhabited by many of their descendants. Men in typical Omani *dishdasha* are nothing unusual here.

A similar picture can be found in the towns along the coast of East Africa and the old caravan routes into the interior, which today's modern transport routes largely follow – particularly in Tanzania. These African Omanis remain closely linked to their relatives in the Sultanate of Oman and form active local communities that are interconnected. Although they are a minority, they are aware of their responsibility to society and strive to make an important contribution to the common good.

Noteworthy in this respect is the *'Istiqama Muslim Community of Tanzania'* (IMCOT). This organization mainly consists of Tanzanian citizens of Omani descent. It is financed by contributions and donations from its members and government funding from the Sultanate of Oman.



IMCOT's board of directors at the annual meeting 2019 in Dar es Salaam.

Over the past few decades, IMCOT has initiated and built a network of mosques and religious and secular educational institutions all over the country. Their largest project can be found on the island of Zanzibar. It is the Mahaad Istiqama Tunguu education campus with the attached Centre for Islamic Knowledge Zanzibar.

The Tunguu project started with two classes of the first and second year of primary classes in 2005. From this small educational cell, a full-fledged nursery school as well as primary and secondary school has developed to this day. They are funded institutions for boys and girls. The fees are determined by the parental income. The schools offer a four year all level education as per the Zanzibari curriculum. In addition, thanks to its supporters, the schools provide each student with a nutritionally balanced lunch.



Above
View of some of the Istigaama campus in Tunguu.



Below
Lessons at secondary school in Tunguu are held in coeducational classes.

On August 14, 2015, the Centre for Islamic Knowledge was opened on the campus in the presence of Sheikh Ahmad bin Hamad Al Khalili, the Grand Mufti of the Sultanate of Oman. It serves as an Islamic college and includes a mosque for the students on the campus and a house for the imam. An additional boarding house provides the college students with accommodation.

It should be emphasised that the general schools run by IMCOT are non-denominational. One does meet Christian pupils there as well as Christian teachers. This is not surprising as IMCOT sees itself as a service provider for the whole society. In this sense, the organisation also runs a polyclinic with its own emergency vehicles in Dar es Salaam and also some smaller health centres in the interior.

IMCOT's board of directors includes businessmen with Omani roots who are among the most prominent in the country. They run nationwide petrol station networks, cotton processing, beverage factories, cargo and construction companies and every other kind of trade imaginable. They are successful risk-taking entrepreneurs who embrace their social responsibility at the same time. With their vast experience, they manage the construction of schools and the renovation and building of mosques – in addition to their daily work.



The red dots on the map mark places where larger communities of people live to this day who see themselves as descendants of Omani traders. They still maintain close family ties to Oman. Their distribution is almost congruent with the routes of the former caravan routes.

The Omani presence in East Africa is not a story from the past. It lives on in the many testimonies of the shared cultural heritage, created over centuries of exchange. But above all it lives on in the many people encountered throughout East Africa who proudly profess their family ties to Oman.

The most internationally renowned person in this respect is a woman – Samia Suluhu Hassan. The Zanzibar-born politician with family ties to al-Mudhaiby in Oman took over the highest office in the state of Tanzania after the death of President John Magufuli in March 2021. This is clear evidence that the descendants of Omani traders are strongly rooted today in East Africa’s life and politics. They are not negligible relics from history, but a vital part of modern East African society actively taking part in shaping the future of the coming generations on the basis of a shared history.



Epilogue

Omani Presence in East Africa

The role of Omanis in East Africa is not over. In researching this book and the three accompanying documentary films – we came across not only evidence of the Omani presence in the material world of East Africa, but we also met people who embody the centuries-old exchange. Living witnesses of this eventful relationship can be found from the Congo to the Comoros, from Mogadishu to Mozambique. In spite of the historical ruptures and upheavals, our encounters have made it clear to us that the connection between Oman and East Africa has not been irrecoverably severed. Oman is present in East Africa as East Africa is in Oman. Unmistakable proof of the two-way exchange is found in – among many others – culinary preferences and, most significantly, the language: Whoever enters the *majlis* of a family in Muscat will often find that Swahili is spoken there – primarily, of course, by the elders.

What is the legacy of Omani presence in East Africa? To answer this question, the German-Omani team led by director Friedrich Klütsch spent five years tracing the amazing and mostly unknown history of Omani presence in East Africa. Archives were visited, experts around the world and people with Omani roots living in East Africa were questioned, like here in Kasongo. (Democratic Republic of Congo)



Migration or Colonization

At the present time when the decolonization discourse is characterized by attitudes such as ‘cancel culture’ and ‘identity politics’, we have to question whether Omani presence in East Africa should be seen as migration or as colonization.

To answer that, we must look to the beginnings of the links between Arabia and East Africa, which we cover in the opening chapters of this book and in the first episode of the film series. It is easy enough to find proof of contacts that reach back to the period of early Islam. It is likely that the relationship, which depended on the seasonal winds of the Indian Ocean, go back even further. At the beginning of the bonds which evolved there was – and this is a consensus among historians – an economically motivated exchange. Trading routes were established, with the monsoon winds reliably carrying the ships south in the winter months and north in the summer. Sailing from Muscat to Lamu or Zanzibar or vice versa took about three to four weeks. The crews of the ships and the Omani traders then had to wait as long as six months before they could start their return trip. Trade settlements were established. The long waiting period will have fostered relationships that went beyond strictly business.

The busy trade routes paved the way for waves of migration, which occurred sporadically in the history of Arabia and East Africa. These migrations were prompted by drought, plagues, tribal conflicts, persecution, expulsion or war. In this respect, these historical waves of migration share much with those of the present.

As a preliminary answer to our question, it can be stated that the early settlement of Omanis in East Africa should be called migration. But how are we then to interpret Sayyid Said ibn Sultan's decision to shift his center of power to East Africa in the 1830s and to declare Zanzibar the capital of his coastal empire in 1840? Was this an act of colonization?

Scholars of history have defined the fundamental differences between the two. In an interview which we conducted for this project, Professor Allen Fromherz, Director of the Middle East Studies Center, Georgia State University, states his views. The historian concludes that at the time this was an extraordinary move by the Omani ruler. During the period of Colonialism, European countries kept and concentrated their power within their metropolises. The flow of goods, the profitable stages of the value chain, and the accumulation of wealth were redirected through and to Lisbon, London, Paris, Berlin, and Brussels. The British Empire as the biggest and longest lasting colonial power in the Indian Ocean never considered shifting to India or to move its capital from London to Bombay.

Following this line of reasoning, we can very well characterize Sayyid Said ibn Sultan's decision as an act of migration. Furthermore, as is elaborated in the corresponding chapters of this book and in the second film of our series, dealing with the Omani merchant Tippu Tip, the extent of intermarriage is another indicator. The issue of slavery, however, is not. There was no colony established, subjugating the indigenous peoples, benefitting only the overlords. Slavery was long established and

widespread. Europeans and Americans, Arabs, Asians, the Swahili population as well as the African tribes themselves were all involved in slave trade and slavery. The topic does not support validating a colonial supposition.



While the Omanis never lost the connection to their motherland, they did migrate to and settle for good in East Africa. They regarded themselves as an integral part of the multiethnic Swahili societies they had helped to establish in the coastal regions of East Africa. The life and acts of Mbarak Al Hinawy, the protagonist of the third episode of our film series, gives ample proof to this conclusion.

Key events of the Omani-East African history were reenacted at original locations. Wherever possible, authentic sets were used, or recreated in accordance with the advice of experts. The main emphasis of the production, however, lies not with the historical accuracy of props and costumes, but with the identification of specific traits and attitudes that pervade Omani history.

Shared heritage

With this project we have attempted to show that the Omani presence in East Africa resulted in a significant rise in technological development, agriculture and standard of living. The Swahili coast thrived with the progress made economically and diplomatically, and there was a fusion of intangible cultural assets.

The benefits of trade went both ways: natural resources, timber and foodstuffs not found in Arabia were imported for local consumption and exported further abroad. The wealth and standard of living rose with every cargo from Africa. Traces and memories of East Africa can be found in almost every Omani household of today.

Political developments in the 60s and especially the events in Zanzibar in 1964 left deep scars, but have not succeeded in severing the bond between Oman and East Africa. Besides families with Omani background, the Omani presence in East Africa can still be felt through many projects funded and supported by the Omani state, charitable and cultural institutions – this multimedia effort included.

The three films and this book are meant to raise the awareness of the shared heritage between Oman and the countries of East Africa. During the course of the production we witnessed and enjoyed the support and enthusiasm of the peoples of East Africa for our main goal: To preserve and cherish the Omani legacy as an integral part of East African heritage.

Friedrich Klütsch

Munich, 2022

Appendix

The DEMAX Core Team of the Project 'Omani Presence in East Africa' Documentaries and Companion Book

Friedrich Klütsch

Screenwriter, cinematographer and film director, specialises in the field of dramatised documentaries. As a freelance writer and director, he develops and realises documentaries for public television. He is the head of the project 'Omani Presence in Zanzibar and East Africa' and is responsible for the artistic direction of the film trilogy as well as for research and writing of episode 1, focusing on Sultan Said ibn Sultan Al Busaidi.



Georg Popp

Book author, exhibition creator and artist. Since 1992, the Sultanate of Oman has been the focus of his activities creating artistic works, publications and exhibitions. He has published several articles and books on the Sultanate and has produced various travelling exhibitions on culture and religion in Oman. He is the screenwriter for episode 3, focusing on Sheikh Mbarak Al Hinawy. He is also author and producer of the companion book.



Joachim Puls

Author and producer in film and related media since 1986. He is a member of the German Journalists' Association and has received several awards for his work. Since 2019 he has supported the multi-year filming of the international documentary trilogy about 'Omani Presence in East Africa' as producer and CFO. He researched and authored episode 2, focusing on 'Tippu Tip'.



Juma Al Maskari

Omani IT security consultant, born in Zanzibar and living in Germany. For him, knowing one's own history is fundamental to knowing one's future. He is a bridge builder between Orient and Occident. As member of the project 'Omani Presence in East Africa' he acted as an advisor for intercultural dialogue as well as facilitator in dealing with authorities, institutions and local personalities.



Michael Dickinson

American national with a diverse skill set, collaborating with Georg Popp for more than 10 years on various projects relating to Oman. He contributed to this book and film project as line producer, location manager, translator and proofreader, and through extensive research of literature, including texts on the journey of Ahmad ibn Na'aman Al Ka'abi to New York in 1840.



Contributors to the publication



Riadh Abdalla Said Al Busaidi

brought up at the Palace (Beit Serkal) during the reign of H.M. Sultan Khalifa ibn Harub who married his aunt, Sayyidah Nunuu bint Ahmed, as a young man he gained a lot of information about various historical aspects of Zanzibar. He was part of the entourage when the Sultan visited Dar es Salaam, Tanga, Mombasa and Lamu. He studied International Law at the University in Prague and later Sociology at Leeds University in U.K.



Dr Sulaiman Al Mahdouri

Omani researcher in the field of history and cultural relations between Oman and East Africa. Author of the book entitled: *Zanzibar in the era of Sayyid Said ibn Sultan (a study of economic history)*. Working at National Records & Archives Authority, Sultanate of Oman.



Prof. Allen Fromherz

Dr. Allen Fromherz is a Professor of Middle East, Gulf and Mediterranean history. He directs the Middle East Studies center at Georgia State University; Atlanta (USA) and is President of the American Institute for Maghreb Studies. He is founding series editor, with Matt Buehler, of Edinburgh Studies on the Maghrib and is North Africa senior editor for the Oxford Research Encyclopedia Africa.



Dr Guido Gryseels

Dr Guido Gryseels is Director General of the Royal Museum for Central Africa (RMCA) in Tervuren, Belgium. The RMCA is a federal scientific institute for research and information dissemination with respect to Africa in the fields of biology, earth sciences, anthropology, history and agriculture/forestry. The RMCA has world famous reference collections for Central Africa and has international recognition for its exhibitions and research on cultural and natural heritage, societies and natural environments of Africa.



Prof. Zulfikar Hirji

Zulfikar Hirji is an Associate Professor in the Department of Anthropology at York University, Toronto (Canada). His research focuses on Islam and Muslim societies in a range of historical and contemporary contexts, particularly in Africa and the Indian Ocean. His publications include *Approaches to the Qur'an in Sub-Saharan Africa* (2019) and *Between Empires* (2012), an illustrated biography of Sheikh Mbarak Al Hinawy.

Contributors to the publication

Dr Birgit Mershen

Since first coming to the Sultanate of Oman in 1995 to teach as a visiting professor at Sultan Qaboos University, Dr Birgit Mershen has made Oman her home and key area of research. As a result of 25 years of teaching, research including fieldwork in local communities, advisory work for governmental agencies and consultancy work for different companies in the field of Oman's cultural heritage, she has gained a profound knowledge, of the Sultanate's tangible and intangible heritage and ways of life.



Prof. Karin Pallaver

Associate Professor of African History at the University of Bologna, Italy, where she teaches Modern African History, Africa and the World, and Indian Ocean History. She previously worked as a researcher in the Coins and Medals Department at the British Museum in London. Her research focuses on the social and economic history of East Africa with a special focus on monetary and labour history. President of ASAI (Association of African Studies in Italy)



Drs. Ridder H. Samsom (University of Leiden, Holland)

Retired Lecturer and Researcher in Swahili Language and Linguistics. Universities of Hamburg (AAI/CSMC), Berlin (Humboldt), London (SOAS), Leiden (Afrikaanse Taalkunde), Zanzibar (TAKILUKI). Guest Lectures at Universities of Lisboa, Catolica Lisboa, Warsaw, St Petersburg, Napoli. Papers presented at the universities of Dar es Salaam, Bayreuth, Comoros and Bujumbura.



Prof. Ibrahim Elzein Saghairon

Served as a professor of Modern Omani History in Sultan Qaboos University in Oman during the years 1989–2016 and was appointed Chairman of the History Department from 1998 to September 2003. He taught all courses pertaining to Oman and East Africa and supervised M.A and Ph.D students research on different aspects of Omani History in East Africa. He published numerous books and articles pertaining to the political, economic and social role of Oman in East and Central Africa.



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Chapter 1

Growing a Relationship with East Africa

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Map of Indian Ocean showing Trade routes and Monsoon winds
Map drawn by Willie Ryan, 2016, with art direction by Lisa Vann
Sailors and Daughters: Photography and the Indian Ocean online exhibition, 2015
Connecting the Gems of the Indian Ocean: From Oman to East Africa
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Weisgerber, Gerd: p 24 (a/b)
Mohammed90m / Wikimedia Commons / CC-BY-SA 4.0 / Model of Magan Boat: p 27
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36.1.26 Courtesy the Melville J. Herskovits Library of African Studies Winterton Collection, Northwestern University: p 10

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Chapter 2

The Birth of a Unique Commercial Empire

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Exploring the Heart of Africa

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The Omani Legacy in the Present

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