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The Re-globalization Process in the Indian Ocean: the Ibadi Press in Zanzibar (al-Sultaniyya)

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Introduction

- 1 During the XIX century, on the Zanzibar Island, a gradual process of osmosis occurred through the first publications that often linked magical practices with the precepts of the Quran, resulting in a social and political interpretation of the new Omani power on the Eastern African island that reflected a multiplicity of cultural roots. The vast network of international trade links, and the presence of numerous mercantile communities were progressively consolidated, stretching from Africa, Arabia, the Gulf, and India as far as Southeast Asia, Indonesia and even China with Zanzibar as a polarizing new centre. This process of political and institutional consolidation experienced a new globalization process introduced from Arabia to Africa and vice versa where new realities through printing texts were published, described, and spread. Consequently, the various labels such as empire and kingdom were often used to refer to the African experiences, but clearly did not perfectly match the political definitions used by Western analysts. The variety of autochthon forms of Zanzibar political organization has been often eclipsed by the colonial imposition of the European nation state model. The British colonizers wished to connect the local realities with the appearance of continuity of Western rule. This process showed how these appositions were tools for the colonial administrators for re-inventing Arabian traditions for Arabians in Africa to replace those already existing, albeit unknown structures of power. One implication of the term is that the sharp distinction between

tradition and modernity was often itself redefined. The concept is highly relevant to that comparatively recent historical innovation, the nation, with its associated phenomena: nationalism, the nation-state, national symbols, and histories. Many of the traditions which we think of as very ancient in their origins were not in fact sanctioned by long usage over the centuries but were defined comparatively recently. This theory explored examples of this process of definition - the creation of Welsh and Scottish national culture; the elaboration of British royal rituals in the XIX and XX centuries; the origins of imperial rituals in British India and Africa; and the attempts by radical movements to develop counter-traditions of their own. It addresses the complex interaction of past and present, bringing together historians and anthropologists in a fascinating study of ritual and symbolism which posed new questions to history.

- 2 Another implication was that the concept of authenticity had also to be questioned. It's true that the definition of tradition was a splendidly subversive phrase but contained serious ambiguities. Given that all traditions change, we would like to put forward the hypothesis that was it possible or useful to attempt to discriminate the genuine antiques from the fakes? Such distinctions between invented and authentic traditions resolved themselves ultimately into one between the genuine and the spurious, a distinction that may be untenable because all traditions, like all symbolic phenomena, are humanly created spurious rather than naturally given genuine. This complex process, once attached to the Zanzibar press during the XIX century, was partially applied by transforming the flexible and porous customs of Zanzibar into more familiar assumptions and structures, which indeed still exercise their influence on the way power and traditions are perceived and handled, marking the inequalities between who detained power and who did not. To avoid the duplication of this colonial necessity, such recognition was crucial in accepting the limits and the nonetheless useful role of these terms for description.

The Indian Ocean Soft Sound

- 3 The study of the history of the Indian Ocean should take into consideration several historical-political-institutional aspects. These include: the presence of different ethnic, social and religious groups together with the affirmation of the Omani Ibadites, also *Ibadiyyah*, dominance between the mid-XVII century and beginning of the XIX century¹; the fundamental influences of the Indian mercantile and other Asian communities; the impact with the Swahili population of the Eastern African coast and the Sub-Saharan regions. All these issues should also be considered in relation to links with Europe.
- 4 The Ya'riba (sing. Ya'rubi) dynasty emerged in Oman around 1624.² They created and extended a prosperous empire.³ During the XVIII century the Ya'riba gave life to a flourishing mercantile power that was interconnected to the coastal cities and to the principal islands of Eastern Africa. The Ya'riba Omani domination along East African littorals, that included Mombasa and the Island of Pemba, was characteristic of quite normal changes in dominion over the seas, without resulting in substantial alterations in commercial organization. This institution had its roots in the tribal system of exercising power, as well as in the political agreements with local authorities. To this regard, the Ya'riba, financially assisted by merchants from the Western coasts of India, and military defended by Asian troops, carried to the littorals of East Africa their

Omani tribal system. It was under the strong and prosperous rule of the Ya'riba Imamate, till approximately 1748, that the distinguishing characteristics of Omani military architecture began to crystallize. The Ya'riba rulers, effectively uniting Oman for the first time in many centuries, rebuilt the old irrigation systems, *aflaj* in the Arab world,⁴ renovated the towns, revitalized agriculture, and spurred the pace of trade.⁵

- 5 After centuries of prosperity, the traditional system that had developed along the shores of the Indian Ocean was shattered by the Europeans maritime powers of the time, who started to extend their territorial ambitions, pursued from *terra firma* to the seas. The rise to commercial power in the Indian Ocean of the Netherlands and Great Britain marked the start of the progressive decline for the Portuguese Empire in the East Indies. Towards the end of the XVIII century, the Al bu Sa 'id defeated the Ya'riba at Muscat and soon extended their political and commercial power in the Indian Ocean, and in East Africa throughout the XIX century.⁶ The gradual emergence of new Omani maritime dynasties resulted also from the numerous polarizations that followed the struggles against the Portuguese presence in the Gulf and in the Indian Ocean. Inside these wide contexts, land and maritime realities did constitute crucial issues throughout the history of the Indian Ocean. The history of Omani international relations has been closely connected mainly to the maritime routes across the Indian Ocean: sailing the Gulf and the Indian Ocean had always been dependent on the fact that the winds occur in an annual sequence with great regularity.⁷ The balance created by the monsoons was achieved over the space of a year with the following rhythm: from December to March the monsoon blows from Arabia and the Western coasts of India in the north-east, pushing as far as Mogadishu.⁸ The winds are light and constant, the climate hot and dry. In April, the monsoon starts to blow from the South-West, from Eastern Africa towards the coasts of the Gulf, the climate becomes cooler but much more humid. The rains are mainly in April and May, while the driest months are November and December. Moreover, along the East African coasts and in the islands of the Indian Ocean, the tropical climate is always tempered by sea breezes. Until the XIX century, sailing from the Arabian Peninsula in November in a south-south-westerly direction took thirty to forty days in ideal weather conditions while, in December, thanks to the stabilization of the monsoon, the voyages took only twenty to twenty-five days. Consequently, thanks to the monsoons, the international trade relations of Oman had been historically through the sea; although we must remember that Omani trades were intense through land as well.⁹ Maritime coastal trade, as well as long distance trade, constituted the expressions of an economy that was sophisticated, developed and although the Portuguese colonial empire was ousted by the Dutch about halfway through the XVII century, this did not prevent a Lusitanian presence from continuing in the trading and strategic centres of East Africa and the Indian Ocean.¹⁰ Therefore, the necessity of control of these sea trade routes represented a crucial element: a political element.

The maritime power of the Al bu Sa'id

- 6 Since the end of the XVIII century, the Al bu Sa'id empowered the mercantile expansion towards the oceanic coasts of Eastern Africa; therefore, within the Indian Ocean developed a cultural synthesis represented by continuous migratory flows. The dominions of Muscat consisted of the island of Bahrain, the coast of Makran, some

areas along the Persian coast such as Chahbahar, the island of Socotra, the islands of Kuria Muria, the islands of Zanzibar and Pemba and adjacent ports of the East African coast from Cape Delgado to Cape Guardafui. Consequently, the presence of numerous economic opportunities on the East African littorals was a potent factor which led the Omani Arabs towards Africa. The lucrative movement of goods traded by Oman throughout the Indian Ocean included every type of merchandise and spice, for the most part precious. To name but a few: rhubarb, borax, ginger, sesame, ivory, tortoise shell, rhino horn, beeswax, opium poppies, exotic animal skins, birds of prey, diamonds, vermilion, gold, horses, raffia, silk - which the Omanis regarded as having protective powers against disease and parasites - castor oil, tamarind, cloves, vanilla, curry, nutmeg, rubber, tropical fruit, Mocha coffee - very much in fashion in Europe at the beginning of the second half of XVII century - Chinese ceramics sometimes used as precious containers for dates in Oman, musk from Tibet and China, enormous quantities of ambergris bought on shores of the island of Zanzibar or the nearby islands, considered a delicacy by the Omanis who even put it in the sorbets! We know that ivory was exported from the Eastern coast of Africa in considerable quantities from an early date, and rhino-horn and tortoise shell, as was rock crystal.¹¹ In 1800, the principal products exported from the Eastern coast of Africa were cloves, copal, ivory, hides, red pepper, sesame, copra, coconut oil, tortoiseshell, cowries, beeswax and tallow, while goods imported included cotton, arms, powder, Venetian beads, clocks, spirits, wheaten flour, refined sugar, brass wire, glassware, chintz and chinaware. Major exports from Zanzibar to Oman were ivory, cloves, copal, sandalwood, coconuts, hippo teeth, cowries, rafters, rhino horn, beeswax, and ebony. The Omani seafarers from the Red Sea carried Venetian beads, coffee, aloes, and dragon's blood; those from the south coast of Arabia sold dried fish, fish oil, ghee, and onions; and those from Oman and the Gulf brought to East Africa dates and raisins, donkeys, and horses, Muscat cloths, Persian carpets and silks, nankeen, crude gunpowder, almonds, and drugs (mainly saffron and asafoetida).¹² The Omanis also brought honey, waterjugs, ready-to-wear clothes, rosewater, gold, and silver threads. Among Arab purchases from Africa there were: ivory tusks, cloves, coconuts, and rafters. Oman bartered with Europe and, starting from 1833 with the newly United States of America, coconuts, tortoise shell, red peppers, and beeswax in exchange for hardware, cotton wool and fabric. Ambergris was floating or could be obtained from whales. The Arabs brought this precious product to the West and to China where, starting from the IX century, it was known as dragon's saliva; ambergris was also an important fixing agent for the essences extracted from flowers. With the object of better understanding the extent of this region and the reality where the Ibadi press developed, Zanzibar is an archipelago made up of Zanzibar and Pemba Islands, and several islets. It is in the Indian Ocean, about 25 miles from today's Tanzanian coast, and 6° south of the equator. Zanzibar Island (known locally as Unguja, but as Zanzibar internationally) is 60 miles long and 20 miles wide, occupying a total area of approximately 650 square miles. At that time, the island of Zanzibar was administered by governors representing Saiyid Sa'id bin Sultan Al bu Sa'id and exercised all power on his behalf. The military support provided to these representatives over the island consisted of special troops of proven trustworthiness, the Baloch corps, closely tied to the Al bu Sa'id by strong economic agreements. During the XVIII and the XIX centuries, the Baloch were labelled by Europeans as ferocious freebooters, and they protected and hid the Al bu Sa'id rulers of the dynasty of Oman in their desolate lands. They were mainly employed on the dhows

of the Muscat rulers or sent on military expeditions into the Omani deserts. It is worth noting that the Baloch not only served the Al bu Sa'id, but also the preceding dynasties of Oman, such as the Ya'riba during the XVI and the XVII centuries. During the first half of the XIX century, the permanent bodyguard of the Sultans of Oman was composed of three hundred Baloch who lived in huts, and they were perceived as so cynical that they ignored the political struggles within the Arabian Peninsula, and they naturally obeyed the orders only of the princes who gave them pay. Due to the Omani mercantile expansion along the Sub-Saharan East African littorals, many Baloch settled in Zanzibar, the heart of the Omani African dominions during the XIX century and in many African port towns, where they were called *Bulushi* in Kiswahili. Along Eastern Africa's coasts local governors had the support of the local autochthonous Swahili aristocracy, that was composed of numerous merchants. These came under the *mwinyi mkuu*, subdivided into *diwan*, *jumbe*, *wazee*; and were tied as well to the Omani elite by mutual interests in the exploitation of the resources offered by the island and the eastern shores of Africa. This mercantile empire, with Saiyid Sa'id bin Sultan Al bu Sa'id moved its economic and political centre of gravity to Zanzibar, making control of the neighboring islands and the nearby African coast one of the cornerstones of its vast system of interests.

- 7 Many years later, the British explorer Richard F. Burton (1821-1890) wrote that if you had played the flute in Zanzibar, it would have sounded as far as the Great Lakes.¹³ Without a shadow of a doubt, European rivalry in the Gulf and the Western waters of the Indian Ocean from the start of the XIX century onward, combined with related upheavals in power and strategy, had an impact also on the progressive deviations of the several maritime routes. Clearly, however, the ability and modernity of Saiyid Sa'id bin Sultan Al bu Sa'id in exploiting such political contingencies was great. Within this framework of trade, commerce, bargaining, conflict, and struggle for the control of trade in valuable merchandise, the island of Zanzibar inserted itself with the dynamism of its officials, merchants, and adventurers. These, therefore, were the main foundations on which Saiyid Sa'id bin Sultan Al bu Sa'id and the Asian mercantile communities expanded their commercial emporium in the face of inevitable conflict with the British in the Gulf over the question of piracy.¹⁴

Sa'id bin Sultan Al bu Sa'id in Zanzibar (r. 1804-6–56)

- 8 Ahmad bin Sa'id of the Al bu Sa'id (1749-1783) was Governor of Sohar. He succeeded in expelling the Persians and, after having overcome the Ya'riba and their Ghafari supporters, was elected Imam and founded the present Al bu Sa'id dynasty. Ahmad bin Sa'id Al bu Sa'id, son of a coffee merchant from Sohar, was the leader of a dynasty which linked its own destiny to that of East Africa and to the Indian Ocean. The Omani dynasty of the Sultan Sa'id bin Sultan Al bu Sa'id (r. 1804-56), emerged at the end of the XVIII century into this already fully functioning system, with its wide range of links and connections, and which enjoyed the mediating roles and loans of the various Asian communities present on Zanzibar and present into Eastern African reality. The title of Imam gave Ahmad bin Sa'id Al bu Sa'id a certain control over Oman, and under him and his successors the country saw an expansion for more than a century. The Omanis extended their influence into the interior and into part of the present-day United Arab Emirates (U.A.E). They also collected tribute from as far away as present-day Bahrain

and Iraq. The Al bu Sa'id conquered the Dhofar region, which is part of present-day Oman but was not historically part of the region of Oman. Although Ahmad bin Sa'id had succeeded in uniting Oman under an Ibadi Imamate, the religious nature of his family's authority did not last long. His son, Saiyid Sa'id bin Sultan Al bu Sa'id, was elected to the Imamate after him, but no other family member had the official approval of the religious establishment. The Al bu Sa'id called themselves Sultans, a secular title having none of the religious associations of Imam. They further distanced themselves from Ibadi traditions by moving their capital from Rustaq, a traditional Ibadi centre in the interior.

- 9 Since 1800, when Saiyid Sa'id bin Sultan Al bu Sa'id received the model of a 74-gun ship as a present from the visiting British envoy, Major-General John Malcolm (1769-1833), he has recognized the importance of cultivating British friendship. And this was a relationship valued too by Britain. This was an important factor that played a part in the economic-commercial growth of the Indian Ocean. And here we come to that delicate and precious material which had been exported throughout the Orient since time immemorial: ivory. Since the II century B.C., ivory had been exported from Eastern Africa to the Mediterranean. From the VII century A.D., India and China emerged as the main markets for African ivory. Superior to Asian ivory in quality, softness and colour, African ivory had followed the maritime routes of the Indian Ocean until the end of the XVIII century, departing from Mozambique. New fiscal burdens and taxes, however, imposed by the Portuguese at the beginning of the XIX century and termed 'suicidal' by Sheriff, together with the mercantile ascendancy of France and Great Britain in the Indian Ocean, caused a gradual shift in the ivory trade. The ports of Mozambique having been progressively abandoned, the dealing and sale of this precious material would henceforth be conducted on the island of Zanzibar. Starting from the second decade of the XIX century, Europe entered the ivory market with its considerable demands. The splendid, shining African ivory, pure white and strong but at the same time easily worked, was increasingly desired from Europe for luxury items such as elegant elements of personal toilette, billiard balls, piano keys, elaborate jewels, fans, cutlery, and clothing accessories. In that atmosphere of a fin de siècle Europe increasingly fascinated by all things Chinese or exotic, ivory was a must. This was clear by the fact that British imports of ivory rose from 280 tons in 1840 to 800 in 1875.¹⁵ During the first half of the XIX century the demand for ivory came mostly from India. The Omanis exploited the ancient trade routes to the interior bringing new groups of people to the coast of East Africa with elephant tusks. The Mrima was the major source of ivory's export for Zanzibar economy. The economy of the East African interior thus witnessed a decisive growth in the demand for *pagazi*, free men recruited from among the African groups allied between each other (mainly Yao and Nyamwezi), and for porters. The high demand resulted in the transportation of elephant tusks in huge quantities. Therefore, an intense exchange network soon developed between the African interior and the coast, leading to the introduction of rice cultivation in the interior in those areas under Arab dominion such as Tabora, Nyangwe, in modern-day northern Congo, and in nearby Kasongo. The *sati*, officially - but not effectively - abolished in British India on 4th December 1829 under the Bengal Presidency of Lord William Bentick (1774-1839) by the Anglo-Indian government, burned the widows with their dowry ivory bracelets, forcing on every marriage to order new ivory from Africa. Consequently, the demand for ivory was constantly high.¹⁶

10 Later, a figure such as Tippu Tip (Hamed bin Mohammed bin Juma bin Rajab bin Mohammed bin Said el Murgebi, 1837-1905), became one of the most powerful ivory traders of the XIX century, extending the Eastern African slave trade further to the north-west into modern-day Rwanda and Burundi. At that time, these mercantile intercourses grew rapidly. There were three major sets of ivory trade routes to the interior often safeguarded by Baloch corps: 1) the 'southern' route from southern ports such as Kilwa to Lake Nyasa and the highlands of the interior where the Nyamwezi carried tusks and other goods; 2) the 'central' ivory route from Bagamoyo in west and northwest directions, where the caravan trade became progressively monopolized by the Omani Arabs and by the Asian merchants; 3) the 'northern' route, the Masai route from Mombasa and Malindi towards Kilimanjaro where the Mijikenda were ivory hunters together with the Kamba.¹⁷ The Saadani caravan route did not develop an Arab merchant community, while the Pangani route led to the foundation of Ujiji around 1840 and passed through the Bondei hills and along the foot of Usambara and Pare mountains, well-watered and preferred by travellers from other towns of the northern Mrima; large quantities of ivory, *pembe*, of soft and high quality, came from Pare and the Rift valley, and this route became the second in importance after Bagamoyo. The Taveta trading station never became fully dominated by coastal Muslims, as it was too dangerous. Caravans arrived usually in September and porters announced their approach by blowing horns and beating drums.¹⁸ Another wealthy protagonist in this chapter of Indian Ocean maritime history, Jairam Sewji (or Jeram Sewjee, master of the custom house), was the leading pioneer of the merchant capitalists in Zanzibar during the XIX century, and he also profited greatly from this opening up to Western markets. A member of the Topan family, who was the richest and most influential merchant in Zanzibar, personally financed almost all the caravan traffic, accepting responsibility for all the risks and eventual losses this entailed. Throughout the first half of the XIX century, Jairam Topan represented the financial and political kingpin of all activity occurring on Zanzibar (around the year 1840, for example, he had four hundred Africans in his personal service). A somewhat singular political-financial phenomenon thus came into being, in the figure of Jairam Topan who concentrated Arab, Asian, and European interests in his own hands, conducting as though with a baton the ancient, admirable, and sophisticated system of commercial currents, connections and links of the Indian Ocean. A further factor, and no less important than ivory, was the extraordinary and revolutionary expansion of clove cultivation on Zanzibar Island. At the end of the XIX century Tippu Tip owned seven *mashamba* in Africa, a capital worth approximately 50,000 Maria Theresa thalers in total. Tippu Tip's family has not died out, the last descendant of this great XIX century trader was a doctor in Muscat, in 1993. The agricultural exploitation on Zanzibar and Pemba was destined to transform the twin islands into a true commercial empire. According to British available literature of the time, at the end of the XVIII century the introduction of cloves (*Eugenia caryophyllata*, of the Myrtaceae, Myrtle family) altered completely the perceptions of the economic and commercial potential not, take note, in the eyes of the Europeans but in those of Saiyid Sa'id bin Sultan Al bu Sa'id and his Indian protégés. Since the II century B.C. envoys from Java at the Han court of China had sucked cloves to sweeten their heavy garlic breath during audiences with the emperor. Clove plants, originating in the Moluccas, were first exploited by the Dutch who grasped the commercial value of this precious and perfumed spice rich of powerful medicinal properties. Around the year 1770, the French merchant, Pierre Poivre, succeeded in

obtaining a few seeds with which to start a cultivation on the Mascarene Islands. It was, therefore, the French who, at the start of the XIX century, introduced cloves onto the island of Zanzibar. These initial attempts proved successful; the environment being perfectly suited to this cultivation that eventually led to Zanzibar being the primary producer of cloves in the world. From available accounts, it appears that Saiyid Sa'id bin Sultan Al bu Sa'id decided to invest his wealth and energy in such an ambitious and challenging project. Such a move required both courage and faith, as the plants take from seven to eight years to reach maturity and produce the first blooms, and ten years for the first crop. As budding does not occur at regular periods and the buds themselves must be removed before flowering, harvesting occurs in three phases, between August and December. This requires numerous and skilled labour, especially as the plantations also need to be weeded in continuation. The cultivation of cloves was very similar to that of dates practiced in Oman and well understood by the Omanis, who proceeded to acquire land on Zanzibar. The management of land on Zanzibar was organized in three different categories: *wanda*, natural scrubland; *kiambo*, areas suitable for building upon; *msitu*, rural areas and lands surrounding villages. The *mashamba* of the Sultan of Zanzibar, initially concentrated around Mntoni and Kizimbani, gradually grew to include Bumwini, Bububu and Chiwini. In 1835, Saiyid Sa'id bin Sultan Al bu Sa'id possessed as many as forty-five *mashamba* on the island. Clove 'fever', with its high profit on initial expenditure, produced an Arab landowning aristocracy, continually financed by the Asian mercantile communities, that in some areas replaced the old Swahili aristocracy. This did not, however, cause any kind of rupture, thanks to the dexterity of the Asian exponents who gradually involved the local African elite by delegating to them certain tasks and responsibilities, thus making them active participants in this major Indian Ocean business. On the coasts of the continent, on the contrary, local societies experienced significant changes due to the high influx of Africans from the interior and of Arabs and Asians from abroad (Tabora - a key site on the commercial route towards the heart of the continent - practically became an 'Arab' town with a considerable Baloch presence). The cultivation of cloves on Pemba was less successful than on Zanzibar due to a cyclone that destroyed most of the plants in the last decades of the XIX century (April 1872). Thus, profound differences developed between the cultural identities on the islands, on the one hand, and the continent on the other, where, from the third decade of the XIX century onwards, the opening of caravan routes wrought a 'true revolution' in economic, military, social and cultural terms. This agricultural turning-point rapidly undermined the traditional order, and the plantations led to the phenomenon known as clove fever. By 1822, the plants had grown to a height of roughly four and a half meters. It was the clove plantations which would prove vital to Zanzibar's economic growth. Profits, in fact, rose phenomenally from 4,600 Maria Theresa thalers (XMTT) in 1834 to 25,000 in 1840.¹⁹ For Saiyid Sa'id bin Sultan Al bu Sa'id, it was a financial triumph.

- 11 The imports of cloths from India were given by the Arabs as presents to main African chiefs of the interior and this represented a clear sign of prestige and superiority within their groups, although agriculture remained for long periods the primary source of the Swahili coast, long before the booming introduction of commerce. Salted and smoked fish became an important item of trade: Zanzibar and Pemba islands soon developed the production of fish to provide the porters to the interior and for the very profitable exchange with ivory. Also, copal resin's demand grew during this period and was produced in Bagamoyo area and bought by the Asian traders, as well as mangrove

poles for vessels to be taken to Arabia and to the Gulf. Another important item destined to change deeply the hinterland power balances was represented by firearms: during the first half of the XIX century, matchlocks began to appear in hands of Omani troops, who imported them from the Ottoman Empire and from Europe. The Shirazi, the Swahili prestigious families, gradually lost their power and were putted apart by the Al bu Sa'id within the growing trade of Zanzibar, although they retained control of the northern caravan trade, but the great wealth soon passed into Arabs and Asian hands. As the central route was the most controlled by Omanis, Tabora, near the heart of Unyamwezi, as we have seen above, became an 'Arab' town together with Ujiji. The impact of the Al bu Sa'id political power and of the Asian military power in Zanzibar on the African hinterland was therefore destined to influencing the lives of East African men and women; as explained above, considerable modifications underwent in traditional elite patterns of power relationships where client-patronage perspectives never were to be the same, and where new actors were destined to emerging on the new Indian Ocean scenario in its interconnections with the East African hinterland. In this regard, the ivory trade became a mean of travel, adventure and wealth offering a way to modifying the status within the coastal communities. Everybody could share this ambition but at the same time new tensions were introduced between Swahili rich families, struggling to preserve their fragile domination, and the demand of the 'parvenus' on whose support they relied. And with regards to monetary politics, Semple affirmed that, since 1763, testimonies of German Crowns minted in Austria came from Yemen and, even earlier, from Jeddah; many coins were sent on from Arabia to India during the XIX century. The silver content of the thalers was kept constant at 833.3/1000, therefore it was considered very reliable, unlike the Spanish dollar, which was debased, although it had a higher silver content. Also, the Maria Theresa thaler could not be 'clipped' because it had an elaborate edge inscription, and this made it very popular - spreading throughout the Indian Ocean even reaching Central Asian markets - and people soon began to trust it.

- 12 Under the Treaty of Paris in 1815, French had regained sovereignty over the island of Bourbon.²⁰ A synergy thus developed between Saiyid Sa'id bin Sultan Al bu Sa'id and France of common interest in finding new ports and commercial bases. However, after taking the potential purchase of Zanzibar and Pemba into consideration, Paris instead turned its attention towards Madagascar. Given the by then unrivalled supremacy of the Royal Navy, backed also by the Bombay Marine in the Western stretches of the Indian Ocean, and the defeats inflicted on the pirates of the Gulf, France did not really have any other choice. In 1817, Lord Hastings (1754-1826), the Governor General of Bengal from 1813 to 1823, proposed strengthening Saiyid Sa'id bin Sultan Al bu Sa'id and supporting his power policy in East Africa. The choice made by the British Government was without doubt influenced by the difficulties caused in that period by the continual raids of pirates, by the commercial and political instability afflicting the entire Indian Ocean region and, lastly, by the presence of the French who continued to represent a serious threat to Great Britain.
- 13 On 23rd March 1819, the Government of Bourbon stipulated a secret Treaty with the Sultan of Kilwa, under the terms of which the French would provide military support to the Sultan in exchange for support in retaking Pemba, Zanzibar, and the island of Mafia from Saiyid Sa'id bin Sultan Al bu Sa'id for which the French would recognize the authority of the Sultan of Kilwa over the island of Pemba.²¹ This treaty was to remain only in French hands to prevent the Sultan from showing it to the British, but it never,

in fact, came into effect. The Ministère de la Maison du Roi feared British naval superiority and, because of further political complications in Europe, the French decided not to place their relations with the increasingly important Saiyid Sa'id bin Sultan Al bu Sa'id at stake. The result was that the traditional conflictual relationships between the coast and the interior were reconstituted. Starting from the XVIII century onwards, groups from the interior gradually began to settle on the coastal new centres. Saiyid Sa'id bin Sultan Al bu Sa'id vitalized in the Indian Ocean an important mercantile empire. The main factors of the rise of a mighty maritime trade network were constituted by the expansion of the spice trade, especially by the cultivation of cloves in Zanzibar and the Pemba islands, known as *Unguja*, as above said, and *Kisiwa Pemba* in Kiswahili, by ivory exportation, and by their implications with the European powers of the XIX century.

- 14 Saiyid Sa'id bin Sultan Al bu Sa'id spoke Arabic, Hindi, Persian and Swahili; he saw the island of Zanzibar for the first time in 1802, when he was only eleven years old, and he was enchanted. He represented the major exponent of the revaluation of the spice trade as a means of creation of new power elite, through a significant expansion of the cultivation of cloves in Zanzibar. This highlights one of the first major steps towards the importance of spice. At the end of the XVIII century the introduction of cloves, *karafuu* in Kiswahili, onto this tropical island determined a new perception of economic-commercial potential to the eyes of the Al bu Sa'id. The creation of a new niche of agricultural exploitation in Zanzibar itself and in Pemba was destined to transform Zanzibar and Pemba into new centres of global mercantile interests. In 1825, Saiyid Sa'id bin Sultan Al bu Sa'id income amounted to 522,000 Maria Theresa thalers, of which 120,000 came from Zanzibar. Saiyid Sa'id bin Sultan Al bu Sa'id had three wives, an infinite number of concubines and at least one hundred and twenty children. His wives were Azza bin Seif bin Imam Ahmad who lived in the palace at Mntoni on Zanzibar; the niece of the Shah of Persia, Fath 'Ali Shah Qajar, whom the Sultan had married in 1827 on the condition that she could spend long periods at her father's court in Teheran, from whence she no longer returned following a ferocious argument in 1832. The third was Shahruzad bin Irish Mirza bin Muhammad, great granddaughter of Shah Muhammad of Persia, who Saiyid Sa'id bin Sultan Al bu Sa'id married in 1837. She arrived in Zanzibar with a valuable dowry, a following of one hundred and fifty men, and numerous horses for hunting. Shahruzad had Persian baths built at Kidichi and Kizimbani, the ruins of which still today bear witness to the artistic sensitivity of the Sultan of Zanzibar's last wife, while the mother of Hilal bin Sa'id Al bu Sa'id was a concubine. The Sultan, himself a great sailor, possessed a fleet including the *Liverpool*, a magnificent vessel built in Bombay in 1826, with seventy-four cannon and a crew of one hundred and fifty.²² In 1833, with the object of consolidating the international relationships, he sent this ship as a gift to the King of Great Britain and Ireland William IV (1765-1837) who renamed the ship *Imam*. A further eighteen ships were also at his disposal. While, on one side, the Sultan's respect for Great Britain had been demonstrated on numerous occasions, also with the marvelous gifts he sent to all British representatives and his permitting ships of the Royal Navy and the Bombay Marine, on the other side, his behavior had been sometime exploited for economic and political goals, far from the true realities. His life was certainly long as Saiyid Sa'id bin Sultan Al bu Sa'id died when he was 65 years old in the Seychelles on a ship named *Victoria* that was taking him from Muscat to Zanzibar on 19th October 1856. It marked the end of an epoch, but not the end of the multiple cultural ties, as well as of the

numerous mercantile routes with the Omani red flag across the Indian Ocean. The Al bu Sa'id's dominions in Muscat and on Zanzibar were divided under the terms of the settlement of 13th May 1861 - with Zanzibar having to pay 40,000 Maria Theresa thalers to Muscat annually - and formalized by the Canning Award, confirmed by the Anglo-French Agreement of 1862: a further formal step towards the construction of the Omani State, and the result of European imperialism. With this division, the possessions were assigned to the sons of Saiyid Sa'id bin Sultan Al bu Sa'id, Majid Bin Sa'id Al bu Sa'id (r. 1856-70), of an Ethiopian mother, on Zanzibar and Thuwayni bin Sa'id Al bu Sa'id (r. 1856-66), of a Georgian mother, in Muscat.

- 15 Starting from the XVII century the level of influence on trade routes controlled by Muslim merchants in the Gulf and in the Indian Ocean was high. The growing strategic importance of the Indian Ocean as a watering highway was soon to becoming the focal point of world politics, making the whole region the pivot of world affairs.²³ The promotion of arms trade and its influence has been not only a source of complex relationships between different people and different cultures and religions, but also played an important role in searching for peace among all the littorals of East Africa.²⁴ Therefore, the Omani identity in East Africa represented one of the main issues for a better understanding of the succeeding powers on the coasts of the Indian Ocean during its historical and political evolutions. The deep forces of the local policies, with the European powers of the epoch, on the one hand, and the study of the goals and the steering gears of power of the West from an overwhelming military and technological superiority, on the other hand were all elements able to develop numerous relationships between the interior populations of Sub-Saharan East Africa and the main ports and trade centres of Western India, Arabia, and Southwest Asia.

Zanzibar Archives and the Press

- 16 In view of Zanzibar's importance in the XIX century as a mercantile empire and centre of administration for the whole of East Africa, Zanzibar developed as a seat of learning and a centre of Swahili culture, a fountainhead of Swahili language and Islam from which the language and the religion were disseminated over a vast region of Central Africa. This is the enduring cultural contribution of Zanzibar to the history not only to East Africa of humankind in general. Indeed, in term of modern advancement and technological development Zanzibar stands first for the whole of East Africa. The first Gazette in East Africa was established in Zanzibar in 1892. The first cable communication with Europe was introduced in December 1879. The first Chukwani-Saateni railway was established in 1875 to mention but a few. Against this background, the Zanzibar Archives is endowed with important and basic material for the study of XIX century European contact with Kenya, Uganda, and Tanganyika as well as Zanzibar's own history. In chronological sequence the oldest material is to be seen under Arabic Manuscripts and Books Collection, some of which go back 300 years. During the XIX century, Zanzibar became not only the centre of administration and commerce for the whole of the Eastern Africa, but also a seat of Islam and of learning from where they spread all over the region. In this context, many records were created by many institutions and individuals on a period of years. Most of these have been systematically collected and preserved in the Zanzibar National Archives. The long-established contact between Zanzibar and Arab world was then cemented in 1832 when

Saiyid Sa'id bin Sultan Al bu Sa'id was present on the Island. The collection of Arabic Manuscripts under the custody of the National Archives originated from the Sultans Library and Qadhisi Courts collected over the period of years. These manuscripts were later transferred to the Zanzibar National Archives to give access to public and researchers. These records are to be found under: AZ group: Arabic Manuscripts; AQ group: Sultans Records; and AB groups: Sultan and Royal family. In terms of its content, the collection is very rich in such areas of local medicine and treatment, astrology, astronomy, local history of Zanzibar and the Swahili Coast of East Africa. This collection of Arabic manuscripts provides data of all kinds, and they are of great interest to those who study the various aspects of Islam, Arabic literature and rhetoric, history of ideas as well as that of Eastern Africa.²⁵ It covers such subjects as Islamic theology, the interpretation of the Quran and Prophet hadiths, Arabic language and grammar, diseases, treatments, local medicine and witchcraft (a term absent in Kiswahili), astronomy, diaries, poetry, memoirs, and Arabic magazines. Moreover, as literary and cultural documents, the manuscripts played a significant role to the study of the social and cultural heritage of Zanzibar and the region.²⁶ Some of them discuss various aspects of Islamic religion and others are oral narratives which had been exchanged amongst the people and written down in various times. In addition to cultural content, the manuscripts represent good artistic works showing the art of calligraphy, the arrangement of margins and other points connected with artistic embellishment. They also draw attention to the existence of a class of artistic calligraphers, copyists as well as the extension of a good tradition which resulted in writing, copying and exchange of books. This was an effort which required understanding, patience, and perseverance. That research needs to be done to explore more of this collection, for only few researchers has attempted to make a serious study of it. Of late the collection has been enriched by a new collection of Arabic manuscript from the defunct East African Centre for Research on Oral Tradition and African National Languages - EACROTANAL - and as such Zanzibar National Archives remains the leading institution in East Africa with the largest collection of manuscripts in the whole.

- 17 The strategic position of Zanzibar and her influence over the whole of East Africa, well described in the Consular Records (1841-1890), invited the early European and American speculators to penetrate to Zanzibar as early as the beginning of the XIX century and establish their bases. Consequently, the United States of America opened their consulate in 1837 followed by Great Britain in 1841 and France in 1844. Other foreign powers which followed were Portugal, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, Austria, and Hungary. Meanwhile Britain through her long-term influence and position in India through the East India Company emerged as the dominating force in Zanzibar. British supremacy over Zanzibar was confirmed in June 1890 when the country was declared a British Protectorate. Generally, the collection is worth consulting in searching for information relating to the involvement of the Europeans and Americans in Zanzibar as well as understanding of the scramble and partition of East Africa in the XIX century. Regarding the Protectorate Records (1890-1914), responsibility for the administration of Zanzibar was placed under the Foreign Office in London soon after the country was declared a British Protectorate in 1890. The whole administrative set up was re-organized and a new system of administration was introduced with the objective of achieving greater simplicity of procedures and a uniform method of administration with greater economy of both time and management.²⁷ It is worth mentioning that it

was during this period that the colonial administration started to penetrate the interior of East Africa, in Kenya, Uganda and Tanganyika. Records under this group are mainly correspondence of the Foreign and Colonial Offices. The existence of the Secretariat Records (1914-1932) whilst the system of administration under the Foreign Office suffered from disadvantages resulting from divided control, therefore, it was agreed in 1913 to transfer the administration of the Protectorate from the Foreign Office to the Colonial Office. With this change the Secretariat Office was established in 1914 as the centre for all communication and records, from all departments to the British Resident. This collection covers a wide spread of subjects relating to all the departments during that time. It includes records on the establishment of democratic machinery such as the Legislative Council and Executive Council. This administrative set-up, although modified, remained operational until 1962 when the new ministerial system was introduced. The collection is so resourceful in studying the XX century Zanzibar history and changes of the British administrative set-up in East African territories. Indeed, there is accruing records of post-independence era that cover all government ministries and other institutions from 1964 up to 1980s. Important are the German Records (1839-1914). Germans started to open their consulates in Zanzibar as early as 1840s, and during that time Zanzibar was a centre of international commerce for the whole East African region. During this, many German records were created: these are mainly correspondence of the Consulate of Hanseatic League, North German Federation, Consulate of the German Empire and Bremen on various matters. The Germany Consulate in Zanzibar was closed at the beginning of the World War I in 1914. Zanzibar was a starting point for most of the early exploration and missionary expeditions to the interior of East Africa. These explorers and missionaries had to report to Zanzibar on various matters encountered in the inland regions: Dr. Livingstone, Stanley, Speke, Burton, Krapf, and other significant historical figures. Besides, there is a small collection of Church records of the Universities Missions to Central Africa (UMCA). The UMCA was established in Zanzibar in the mid-XIX century for the purpose of the abolishing slave trade and slavery as well as spreading Christianity in Zanzibar and other parts of East Africa. And from Zanzibar, the UMCA activities were extended to other parts of East Africa as far as Malawi and Zambia in Central Africa. To this connection, this UMCA collection is a unique source in studying the spread of Christianity in Zanzibar and East Africa as well as their role to the abolition of East African slave trade.

- 18 Now we come to the Zanzibar Gazette (1892-1990). The Gazette for Zanzibar and East Africa, as it was originally named, was established in 1892, and the first issue was published on February 1st, the same year. The title of the paper was changed in 1910 to Zanzibar Official Gazette and its series continued up to the present. They early copies are unique and comprehensive in nature. They document basic information on those subjects like trade and commerce, economic statistics and political affairs covering the whole of East Africa. Indeed, the collection is very resourceful in local and other official events. This collection is supplemented by other Official Gazettes from other Countries in East Africa. At the beginning of the XIX century there had been a restricted urban cultural tradition in Zanzibar. As Zanzibar emerged as a new commercial and political centre in East Africa, Arab and Swahili cultural and intellectual life developed because of indigenous efforts and an influx of scholars from Oman, the Arabian Peninsula, and the Western Indian Ocean;²⁸ Zanzibar became important in the intellectual renaissance of these societies through the vibrant cultural life of their diaspora. These scholars

developed a network of fertile relations with their homelands, the East African littoral, the Comoros, Algeria, Mecca and Cairo. With Swahili functioning as the lingua franca, Arabic survived and prospered for many as a language of political, religious, social, and cultural status. Features investigated will be the impact on Zanzibar of the wider Arab renaissance in Egypt and the Levant: contacts with Egyptian scholars and other Arab intellectuals; the influence of Egyptian and Syrian journals on Zanzibari intellectuals; the introduction of printed books; the development of Arabic printing after 1875, its vital role in disseminating Ibadi literature and laying the modern scholarly foundations of Ibadism; the Arabic element in the birth of journalism in East Africa: *al-Shanba*, *al-Najah*, *al-Ushbu'iyah*. The publication of books by Zanzibaris in Egypt and elsewhere; the role and works of the Ibadi and Shafi'i experts and local exponents in the intellectual and literary renaissance; the creation of new cultural institutions and societies: libraries, theatre, cinema, Zanzibar Book Club, and the Arab Association. This new flow developed into the spread of popular culture from indigenous, Arab, and foreign roots: the evolution of taarab music under Egyptian influence from an exclusive court music to a popular phenomenon, the Sultans' bands and Beni bands, other cultural manifestations, the Arab dimension of Islamic feast days, the saints' days, Nayrouz ceremonies, the Arab aspects of dance, *ngoma*, associated with these and other events.

- 19 Barghash ibn Sa'id Al bu Sa'id (b. 1834 - March 27th, 1888), reigned as Sultan of Zanzibar from 1870 to 1888.²⁹ He brought a printing press from Syria along with experienced printers, very much inspired by the spirit of reform then current in the Arab world. The press was active from 1879 and launched an extensive program of printing key Omani legal texts written in North Africa and preserved as manuscripts in Oman. Its most ambitious project was the printing of the 90-volume *Kitab qamus al-shar'iyya* by the Omani scholar Jumayyil bin Khamis al Sa'id.³⁰ Unfortunately, printing ceased after nineteen volumes. As far as could be ascertained based on the holdings in Zanzibar, the only work printed by a contemporary Zanzibari was by the *qadi* and major intellectual Nasir bin Salim (known as Abu Muslim) Al Rawwahi (d. 1920).³¹ In 1898, the Sultanic Press published an account of a tour by the young crown prince in East Africa. Interestingly, the Sultanic Press was also listed to have published a travel account by Al Rawwahi concerning a journey to South Africa.³²

Conclusion

- 20 During the XIX century, the vibrant and articulated reality of the Ibadi press in Zanzibar through its wide network inside Africa, its publications, and through its main scholars, such as for example the Ibadi Sheikh Muahmmad bin Yusuf Attafayyish (1820-1914) was not only a regional reality that deeply influenced local East African society and politics, but also an important testimony of the deep processes of re-globalization re-emerged from the European presences such as the British colonial dominion on the East African island. Sheikh Attafayyish was an Ibadi *alim* who lived in an Algerian oasis. He met the religious world of his epoch, especially with Sultan Barghash ibn Sa'id Al bu Sa'id of Zanzibar, reminding him to keep his probity intact. Sheikh Attafayyish did publish in Zanzibar thirteen volumes commentaries on the Quran between 1887 and 1897, and a modest treatise on Ibadi doctrine in 1898. Intense was his correspondence between him and the Zanzibar court for these publications from such a remote area of Eastern Africa.³³ To this regard, we agree with Ghazal about

the significant role of Ibadism in Zanzibar and in its influences and reactions when in contact with other regions inside the African continent, and with the Western colonial presence.³⁴ Modernity brought also by the Western presence in Zanzibar involved numerous reflections in order not to 'forget' the traditional society values and the main Ibadi precepts inside this new-coming flow. Ibadi press on Zanzibar Island was in fact representing one of these social and political objects: re-connecting the ancient communication flows between Oman and East Africa; discovering the role of the African scholars within Ibadi doctrine inside the African continent; re-globalizing new Arab African traditions of Ibadi Islam, and of a new Zanzibari world in contact with the religious, social, and political challenges of Christianity and the West.

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ABSTRACTS

During the XIX century, on the Zanzibar Island, a gradual process of osmosis occurred through the first publications that often linked magical practices with the precepts of the Quran, resulting in a social and political interpretation of the Omani power on the Eastern African island that reflected a multiplicity of cultural roots. The vast network of international trade links, and the presence of numerous mercantile communities were progressively consolidated, stretching from Africa, Arabia, the Gulf, and India as far as Southeast Asia, Indonesia and even China with Zanzibar as a polarizing new capital and centre. Modernity brought by the international presences in Zanzibar involved numerous complex reflections in order not to losing the traditional society values and the main Ibadi precepts inside the new-coming progresses. Ibadi press on Zanzibar Island was in fact representing one of these social and political objects: re-globalizing the ancient communication flows between Oman and East Africa.

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Keywords: Zanzibar, Oman, British colonial presence, Ibadism, printing press, re-globalization

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