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By

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Dedicated to my father Hagi Scikei Abati,
my mother Khadija Ali Omar,
my sister Zuhra and my brother Sirajadin.

CONTENTS

PREFACE

This book attempts to draw the attention of international institutions and scholars to the landscape of medieval Mogadishu and the two historic districts of Shingaani and Hamar Weyne.[1] Together they form an ancient enclave dating back to at least the first millennium, although it must be said that Shingaani today has been almost completely destroyed and its reconstruction requires serious assessment and evaluation. In this work I will examine just a few aspects of Hamar Weyne with the purpose of raising awareness among national and international institutions and other potential collaborators of the problems of preserving this heritage. Understanding the development process of local buildings teaches young people about the types of solutions that their ancestors devised to solve certain technical problems. For example, in order to improve natural ventilation buildings included shaded courtyards. Furthermore, it is important to note that the width of a room could not exceed 3.60 m. without a wooden beam more than 4 m. in length, which was difficult to find. It can also teach them how their ancestors responded to the environment, the weather, the economy and overcame many obstacles. At the time of writing, this ancient town centre is under serious threat due to environmental degradation and development pressures.[2] I have attempted to present the material in such a way as to make it accessible not only to specialists in the field, but also in order to intrigue the non-specialist. To that end I have included many pictures of this unfortunate city.

[1] Hamar is written as Xamar in Somali—the letter 'x' is pronounced as a guttural 'h' identical in sound to the Arabic letter 'ح'

[2] For readers who may be unfamiliar: over the past 25 years Somalia has been defined by instability and has experienced a destructive civil war, the complete breakdown of state institutions, and the destruction of many historic buildings in the oldest quarters of the capital city.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Who are the Banaadiri?

This is not a book of architecture or archeology, although it reports much unpublished information related to this subject, which, I think, is of great historical importance. The real goal of this manuscript is to save what remains of the medieval districts of Mogadishu and other historical remains scattered around the city. Before presenting information about these valuable buildings, the works of art enclosed in the mosques, and other findings, I think it may be useful to understand the society that produced them.

Historically, Banaadir[1] is a geographical area that overlooks the coast of the Indian Ocean: from the city of Warsheekh, north of Mogadishu, it extends to Ras Kambooni, on the Kenyan border, and advances about 60 kilometres inland. Although the current federal government of Somalia circumscribes Banaadir as the area of the capital, the territory considered in this paper is defined by cultural tradition. Those who are today known as Banaadiri are actually the heirs of a multi-ethnic community formed more than ten centuries ago, which originated from areas around the Indian Ocean, the Persian Gulf and perhaps even Central Asia. On the southern shores of the Horn of Africa, Arab, Bantu and Cushite peoples lived in sufficient harmony that no serious page of history has ever reported any kind of ethnic conflict in the lands of Banaadir. It is only with the tragic and bloody tribal wars that have hit Somalia since the nineties that this peaceful community, in search of safety, began its exodus to Europe and the United States of America.

It should first be clarified that Mogadishu is not just a land of oral tradition (although this kind of tradition always accompanies the stories of people), but has a long and unexplored literary tradition in the Arabic language. Historically, Mogadishu was acknowledged as a maritime

[1] Banaadir is also spelt and known as Banadir or Benadir. The native people of Banaadir are also called Banaadiri or Benadiri.

emporium whose relationship to the countries surrounding the Indian Ocean was fundamental to their economy and identity; however, although this was the most striking feature, the main importance of the city was its role in spreading Islam throughout East Africa. The evidence is plentiful and it is enough to mention that in the early 1900s Mogadishu had twenty-eight mosques, and perhaps many more that have subsequently disappeared. These mosques were crammed into barely 70 hectares of the historic centre of Shingaani and Hamar Weyne and more than ten of these date from the medieval period. Most of the medieval mosques were stripped of their inscriptions and in some cases even permanently demolished; others have been pulled down and rebuilt with no respect for their history. The mosques were not only places of worship, but also places where students studied Islamic law: for centuries they attracted Muslim scholars and merchants. Confirming this, we have the evidence of the illustrious Moroccan traveler Ibn Battuta. He visited all Islamic countries and the most important cultural centres of the Islamic world. Mogadishu was among the cities that was honored and praised by Ibn Battuta. In fact, he left us one of the most important pieces of evidence of this period and wrote that he was lodged in the house reserved for Islamic students, which was decorated with carpets and contained everything needed—as early as the fourteenth century the existence of a college to host students and teachers from all over the Islamic world can be established. This college, an institution that provided free food and lodging to students from other regions, was an institution that was maintained until less than a century ago. As stated above, the area of the two districts of Hamar Weyne and Shingaani covers about 70 hectares. In the early 1900s there were twenty-seven mosques within this space. It seems likely, therefore, that urban centres were planned around mosques (which were centres for study and prayer) rather than around the *suuqs* (markets), as was typical of many Islamic districts.

In other words, it seems that the architecture and spatial organization of the city were influenced by the vocation of its inhabitants for teaching and their desire to disseminate Islamic knowledge. This is the reason, for example, for the existence of so many mosques in the limited space of these two medieval districts. Unfortunately, important institutions like the college described by Ibn Battuta and the caravanserai on the north side of the ancient walls (that once surrounded the city), which was noted by the Italians when they arrived, no longer exist. The loss of these ancient buildings, and many others, is indicative of the fact that many of Mogadishu's historic buildings have been destroyed.

The trade that sustained this religious community was very important. The regularity of the changing monsoon winds enabled sailing vessels to ply the ocean and return again within twelve months. The seasonal trend of the monsoon was the key factor in the trading networks of the Indian Ocean. The trade began with the arrival of sailing ships and that is why the medieval districts of Mogadishu were organized along the coast. This led to the city's enlargement, always parallel to the coast, and the construction of buildings with unusual frontages. This architectural feature, discussed in detail later, is a rectangular construction that juts out from one facade of the building, covering and hiding the main entrance and reaching up to the top of the first floor. Many two-storey buildings, especially in the Shingaani district, had this *avant-corps* or 'vestibule.' This medieval district was almost entirely destroyed in the early 1990s by Somali militias from other regions of the country. The life of the city was centred on its trade: as goods arrived they were brought within the walls and then moved to areas close to one of the city's four gates, later destroyed by the Italians.

One of these gates included the holding area for the dromedaries that formed the caravans: these carried goods into the heart of the country and on to the populous land of Ethiopia, which was the main destination for goods coming from Arabia and India. The traditional Banaadiri city of Mogadishu had two clear zones of economic activity: one near the main entrance to the walled city and the other on the beach for the embarkation of goods onto sailing ships. These goods were diverse, but important ones included fabrics made in Mogadishu, live animals such as goats and camels, and goods coming from southern Ethiopia. Ultimately, the city connected the religious culture and trade of Arabia, Persia and India with the interior of the Horn of Africa. The cities of the Banaadiri made the commercialization of products cultivated in the rural zones and those manufactured in urban centres possible. This had a positive impact on cultural and mercantile exchange at every level: local, regional and international.

At the beginning of its birth, nearly a thousand years ago, Mogadishu was as sparsely populated as the rest of Africa. The way the city was constructed—surrounded by walls with well-guarded entrances and an urban layout characterized by irregular streets and blind alleys—increased the city's security. In the interior of the ancient districts there were once many small open spaces where children played and which were also used as meeting places or for celebrations. For example, the square on the south side of the Jaama'a mosque still exists, as do those near the Mataano mosque, the Adayga mosque and some others. Sadly, other famous open spaces, like the one behind the Shiiq Rumaani mosque where the Reer

Faqi elders gathered, no longer exist. Between the alleys, we can still find some of these open spaces, but in the absence of a clearly defined development plan, speculators are infilling the few remaining spaces with new buildings. Historically, the city was very active in the manufacture of textiles and there were many foreign workers (especially Ethiopians) employed in this sector—European visitors described them as slaves even when they were not. It is true that slaves were sometimes used in textile production and as domestic labourers; their number, however, was very limited. This aspect was presented by the colonialist powers as a defining feature of the city to justify intervention on humanitarian grounds. Through this "humanitarian intervention" real colonization of Banaadir began.

Some details about the social characteristics of the inhabitants of Mogadishu can be derived from the architecture of their buildings. Their proximity indicates that residents had strong bonds of trust between them and defended themselves collectively from external aggression. The proximity of the buildings created a network of shady alleys and inhabitants must have collectively planned this feature of the city. There were many mosques pressed tightly against each other and domestic buildings were simple, unpretentious and lacking in ostentation. Banaadiri buildings are often square, with two or three storeys and flat roofs that are used by both women and men (separately) during religious and social ceremonies. The span of each room is determined by the length of the ceiling beams made from "harar" (the wood of *terminalia spinosa*), or "boriti" (*mangrovia*) imported from Lamu (Kenya). The stone buildings were made using coral, which was burnt to create lime and mixed with sand. Public artworks were reserved almost exclusively for mosques and wealthy donors invited the best artists from abroad. In this area, extensive research remains to be done: in some houses I have found interesting artifacts with decoration engraved on wood and metal suggesting that wealthy families bought or commissioned works of art for their homes. In general, we may assert that the virtue of modesty praised by the Qur'an determined the logic of traditional Banaadiri architecture.

Maritime Traders and Ancient Banaadiri Settlements

The trading links between the Banaadiri and different regions across the Indian Ocean were well established by 1000 CE and their wealth came from trade. The reliability of the monsoon winds, which changed direction twice a year, connected distant shores making long-distance trade the crux of Banaadiri history. Coastal cities formed a nexus between the African

hinterland and the merchants of the Indian Ocean. The development of these networks led to the progressive economic integration of the communities of the Indian Ocean littoral and the people of the East African hinterland. Another decisive factor in the development of the Banaadiri cities was the regularly changing monsoon winds, which meant that traders had to wait several months for their return voyage. For many seafarers Mogadishu and the other port cities of Banaadir became a second home.

The presence of the Banaadiri in the Horn of Africa by 1200 CE is well-established; the mosques built by them, like Al Jaama' in 1238 and Fakhruddin in 1269, still exist today. In the opinion of a number of scholars, further serious archaeological study may show that their presence dates back to the pre-Islamic period. There are numerous signs suggesting the existence of Banaadiri settlement prior to 1000 CE. The chronicle of Kilwa dates the foundation of Mogadishu to 900 AD.[2] Other documents found in Mogadishu suggest that the Banaadiri settled the city between 766 CE and 767 CE.[3] Chinese coins have also been found dating back to Emperor K'ai Yuan (713-742 CE) of the Tang dynasty[4] and among the ruins of Gezira, about 20 km south of Mogadishu, fragments of porcelain have been discovered along with Islamic earthenware from the ninth and tenth centuries.

Religion and Learning

Apart from being traders and entrepreneurs, the Banaadiri were also missionaries bringing Islam from Arabia. Some of these dedicated men of God, who had ventured across waters, settled, and developed coastal communities, travelled across the empty savannah, enduring hardship and risking their lives to spread Islam to the remote villages of the interior. Eventually, Islam spread throughout the Horn of Africa. The Banaadir coast, already a centre of trade, was the base from which, in the Middle Ages, the Islamic missionaries of *Jama'at Tabliiqi*[5] (The brotherhood that

[2] Cerulli, Enrico. 1957. Somalia: scritti vari editi ed inediti. Volume I, Storia della Somalia, L'Islam in Somalia, Il libro degli Zengi. Roma: Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, 1957. Vol. I., p.20

[3] E. Cerulli, p. 25-27.

[4] T. Filesi, *Testimonianza della presenza cinese in Africa*, in Africa, maggio/giugno,1962, p.115; Teobaldo Filesi, *Le relazioni della Cina con l'Africa nel Medio-Evo,* Milano, Giuffrè, 1975.

[5] Strictly speaking, the "*Jaama'at Tabliiqi*" is a movement for the revival of Islam born in 1867 in India. I have borrowed the term because it best describes the

propagates the word of God) departed. This Islamic conversion required a belief in egalitarianism and education: teaching the Qur'an was conditional on being literate in Arabic, requiring the teaching of reading and writing. In effect, the Banaadiri led a de facto literacy campaign in the Horn of Africa. The spreading of Islam required a fundamental point of departure: the principle of equality in education. Banaadiri teachers, without distinguishing between tribes, taught reading and writing in order for the Qur'an to be understood. This behaviour (imbued with altruism and dictated by religious ardour) facilitated their contact with other ethnic groups in the territory. Islamic forms of organisation and administration took root in Banaadir and began to spread inland. There were many social transformations, but the least studied are the effects that the spread of Islam had on economic life. One may suggest that Islam had a significant role in encouraging economic union. For example, the Qur'an categorically forbids the payment of interest and prohibits any request for a larger sum than that loaned, *riba*[6] (usury), regardless of the loan's purpose:

> "Contemporary Muslim Economists interpret the prohibition in its context within the Qur'an. Richness is not condemned for itself but the pursuit of wealth as a primary objective is. In this context, the prohibition of *riba* refers to risk-free interest rather than profit. When a lender extorts payment without taking into account the conditions under which the borrower accepted the loan, his action can be compared to exploitation and as such can be considered socially irresponsible. If, on the other hand, the borrower has agreed to accept losses or profits, on his own initiative, the *riba* is avoided since the borrower is considered a business partner."[7]

This principle of the illegality of interest would have been of significant impact since the primary activity of the Banaadiri was commerce. The fact that there were no credit or insurance institutions meant that, in the past, the laws of the Qur'an favoured the formation of partnerships, in which

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characteristics of the faithful who spread Islam across the world.

[6] The literal translation of the Arabic word *riba* is 'increase,' 'addition' or 'growth,' though it is usually translated as 'usury.' *Riba* is an unjustified increment in borrowing or lending money, paid in kind or in money above the amount loaned, as a condition imposed by the lender or voluntarily agreed by the borrower. *Riba* defined in this way is called *Fiq riba al-duyun* (debt usury). *Riba* is also an unjustified increment gained by the seller or buyer if they have exchanged goods of the same kind in different quantities.

[7] Mohamed Ariff, et al., *Islam e Finanza: Religione musulmana e sistema bancario nel Sud-est asiatico*, Torino: Fondazione Giovanni Agnelli, 1991, p.276.

the participation and, therefore, the division of profits and losses did not contravene Islam. Some Europeans misrepresented this business practice as suggestive of a sort of criminal association, ignoring the real reason that led to this union of capital among the Banaadiri. Others made every effort to represent the coastal traders, particularly those who lent money, as usurers.[8] In any case, from a solely economic point of view, those who lent money, even when asking for interest forbidden by the Qur'an, facilitated trade by acting as bankers.

The Growth of Foreign Trade, Urbanisation and the First Industries of Banaadir

The long uninterrupted urban history of Mogadishu, its cultural and architectural diversity and relatively consistent economic prosperity in comparison to other areas of the Horn of Africa, are all largely due to its proximity to the Arabian Peninsula and India, and the ability of the Banaadiri to navigate with the monsoon.

The Banaadiri had an impact on all areas of social life. They introduced a system of weights and measures (no longer used): the *ratl* or roll (approx. 450 g.), the *dra* or arm (approx. 50 cm), the *gizla* (120 kg), and the *frasla* (approx. 36 rolls); and the scales that came to be used inland were introduced by coastal Banaadiri traders[9] in an attempt to rationalise the measurement system, which had until that time been rather primitive and had been based on arbitrary bartering systems. They also oversaw a decisive internationalisation of commercial activity. All of southern Somalia was connected to the vast network of Muslim trade, which stretched from the Arabian Peninsula and the Persian Gulf as far as western India, through the coastal city of Banaadir. Coastal exporters almost always found a foreign market for local produce, such as cattle, skins, butter, ivory, cereals, cotton, sesame, and local cloth. Imports included rice, sugar, silk and cotton cloth, yarn for local industry, and metal utensils. New navigation methods were introduced. The French traveller F. Elliot wrote that around 1925 at Ciovai (one of the Bajuuni islands) there was a naval yard in which 'sewn boats,' *mtepe*, were built for long distance trade.[10] Even though the heart of the whole system was

[8] Romolo Onor, *La Somalia Italiana*, Torino, Fratelli Bocca Editori, 1925, p.88; U. Ferrandi, p.342.
[9] U. Ferrandi, p. 348.
[10] V.G. Grottanelli, *I pescatori dell'Oceano Indiano*, Roma, Cremonese, 1955, p.196.

foreign trade, the Banaadiri also developed industries that transformed local life. They introduced the technique of extracting oil from sesame, which became one of the most important exports of the Banaadir. Until only a few decades ago, the production of sesame oil presses was still exclusive to them.[11] They even tried to produce glass. An account is related in Stefanini:

> "Revoil found interesting drips of glass and ceramics at Mogadishu and recognised their similarity to others that he had found in the village of Scec Osman near Aden."[12]

They introduced weaving techniques and the legendary Banaadir textile industry was born. We know from Ibn Battuta that by 1300 cloth was being exported from Mogadishu to the Middle East, and therefore industrially produced and marked up for sale. This is the best evidence that the Banaadiri were not only involved in the trade of cloth, but also in its production. Another indication supporting this theory regards the import of the primary material. Cotton had, before its local cultivation, been imported by the Banaadiri—they travelled to Gujarat in dhows to buy supplies. One type of striped cloth, known as *subaa'i*, produced and used by both men and women in Banaadir was also used in Hadhramaut in Yemen.[13] Both in Banaadir and in Hadhramaut, this cloth is associated with traditional wedding ceremonies. In order to avoid dependence on foreign imports, Banaadir artisans also began to grow and export raw cotton. The creation of a new foreign market spurred on agricultural production, which was carried out mostly by Bantu and Cushite communities. The most important evidence is relatively recent, but significant. Christopher commented, in 1843, that grain (primarily millet) "supplies the whole coast of Hadramaut and Oman" and that Banaadir "may be styled the grain coast for the supply of Southern Arabia." Four years later, Guillain reckoned that nearly 3,182,400 kg of millet was exported from Mogadishu to Zanzibar and southern Arabia. He also records that between 23,868 and 39,780 kg of sesame seed was sold overseas. By the time of Kirk's visit to the Banaadir ports in May 1873 there can be no doubt that a roaring business was being done in agricultural products, mainly through the ports of Mogadishu and Marka

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[11] R. Onor, p.71.
[12] G. Stefanini, *In Somalia: note e impressioni di viaggio,* Firenze, Felice Le Monnier, 1922, p.25.
[13] R.B. Serjeant, *Customary and Shari'ah law in Arabian society* London, Variorum, 1991, XII, p.476.

(Merca). At Mogadishu, Kirk "was much struck with the number of large dhows at anchor … We found twenty vessels from 50 to 200 tons, all filled with or taking in native grain, which I learn is largely grown on the river behind, near Geledi." He also found a similar number of vessels engaged in the grain trade at Marka, "to this must be added ... crops of the best kind of sesame oil-seed, which are a very important item in the Zanzibar trade."[14]

The Italian consul to Zanzibar, in a letter dated 1889 and addressed to the Italian Prime Minister, Crispi, wrote:

> "20 Mogadishu Arabs settled for about a year in a locality known as El Khor [...] they were supported by the capital of Mogadishu traders who had cornered the market in orchill."[15]

El Khor (pronounced Eel Huur) is a small village about 450 km north of Mogadishu. This is further proof that the Banaadiri encouraged agricultural production, even in other regions, guaranteeing an income and a foreign market for local produce. The transformation of society was remarkable. From a form of subsistence production they passed to one led by the foreign market and connected the coastal villages to those further inland. New commercial roles were born, such as that of the wholesale merchant, and new buildings with the construction of warehouses along the coast to receive merchandise. The problems encountered at the village of El Khor deserve to be mentioned as they give us a good idea of the difficult conditions in which coastal traders operated when dealing with Somali clans. From the letters of Captain Vincenzo Filonardi, we know that the Sultan of Hobyo, Yusuf Ali Kenadid, asked for protection from the Italian government because:

> "The El Khor Arabs [...] returned and made agreements with internal tribes to declare war on me and close internal roads to me [...] they are ready to open hostilities [...] this war came to us from the sea."[16]

From the traveller Robecchi Bricchetti we know that some years earlier, prior to the accession of Yusuf Ali, a Banaadiri trader by the name of Muumin Awees was creating a successful commercial emporium on behalf of the people of Mogadishu—Awees built the only two important

[14] Alpers, E.A. (1983), Muqdisho in the nineteenth century: a regional perspective, Journal of African History, vol. 24, no. 4, p.441-459.
[15] Comitato per la documentazione delle attività italiane in Africa, *L'Italia in Africa:Oceano Indiano*, Roma, Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato,1968, p.33.
[16] Comitato, 1968, p.105.

buildings at El Khor. Bricchetti writes that Awees was of the Agbal clan, but, from the letters of a Majerteen noble who knew the trader well, it is clear that he was a Banaadiri Arab. Yusuf Ali felt overshadowed by Awees and gathered his forces to eject him from the area.[17] In October 1925, the Italians forcefully occupied Hobyo and deported the new Majerteen Sultan, Ali Yusuf son of Yusuf Ali, to Mogadishu.

The Banaadiri were undoubted protagonists of urbanisation. They created many more cities than the well-known Mogadishu, Marka, Baraawa and Kismaayo. The archaeologist Chittick in just two weeks succeeded in locating seventeen other ancient settlements in Banaadir alone.[18] Technology and building materials saw radical change and cities began to be constructed with multi-storey houses, built from limestone, mortar, lime and mangrove beams imported from Lamu. The main industry associated with this type of construction, apart from the quarrying of lime, centred on the kilns to bake it. The presence of fragments of *sgraffiato* ceramics at the ruins of a mosque made from brick, discovered by Chittick at Munghia near Marka, suggests that it dates back to the eleventh century, making it the oldest discovered to date. Several tombs at Chula and Bur Gao bear traces of brickwork pillars, which have been interpreted as phallic references. However, if we take into consideration the tomb with a niche for the offering of incense, we notice that it is nearly identical to those found near Aden (Yemen) by the English scholar Serjeant.[19] Among the ruins of Rasini, opposite the island of Ciula, we have a small example of the artistic elegance of which the Banaadiri were capable. In the words of Grottanelli,

> "the small exquisite mihrab[20] in grey stone, already published by Revoil, is one of the most perfect monuments to Muslim art in East Africa."[21]

[17] L. Robecchi-Bricchetti, *Somalia e Benadir***,** Milano, Carlo Aliprandi Editore, 1899, p.183.
[18] N. Chittick, *An Archaeological Reconnaissance of the Southern Somali Coast*, Azania, 1969, p.115-30; Neville Chittick, *Mediaeval Mogadishu,* Paideuma-Mitteilungen zur Kulturunde*,* 8, 1982, p.47-62.
[19] Serjeant R.B., Customary and Shari'ah Law in Arabian Society, Variorum, London, 1991, X, p.80.
[20] Mihrab: niche in the Mosque wall indicating direction of prayer.
[21] V.G. Grottanelli, p. 76.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CAMPAIGN OF DEFAMATION AGAINST THE BANAADIRI PAVING THE WAY FOR "HUMANITARIAN COLONIZATION"

A Brief Mention of the Relationship between Zanzibar and Banaadir

Banaadir and Zanzibar were very close in some respects, but with different political systems and modes of production. In Zanzibar, slavery existed as a production system in order to finance the military apparatus built by the Omani. The make-up of the Omani armed forces was very complex. The army included, besides members of the Omani clans, militias from Baluchistan and received funding from Indian entrepreneurs located in Oman. After the expulsion of the Portuguese from the Indian Ocean, the Omani forces, in order to finance their military apparatus, began to use slavery on the clove plantations of Zanzibar. The situation in Banaadir was very different because they had no armed forces to be financed and the families who owned the plantations were located along the river Shabelle. The majority of these small farmers, who were Cushites and not Arabs, used local labour along with some slaves (of which only a few were "slaves" in the classic sense of the term), while the majority was made up of Ethiopian immigrants whose poverty led them to be mistaken for slaves. Before Italian colonization, Banaadir had strong links to the culture and economic world of the Swahilis. The territory in which this coastal civilisation sprang up was 1500 km long and spread 60 km inland, from Warshiikh, north of Mogadishu, to Sofala, in Mozambique. Therefore the economic and cultural ties between Banaadir and Zanzibar and the whole East African coast were very strong. The most famous Banaadiri in Zanzibar was Sheykh Muhiy al-Din b. Sheykh al Qahtani of the Wai'li clan of Barawa (Brava). He operated in Zanzibar as the first *qaadi sunnites* under Sultan Sayid Said (1804). His successor, Abdulaziz b. Abdulghani,

was born in Barawa in 1833.[1] In 1730, the Omani, a small but capable and ambitious people, succeeded in hunting down and stopping the Portuguese from Cape Delgado to Cape Guardafui: since 1497 the Portuguese had suppressed the centuries-old Indian Ocean trade network in an attempt to enforce a monopoly. After 1832, the Omani family of Abu Saidi expanded their influence in Banaadir. Following the death of Sayid Said (1804-1856), the sovereign who took Oman to its most powerful level, there were problems regarding the succession to the throne. The kingdom was divided and Zanzibar proclaimed itself independent, first under Sayyid Majid (until 1870) and then Said Barqash (until 1888). These dynastic stories are important since in 1840, when Zanzibar became the residence of Sayid Said and the economic capital of the Omani Empire, Banaadir began to prosper. The Banaadiri benefited notably from this situation: the economy was reborn with renewed export of local cloth, skins, cattle, ivory, oil seeds and cereals. As a result of the Portuguese embargo in the region, when, in 1811, the English captain Smee sailed along the coast, he reported that commerce in Mogadishu and Brava (Barawa) was non-existent.[2] Despite this, the Banaadiri did not wish to join with Oman and they missed out on the opportunity of becoming a military power. All in all the Omani have always shown goodwill towards the Banaadir. For example, after serious attacks by the Biimaal clan of Marka on some functionaries of Zanzibar, there were no reprisals, only the arrest of those guilty of the massacre[3] and in 1837, Hashem Bedouni, the unpopular functionary of the Sultan of Barawa was replaced by a local Sheykh.[4] The true objective of the Omani was to create an empire stretching from the waters of the Persian Gulf to the East African coast. In order to create and finance this military enterprise they had no hesitation in actively developing the slave trade, first at the request of the Europeans and then, after the abolition of slavery in 1833, for the plantations of Zanzibar.

On attitudes to slavery, Beatrice Nicolini, who has published several essays and monographs on the history of East Africa, has the following to say:

> "In terms of rights, no political or religious function may be performed by a slave, but owners may delegate to slaves any responsibility or task

[1] A. Sheriff, 1995, p.73.
[2] Freeman-Grenville, 1988, cap. IV, p.157.
[3] Lee V. Cassanelli, *The Shaping of Somali Society,* Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Press, 1982, p.198.
[4] Marisa Molon-Alessandra Vianello, *Brava, città dimenticata,* in Storia Urbana *n. 53*, 1990, p.201

> related to the exercise of their authority. Thus, the slaves of important individuals enjoyed a privileged status and could often attain higher positions of power than free men, the cases of slaves themselves becoming princes not being entirely exceptional, either. In the context of Islam, slavery is a highly-structured concept, regulated down to the smallest detail in the civil and criminal codes. As a result, it is difficult to pass judgement on the moral or physical condition of slaves in the Islamic African world as compared to those in other societies. Conditions obviously varied, and there were certainly those who attempted to escape, but there is no doubt that this institution lay at the very foundation of the entire […] cosmopolitan commercial empire 'founded' on the seas by the Omani Sultan: Saiyid Sahid bin Sultan Al Bu Sahid."[5]

The Defamation Campaign of the Colonial Powers against the Inhabitants without their Knowledge

On the case of slavery in Banaadir, colonial sources, for almost a century, wrote whatever they wished without being challenged—the local inhabitants were not even aware of these accusations. A classic example can be seen in the photos produced by the accusers where a "liberator" is photographed near two locals and the caption reads "Freed slaves from the Anti-Slavery Society" with no evidence to back up this claim. The colonial powers exaggerated and manipulated the facts to build a justification for colonial occupation. Slavery was used as a pretext for colonization and military intervention was disguised as "humanitarian intervention" to rescue slaves. Generally, we may say that slavery existed in the region, but was not a distinctive feature. Ibn Battuta, a careful recorder of his travels, makes no mention of the existence of large numbers of slaves in Mogadishu. The fourteenth century was a period of great economic growth in Mogadishu and this wealth was not the result of the use of slaves. Slaves were used en masse as part of the production system in Zanzibar, but not in Mogadishu, nor in the other urban centres of Banaadir: the majority of Banaadir's wealth was derived from the importation of goods from India and Arabia and their transfer inland to Ethiopian communities. Slaves were used in Mogadishu by a few wealthy families, especially for housework and weaving; they came with the caravans coming from the area now known as Ethiopia. The Mogadishans did not own plantations and their system of wealth production, which was based on trade, did not

[5] Beatrice Nicolini, The Makran-Baluch-African network in Zanzibar and East Africa during the XIXth century, African and Asian Studies, volume 5, nos. 3-4, Leiden, 2006, p.81-106.

require large numbers of slaves. It has been suggested that in Banaadir slaves were Bantu people brought from Tanzania, but the majority of them appear to have been Ethiopian. This can be seen in the use of the term *habash*, the origin of which is Abyssinian, as a synonym for "slave." I would suggest that there is a strong possibility that, originally, this term simply identified a group of Ethiopian immigrants who carried out the most menial tasks for the wealthy of Banaadir. Additionally, the many small farms along the rivers and textile manufacturers were always on the lookout for cheap labour. Many Ethiopian workers found work in these areas and a small number of them were probably slaves.

The Relationship of the Italians and the Banaadiri

Before examining the information on slavery that comes from colonial sources, it is perhaps useful to describe the ideas that the Italians had of the Banaadiri. In 1925, Romolo Onor, an agronomist for the colonial government, said:

> "Even usury is one of their methods, the worst exploitation by the coastal dealers on the productive population."[6]

However, in contrast Grottanelli succinctly states:

> "The Arabs are often diligent and enterprising cultivators."[7]

While the Honorable Chiesi wrote:

> "The Cadi[8] who administer justice in Banaadir are Somalized Arabs, that race which makes up the majority of the population in the cities. Their culture, rather mediocre, one can sum up in the following: knowing how to read and write in Arabic, knowing the Koran by heart [...]. But given this rather obtuse moral sense, of this species and of Orientals in general [...] one understands [...] how the various reported abuses are founded on the truth."[9]

Certainly Enrico Cerulli, who knew the Banaadiri well, did not think this way. In 1923 he wrote:

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[6] R. Onor, p.88.
[7] V.L. Grottanelli, p.331.
[8] Cadi (Qaadi) is an Islamic judge
[9] G. Chiesi e E. Travelli, *Le questioni del Benadir: Atti e relazione dei commissari della Società*, Milano, Bellini,1904, p.360.

> "From what I have described in various chapters one can deduce the state of Islamic instruction among Somalis: a religious minority with a truly remarkable culture."[10]

Finally, from the documentation of the Italian Ministry for Africa's Historical Archive we can understand why Banaadiri of Yemeni origin were actively recruited as soldiers for the colonial troops:

> "They were professional soldiers [...] much nearer in mentality to the dominant Europeans than the indigenous Africans [...] they adapted naturally to discipline as to any other aspect of the profession."[11]

The enrolling of Somalis in the colonial troops, gradually and consistently, began once there were no more Banaadiri willing to serve the colonial authority. The Italians professed a contradictory sentiment, towards the Banaadiri: a mixture of hate and respect conditioned by their own cultural legacy and Eurocentric worldview.

A Brief Outline of the Italian Sources on Slavery in Banaadir

I decided to include a section on slavery in this work, not because it was salient for understanding recent Banaadiri history, but because it helps us to understand the effects of the Islamic schools in Banaadir and the cultural and social revolution of the brotherhoods. This was a social revolution whose source of inspiration was found in the teachings of the Islamic schools of Banaadir, the leaders of which were accused by colonialists of being involved in slavery.

Inquiries, carried out by Robecchi-Brichetti on behalf of the *Società Antischiavista Italiana*, by Chiesi and Travelli for the *Società Anonima del Benadir*, and by Pestalozza and Di Monale on behalf of the Italian government, were opened after a bombastic campaign in the Italian press in 1903. The historian, Francis Surdich, in a report presented in 1979 during a conference on Luigi Robecchi Bricchetti, warned of the unreliability of Bricchetti's evidence on Somalia. The report of professor Surdich, which was not published in the Proceedings of the Conference, showed how Bricchetti distorted reality in order to promote and encourage the widest possible consensus on Italy's expansionist initiatives in

[10] E. Cerulli p.210.

[11] Comitato per la documentazione dell'opera dell'Italia in Africa, *L'Italia in Africa: l'opera dell'esercito*, Roma, Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, 1960, p.81.

Somalia.[12] The objective was to help Italians accept their government's newest adventure in Somalia after defeat at Adwa in 1889. These inquiries showered disgrace and accusations on the inhabitants of Banaadir and highlight the level of prejudice involved. Robecchi-Bricchetti, in 1903, wrote that slavery, "if not [...] destroyed, [then] perhaps the Koran [may be] eliminated.[13] The Hon. Chiesi accused the Filonardi Company, who managed the ports of Banaadir from 1893 to 1896, of having tolerated slavery and of promising the Somali that they would use a judicial system based on the *Shari'a*,[14] and wrote that "the Sheriah admits [...] many other things repugnant to our civil and moral sense."[15]

It would be enough to limit ourselves to these brief references to disqualify the reports of these authors. But despite their intention, typical of Europeans of this period, to describe Muslims and, above all Arabs, as slave drivers, we may still refer to their reports in an attempt to extract something more reasonable and nearer to the truth. The contradictions to which these men fall victim can leave one dumbfounded. Robecchi-Brichetti, after his first trip in 1890 wrote:

> "Every well-off Somali [...] generally has a slave [...]. In the villages of Banaadir, there are still today, not less than two or three thousand slaves [...] they live with their masters who treat them just like any other household member, and they dress and eat like all Somalis, so much so that I am convinced that offering them liberty many of them would refuse immediately."[16]

After the press campaign he returned to Somalia to conduct an inquiry, which suggested that of a population of 6,695 inhabitants in Mogadishu, there were 2,095 slaves. At Marka and Barawa there were 721 and 829 respectively. He marvelled at "having heard someone tell me that the slaves were so happy that even if offered they wouldn't accept liberty!"[17]

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[12] Surdich Francesco, *L'immagine dell'Africa e dell'Africano nelle relazioni di Luigi Robecchi Bricchetti*, Pavia, 1979, p.195-225.
[13] L. Robecchi-Bricchetti, *Nel Paese degli aromi, Diario di una esplorazione nell'Africa Orientale*, Milano, Carlo Aliprandi Editore, 1903, p.489.
[14] Shari'a: (lit. *The Way*) this is canon law revealed by Islam and coming from the Qur'an and Hadith (the tradition related to the acts and words of the Prophet Muhammad).
[15] L. Robecchi-Bricchetti, 1903, p.360-361.
[16] L. Robecchi-Bricchetti, 1903, p.488-489.
[17] L. Robecchi-Bricchetti, *Dal Benadir: Lettere illustrate alla Società Antischiavista d'Italia*, Milano, Aliprandi, 1904, p.232.