

## THE HISTORY OF THE SOMALI PENINSULA:

### *FROM ANCIENT TIMES TO THE MEDIEVAL ISLAMIC PERIOD*

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History is the study of past events using the sources of what is written, what is said, and what is physically preserved. It is also a subjective process of recreating past occurrences and is a matter of perspective. It gives people a sense of identity, prevents them from repeating previous mistakes, and makes them aware of their roots, as well as those of different cultures, peoples, and countries. History can be studied at different levels, such as national, regional, and global, but all these levels exhibit that humankind is not isolated from each other in the past and present, and are interdependent. Historians, specifically Western historians, divided historical studies into four periods. The first period was called Prehistory, which begins at the first the appearance of human beings on earth and continues until the development of writing systems. The prehistoric era is also subdivided and named according to tool-making technologies, such as Stone Age, Bronze Age, and Iron Age. Archeology is the subject matter and the only source for the study of this period. The second period is called Ancient History (3600 BC-500 AD) which begins with the first records in writing and ends after the fall of several big empires, including the Western Roman Empire, the Han Dynasty in China, and the Gupta Empire in India. The third period is called Medieval History (500-1500 AD), which begins with the fall of the aforementioned empires and ends with the invention of the printing press, the discovery of America, and the Ottoman Empire's conquest of Constantinople. The fourth period is called Modern History (1500-present) which begins from the end of the medieval period up until today. Each period is sub-divided into phases with specific common characteristics although each phase generally lacks clearly demarcated lines and tends to overlap one another. Evidently, the Western historical

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narrative has been portrayed as the universal history, which rightly conforms to the theory of power relations and the production of history.

To sift through what is generally shared from what is distinct and specific in the history of humankind, and it is evident that the first two periods, Prehistory and Ancient History, could be considered to a certain degree as the general history of all humankind, with some differences in the different continents and regions. For example, while some regions are still in the prehistoric period, others may be in the ancient or even in the medieval period. So, we should consider historical periods merely as a general trend of human history. With respect to the third and fourth periods, the trends in the human history diverged, and its universality thus became dubious. For instance, the Dark Ages or the Medieval period in the European history (500-1500 AD) was a period of intellectual darkness and barbarity in Europe, whereas this time marked a golden period for the Islamic civilization. This civilization produced great scientific, philosophic, and artistic culture, while at the same time it assimilated scientific knowledge of other civilizations such as Greece, Persia, and China. Therefore, from now on, we will use the terms “European Medieval History” and “Islamic Medieval History” to illustrate commonality in the time and difference in the developmental stage. Moreover, modern European history, which is characterized by iconic periods such as the Renaissance, the industrial revolution, colonization, and the age of technological advancement, was totally different from the conditions of the colonized countries. This period was, for instance, a time of decadence in the Islamic civilization, and an era of colonialism and nation-state formation. Thus, this period could be called, in the Somali context, the “Precolonial, Colonial and Post-Colonial Period.”

Hence, in the case of Somalia, being part of Islamic civilization, the third period of its history begins with the introduction of Islam in the Somali Peninsula in the seventh century and ends with the collapse of the Muslim states of the Ajuran and Adal sultanates in the seventeenth century. The fourth period could be considered as the era of decadence, as symbolized in the precolonial era of fragmented states followed by the reconfiguration of society through colonialism and the postcolonial state. The precolonial phase begins with the fall of Islamic dynasties in the Somali Peninsula and the establishment of clan-based small states until colonial incursion in 1885. It was followed by the colonial era from 1884 to 1960, in which Somalia experienced multiple colonialism with its rancor and hostility. Finally, the postcolonial phase

begins from 1960 and continues until the current time, which is characterized by the rise and fall of the state and its subsequent catastrophic implications. Having laid the frame of Somali history, we will turn now to pen an overview of the ancient and Islamic medieval period of the Somali history to produce a history of the people, who are often thought of as “the people without history”. Herein, we exhibit that colonized people have their own historical trajectory in parallel that of European history.<sup>2</sup>

The Somali peninsula is located on a strategic trade route connecting Africa, Asia, and Europe. It is the cradle of the human race and the kernel of ancient civilizations. The Cushitic-speaking people – to whom the Somalis belong – have dwelled in this region as indigenous people for the past 7000 years. This evidence challenges the hypothesis on the origins of the Somali people, which asserts that the Somalis migrated either from southern Ethiopian highlands in the first century AD, or from south Arabian Peninsula after the tenth century AD. This hypothesis implies that Somalis are newcomers in the territory they occupy today, and that they dislodged other people in the early centuries. Historical evidence shows that the Somali Peninsula was the nexus of the global economy and that various commodities were commonly traded, such as frankincense, myrrh, and spices, with ancient Egyptians, Phoenicians, Mycenaeans, and Babylonians. These commodities were produced and exported from the Land of Punt, which is situated in the North-eastern Somalia. Moreover, other trading cities had flourished along the Indian Ocean littorals, as *the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* reported in the first century AD.

In the medieval Islamic period that began in the seventh century, the Islamization of the Somali society was at pace and intensified in the successive centuries, thereby enhancing its historic ties with the Arabian Peninsula. Locally, Somalis became part of the Muslim Sultanates of Ifat and Adal in the thirteenth century and played a significant role in the push-pull wars with the Abyssinian Empire in the highlands. In addition, the Ajuran sultanate, the largest state in precolonial Somalia, had emerged in the fourteenth century and extended its authority to most of

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<sup>2</sup> Eric Wolf challenges the long-held anthropological notion that non-European cultures and peoples were isolated and static entities before the advent of European colonialism and imperialism. See Eric Wolf and Thomas Eriksen, *Europe and the People without History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

the southern Somalia until the seventeenth century. The Ajuran state is credited for repulsing the Oromo invasion from the west of Somali-inhabited territory, as well as the Portuguese foray from the Indian Ocean. Moreover, the Ajuran Sultanate undertook an assertive plan of spreading Islam throughout East Africa. Both the Adal sultanate and Ajuran dynasty were weakened in the seventeenth century and were replaced by fragmented, clan-centric states until colonial powers seized the opportunity and dominated the Somali Peninsula.

The general historiography of the Somali Peninsula presents a picture as if its history began with the colonial period, while its rich ancient and medieval Islamic history have been given less attention. This shortcoming diminishes a sense of pride and historical awareness of the Somalis and reduces the value and importance of rich and unique human civilizations that flourished once upon a time in this region. A sense of history is vital to developing a sense of connectedness in order to understand past challenges and crises, to preserve collective memory, and revive the conception of historical nationhood. Therefore, this paper aims to make an overview of the less-addressed historical period of the people of the Somali Peninsula, and to reconstruct, in a concise manner, its ancient and medieval Islamic history. The literature review covers the ancient and medieval Islamic civilizations and the emergence of Muslim sultanates in the Somali territory. The paper forms a conclusion on the major historical themes of the period under study and puts forth contested narratives that require further research.

### **Literature Review**

Historical studies often begin with a literature review in order to get an idea of what previous scholars have written about a particular topic under investigation. In doing so, we found that academic studies on the ancient history of the people of the Somali Peninsula is very limited to the extent that it presents an enormous historical gap and an intellectual black hole. Therefore, this paper relies on bits and pieces of general historical literature, scattered articles, and archeological works. The first written work, which describes commercial links and cities on the littorals of the Indian Ocean, is the [\*The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea\*](#), a travelogue written by a Greek traveler in the first century AD.<sup>3</sup> The other important document to be consulted is the PhD thesis of Mohamed Nuuh, titled "History in the Horn of Africa, 1000 BC. - 1500 AD, which

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<sup>3</sup> Huntingford, [\*The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea\*](#). (Ashgate Publishing, 1980).

offers a comprehensive ancient and European medieval history of the people in the Somali Peninsula until the end of the European medieval period.<sup>4</sup> Other less studied historical sources are archeological work carried mainly by visiting European researchers. The first archeological work on Somalia was published by the Italian scholar Paolo Graziosi in 1940.<sup>5</sup> It was seconded by the British archaeologist Desmond Clark, who published his classical work on the Prehistoric cultures of the Horn of Africa in 1954.<sup>6</sup> Other scholars who contributed to the Somali archeological research include British scholar Chittick H. N, who led an expedition mission to the town of Hafun, the ancient trading port of Opone mentioned in the *Perilpus of Erythraean Sea*. Chittick published his first work on Somali archeology in 1969.<sup>7</sup> In addition to that, archaeologist Brandt S.A. also published a number of archeological papers.<sup>8</sup>

Alas, after the collapse of the Somali state in 1991, archeological work came to a complete halt, and National Archives, Museums and the National Academy of Culture, were vandalized. In the misery of conflict and civil war, Somalia lost its valuable artifacts and national heritage, which still requires relocation and repatriation. Recently, Somaliland Department of Antiquity initiated some archeological work that includes mapping the archeological sites. For example, Somali archeologist Sada Mire's paper *Mapping the Archaeology of Somaliland*:

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4 Mohamed Nuuh Ali, "History in the Horn of Africa, 1000 BC. - 1500 AD: Aspects of Social and Economic Change Between the Rift Valley and the Indian Ocean." A PhD thesis submitted to the University of California, LA, 1975.

5 Paolo Graziosi, "L'Eta della Pietra in Somalia: Risultati di una missione di ricerche paleontologiche nella Somalia italiana in 1935. (Università degli studi di Firenze. Firenze: Sansoni, 1940).

6 Desmond Clark published his classical work on the Prehistoric cultures of the Horn of Africa. See also, Sune Jonsson, "An Archeological site file in Somalia." Proceedings of the Second International Congress of Somali Studies, University of Hamburg, August 1-6, 1983. Available from [http://dspace-roma3.caspur.it/bitstream/2307/2879/1/02\\_JONSSON%20S.\\_An%20Archeological%20Site%20File%20of%20Somalia.pdf](http://dspace-roma3.caspur.it/bitstream/2307/2879/1/02_JONSSON%20S._An%20Archeological%20Site%20File%20of%20Somalia.pdf) (accessed on December 16, 2016).

7 Chittick H. N, "An archaeological reconnaissance of the southern Somali coast", *Azania*, 4.

8 Brandt S.A., "The Importance of Somalia for understanding African and World prehistory", *Proceedings of the First International Congress of Somali Studies in 1992*.

*Religion, Art, Script, Time, Urbanism, Trade and Empire* includes more than 100 new and previously unpublished sites. Mire concludes in her research that “The region [Somali Peninsula] had vast Cushitic, pre-Christian and pre-Islamic Empires that at times formed part of the Himyarite and Sabaean cultures of Southern Arabia, the Aksumite Empire and early Islamic Empires of the Horn of Africa.”<sup>9</sup>

Following Mire’s efforts, the number of literature on the Medieval Islamic period increased, with a number of academic studies consistently published. Among these works, four scholarly books stand out of the crowd. The first comprehensive historical book was authored by Ali Abdirahman Hersi.<sup>10</sup> This work is a seminal piece of research dealing with the less addressed issues in the Somali history. It digs deep into the history of the Somali Peninsula in the ancient era and its trade links with the rest of the ancient world. The focus of the book is the emigration of Arabs in the medieval period to Somalia, in addition to their enterprises and the massive conversion of the Somalis to Islam. Moreover, the book further explores the emergence of Muslim sultanates in northern Somalia, the rise of the Ajuran Sultanate, and the Somali interaction with the Portuguese and Turkish powers. Furthermore, the book delves into the colonial incursion of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, its impact, and the subsequently strengthened cultural ties between Somalia and the Arab world.

The second work was authored by Scott S. Reese and traces the history of the “Banaderi” community, their migration to Somalia in the medieval Islamic era, and their habitat in the cities of Mogadishu, Merca, and Barawe.<sup>11</sup> It is an excellent history that draws substantially on an oral collection of the historical data and contributes to the study of the history of the Somali minorities. The third work, authored by Virginia Luling, provides detailed descriptions of the Geledi

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9 Sada Mire, “Mapping the Archaeology of Somaliland: Religion, Art, Script, Time, Urbanism, Trade, and Empire” (2015) 32:111-136, 111.

10 Ali Abdirahman Hersi, *The Arab Factor in Somali History: The Origins and Development of Arab Enterprises and Cultural Influence in the Somali Peninsula*. (Los Angeles: University of California, 1977).

11 Scott S. Reese, “Patricians of the Banadir: Islamic Learning, Commerce and Somali Urban Identity in the 19th century.”, A PhD Dissertation submitted to the University of Pennsylvania, 1996

city-state and the adjacent clans dwelling in and around Afgoye since the late seventeenth century.<sup>12</sup> Luling, besides a good background section, reconstructs the social fabric at the larger regional level and investigates the ways in which traditional relationships and cultural features reshape themselves in new and modern contexts. Written in a clear and accessible style, this is an excellent and up-to-date introduction to the ethnography of Somalia. The fourth work, authored by Lee Cassanelli, reconstructs and interprets certain aspects of Somali history in the precolonial period and offers an excellent background section on the medieval Islamic period.<sup>13</sup> It explores the history of southern Somalia from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. This book studies nomadic ethnohistory and oral history and the author approached the study of Somalia's pastoral history from a regional perspective. The author is one of the leading western scholars on Somalia, and his research is considered a good basis for the study of the pre-colonial history of Somalia.

Other complementary literature includes Mohamed Mukhtar's paper, which offers a historical background on the introduction of Islam in Somalia, which also examines the claims of some Somali clans to originate from Arab descendants and puts forth a counter narrative.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, the of "*Futuh al-Habasha*", authored by Shiba ad-Din Ahmed, offers a detailed description of the campaign of Imam Ahmed Ibrahim "Gurey" and his encounter with the Abyssinian Empire.<sup>15</sup> This book documents Somali clans who participated in the campaign and their crucial role in the Jihad. The recent Ph.D. thesis by Avishai Ben-Dror provides a history of the city of Harar within the context of the medieval history wars between Abyssinia Empire and Muslim sultanates.<sup>16</sup> It particularly focusses on the Egyptian rule of the historic Islamic city of Harar (1875-1884).

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12 Virginia Luling, *The Somali Sultanate: Geledi city-state over 150 years*. (Transaction Publishers, 1990).

13 Lee Cassanelli, *The Shaping of Somali Society: Reconstructing the history of the Pastoral People, 1600-1900*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982).

14 Mohamed Mukhtar, "Islam in Somali History.: Fact and fictions" in the edited book by Ali Jumale titled *The Invention of Somalia*. (Lawrenceville: The Red Sea Press, 1995).

15 Shiba ad-Din Ahmed, *Futuh Al-Habasha: The Conquest of Abyssinia*. (Tsehai Publishers, 2003).

## The Ancient History of the Somali Peninsula

The land inhabited by the Somali people is situated in the Horn of Africa, jutting out into the India Ocean to form the Somali Peninsula. The Horn of the African region is believed to be the cradle of the humanity, as archeological discoveries of 1967 in the Ethiopian Omo River had attested.<sup>17</sup> At the bank of this river, the oldest known fossil of modern human skulls was discovered, dating back to approximately 195,000 years ago.<sup>18</sup> The first team of archeologists led by Richard Leaky had unearthed modern human fossils consisting of two skulls and one partial skeleton in the Omo Basin in Ethiopia, which was estimated to date back to approximately 130,000 years ago.<sup>19</sup> However, another team of scientists from the Australian National University revisited the site in 2005 and came across additional fragments of the fossilized skull that matched those of the original skulls. The new findings were dated as approximately 195,000 years old, using modern radiocarbon dating, making them the oldest modern human remains so far discovered. These human remains were deposited in Addis Ababa Museum as witness that the Horn of African region is the cradle of mankind.<sup>20</sup>

Further, in the northeastern Horn of Africa, nowadays known as Somali inhabited territory, the oldest indication of human habitation during the Stone Age was evidenced with the discovery of “Acheulean stone blades and flint tools discovered in the vicinity of Hargeisa and in the caves along the Golis escarpment”, dating back to roughly 12,000-40,000 years.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, Heyward [Seton-Karr](#) (1859–1938), a game hunter and adventure traveler associated with the

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<sup>16</sup> Avishai Ben-Dror, “The Egyptian Hikimdāriya of Harar and its Hinterland” – Historical Aspects, 1875-1887.” A PhD Thesis submitted to the School of History, Tel Aviv University, 2008. Available from <http://humanities1.tau.ac.il/history-school/files/Ben-Dror.EN.pdf> (Accessed on December 3, 2016).

<sup>17</sup> Philip Briggs, *Somaliland with Addis Ababa with East Ethiopia*. (Bradt Travel Guides, 2012), 4.

<sup>18</sup> Hillary Mayell, “Oldest Human Fossils Identified”. National Geographic news, February 16, 2005. Available from [http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2005/02/0216\\_050216\\_omo.html](http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2005/02/0216_050216_omo.html) (accessed on December 22, 2016).

<sup>19</sup> Alice Roberts, *The Incredible Human Journey*. (Bloomsbury Paperbacks, 2010).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Philip Briggs, 4.

British Royal Geographical Society, discovered stone hand axes at Jalelo on the slopes of a hill between the port of [Berbera](#) and Hargeisa in 1896, which dates back to 40,000 years. The Somalian prehistoric hand axes were placed in museums including the British and the Australian Museums.<sup>22</sup>

More evidence of prehistoric human habitation of the Somali territory was discovered at Laas Geel complex, located about 50 km north of Hargeysa. As Ahmed Ali Ilmi puts it,

The Lass Geel cave paintings depict images of cows, local inhabitants dressed in what appear to be ceremonial robes, and a few dogs in what also appear to be ceremonial robes. The humans have their hands in the air in what is considered a worshiping posture. The cave walls are also covered in old hieroglyphic scripture. Somalis have known of the existence of the caves for centuries and have regarded them as historical sites, hence, the Somali name for the caves. Yet, the Western world only found out about these sites in 2003 when a French team of archaeologists was searching the caves in the area.<sup>23</sup>

In this archeological site, rock art of wild animals is estimated to date back to 5,000 years.<sup>24</sup> Paintings at Laas Geel demonstrate early pastoral livestock herding in the Horn of Africa. In particular, the camel is believed to have been domesticated in the Horn of Africa between the third and second millennium BC, and from there spread to Egypt and North Africa.<sup>25</sup>

Additionally, between the towns of Las khorey and Elaayo lies the Karin-Hegane site, which encompasses numerous cave paintings with real and mythical animals estimated to be

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<sup>22</sup> This hand axes were deposited in the British Museum and the Australian Museum. See brief report and pictures of the Australian Museum, available from <http://australianmuseum.net.au/hand-axes-from-somalia-and-our-african-origin> (accessed on December, 2016).

<sup>23</sup> Ahmed Ali Ilmi, "The History of Social Movements in Somalia through the Eyes of Our Elders within a Diasporic Context." A PhD thesis submitted to Graduate Department of Humanities, Social Sciences and Social Justice Education Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 2014, 24. References to Gutherz, X., Cros, J.-P., & Lesur, J. (2003). The discovery of new rock paintings in the Horn of Africa: The rock shelters of Las Geel, Republic of Somaliland. *Journal of African Archaeology*, 1(2), 227-236.

<sup>24</sup> Otto Bakano, "[Grotto galleries show early Somali life](#)", April 24, 2011, AFP. Retrieved 22 December, 2016.

<sup>25</sup> Michael Hodd, *East African Handbook: Trade & Travel Publications*. (Passport Books, 1994).

2500 years old.<sup>26</sup> Other prehistoric archeological sites discovered in the southern Somalia included cemeteries at Buur Heybe/Buur Ayle and Gogoshiis Qabe (the furnished place), located near the district of Bardale, 60 km southwest of Baidoa, and is estimated to have been used for over 4000 BC.<sup>27</sup> The fourteen burials founded there date back to the pre-Islamic period and constitute the earliest burials in the Horn of Africa containing the earliest definitive grave artifacts.<sup>28</sup>

Archeological studies and discoveries of the ancient civilizations in the Somali inhabited territories are yet to be given serious attention and may reveal new historical evidence. Nonetheless, the above archeological findings challenge the early hypothesis on the origins of Somali people from the southern Ethiopian highlands, specifically those from the Omo-Tana region who later migrated into the northern Kenya in 1000 BC.<sup>29</sup> According to this hypothesis based on historical linguistics, Somalis migrated north in the first century AD to populate the Horn of Africa.<sup>30</sup> The new findings suggest that “Somalia is a nation with a history that stretches back more than 10 millennia to the beginnings of human civilization.”<sup>31</sup> It also suggests that “the ancestral home of the Somalis was the northern part of the Peninsula, with the Peninsula always being inhabited by the Somalis.”<sup>32</sup> This finding also cast doubts on the orally constructed origins

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26 Ismail Mohamed Ali, *Somalia Today: General Information*. (Ministry of Information and National Guidance, Somali Democratic Republic, 1970), 295.

27 Brandt S.A., "Early Holocene Mortuary Practices and Hunter-Gatherer Adaptations in Southern Somalia". *World Archaeology*. 20 (1 (1988), 40-56.

28 [Abstracts in Anthropology, Volume 19](#). (Greenwood Press, 1989), 183.

29 David Shiin and Thomass Ofcansky, *Historical dictionary of Ethiopia*. (The Scarecrow Press, 2004), 362

30 Herbert Lewis, "The Origins of Galla and Somali." *The Journal of African History*, vol.7. No.1 (1966), 27-46.

31 Raphael C. Njoku, *The History of Somalia*, (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood), 2013, 13

32 Said M-Shidad, "The Ancient Kingdom of Punt and its Factor in Egyptian History", 2014. Available from [http://www.wardheernews.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/The-Ancient-Kingdom-of-Punt\\_Shidad.pdf](http://www.wardheernews.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/The-Ancient-Kingdom-of-Punt_Shidad.pdf) (accessed on December 2, 2016)

of Somalis from the Arabian Peninsula pushing Oromo and Bantu further south and westwards, which had already been discredited by the historic linguistic approach. The original homeland of the Somalis being the Horn of Africa was established through linguistic studies and archeological discoveries, which conclude that Cushitic language speaking people such as the Oromo, Somalis, Sidamo, and Afar, have been indigenous people in the Northeast Africa for the last 7000 years.<sup>33</sup>

The Somali Peninsula was always a strategic magnet and commercial nexus of the world trade routes in both the past and present times. Its strategic and commercial importance has continued since ancient times when merchants from the Somali Peninsula traded various commodities such as frankincense, myrrh, cinnamon, ebony, ivory, gold, and animal skin with Ancient Egyptians, Phoenicians, Mycenaeans, and Babylonians. These commodities, which were “the most ancient and precious articles of commerce”, are still produced and exported from the north-eastern regions of Somalia.<sup>34</sup> Frankincense is “a resin exuded from various spices of boswellia” (Olibanum Indicum; Latin), a very expensive commodity used as a perfume, for medicinal treatments, and as an incense.<sup>35</sup> The frankincense tree grows in arid regions of the Horn of Africa. On the other hand, Myrrh, “a gum from the bark of a small tree,” is less expensive than Frankincense and used to perfume clothing, as an incense, and for embalming.<sup>36</sup> The Egyptians called the Land of Punt or “Pwenet”, or *Ta netjer* “Land of the Gods”, in reverence of the Egyptian Sun God (RA) and used both frankincense and myrrh for religious purposes and cosmetics. In particular, the Somali Peninsula had a special relationship with ancient pharaonic Egypt, with various Egyptian expeditions sent to the Somali Peninsula being recorded since 2480 BC. It seems that the Egyptians initiated direct commercial transaction with the original source of the merchandise in Somalia, which they began during the rule of Mentuhotep III (around 1950 BC) when the officer Hanu organized multiple trips to the Land of Punt. However, as time passed, relations between ancient Egypt and the people of the Somali

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33 Kevin Shillington (ed.), *Encyclopedia of African History*. (Fitzory Dearborn Tylor and Farancis Group, 2005), 331.

34 Hersi, Arab Factor, quoted from *the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, 44.

35 Ibid,, 44..

36 Ibid.

Peninsula strengthened beyond mere commercial connections. For example, there is evidence of cultural links and the movement of people, as recorded in some ancient Egyptian inscriptions reporting the arrival of immigrants from the land of Punt. This piece of information is supported by related evidence that the son of Khufu, the Pharaoh of the Great Pyramid, employed one of these immigrants in his court.<sup>37</sup> From historic linguistics, it was also discovered that the Somali language shares a number of etymological words with the ancient Egyptian language that has exactly the same meaning.<sup>38</sup>

However, the most authentic piece of historical literature treating the ancient history of Somali Peninsula was in the hieroglyphic diary and arts of the expedition of the fleet that consisted of 5 ships dispatched to the Land of Punt by Queen Hatshepsut of the 18th dynasty in 1478 BC. The history of this expedition was memorialized in the artifacts of the temple of Queen Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahri, near Luxor in the Valley of the Kings in Egypt, during the reign of the Puntite King Parahu and Queen Ati.<sup>39</sup> Hieroglyphic engravings on Hatshepsut's temple shows the following written inscription: "Sailing on the sea, and making a good start for God's Land. Making landfall safely at the terrain of Punt....".

A description of a typical man from the Land of Punt is described as "a tall, well-shaped man; his hair is bright, his nose is straight, his beard long and pointed, growing only on his chin; he wears only a loin cloth with a belt in which a dagger is fixed."<sup>40</sup> The people of the Land of

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37 Abdurahman al-Najjar, *Al-Islam fi Al-Somal*. (Al-Qahira: Madba'at AlAhram Al-Tijariyah, 1973), 53.

38 For example, some common words are: Hees (song), Aar (Lion), Shub (pour out), Usha (scepter), neder (divine being), Hibo (gift), Tuf (spite), Webi (river), Kab (shoe), Dab (fire), Hoo (to offer), Awoow (grandfather) and ayeeda (grandmother). This comparative linguistics is from Diriye Abdillahi, "Learn Somali: Somali English Dictionary", 1985.

39 The history of this journey is well recorded on the walls of Queen Hatshepsut's temple at Deir el-Bahri.

40 This description is the reading of a scripture of Puntite king Baharu and his wife Atu in the temple of the Queen Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahri. See <https://atlantisjavasea.com/2015/11/14/land-of-punt-is-sumatera/> (accessed on 19 December, 2016)

Punt were known as warriors who were feared by those who saw them in battle. The ancient Land of Punt originally encompasses the whole region that includes Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia, yet, it is almost undisputable that the site of the Hatshepsut expedition was the tip of the Somali Peninsula. The name “Punt” was well known and was even mentioned in the Bible as “Phut” (Genesis 10:6; cf. 1 Chronicles 1:8), while the ancient Romans called it Cape Aromatica because of the trees that produce aromatic gum resins. Phut is the third son of Ham (one of the sons of Prophet Noah), and in the Bible the name is used for the people who are said to be Ham’s descendants.<sup>41</sup> In addition, in the fifth century BC, Greek historian Herodotus, known as the Father of History in the Western traditions, refers to a race called the Macrobian who dwelled in the south of Egypt. These people were famous for their longevity (an average of 120 years) due to their diet that mainly comprised meat and milk. They were also, according to Herodotus, the “tallest and handsomest of all men.”<sup>42</sup> All descriptions of the people concur pastoral Somali figures who are tall, handsome warriors, with a diet predominantly consisting of meat and milk. This point of view was affirmed by the Indian scholar, Mamta Agarwal, who wrote that “these people were none but the inhabitants of Somalia, opposite the Red Sea.”<sup>43</sup> Ancient Greek travelers the likes of Strabo, Pliny, Ptolemy, and Cosmas Indicopleustes also visited the Somali Peninsula between the first and fifth centuries AD. These travelers called the Somali people the “Barbaria” and their land as “Barbars.”<sup>44</sup> It seems that the name derived from the current town of Berbera in the northern Somali territory.

Finally, several city-states flourished along the littorals of the Indian Ocean in the ancient times, such as Opone, Essina, Sarapion, Nokon, Malao, Damo, and Mosylon.<sup>45</sup> The names of these cities and their locations were reported in the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, a

41 Sadler, Jr., Rodney "Put". In Katharine Sakenfeld. *The [New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible](#)*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2009), 691–92.

42 Herodotus, *the Histories*, 3.20.

43 Mamta Agarwal, “Biography of Herodotus: The Father of History.” Available from <http://www.historydiscussion.net/biography/biography-of-herodotusthe-father-of-history/1389> (accessed on December 15, 2016)

44 Abukar Ali, “The Land of the Gods: A Brief Study of Somali Etymology and its Historio-linguistic Potential.” Available from <http://sayidka.blogspot.co.ke/> (accessed on December 19, 2016).

travelogue of a Greek explorer dating back to the first century AD.<sup>46</sup> This travelogue is a firsthand description of the region, written by Maris Erythraei, who was familiar with the sea routes of the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. According to the *Periplus*, trade was flourishing in the region along the coast line of the Indian Ocean. The ancient Indian Ocean cities, as recorded in the *Periplus*, correspond to the modern Somali cities along the littorals of the Indian Ocean.<sup>47</sup> For instance, Sarapion, Nikon, and Opone correspond to Mogadishu, Barawe and Hafun, respectively.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, Somali-Indian trade intensified following the annexation of the Roman Empire in the Nabataean Kingdom in 106 AD.<sup>49</sup> The Nabataeans occupied northern Hejaz and the Negev into the Mediterranean Sea, stretching along the coast of the Red Sea. The Indians traded cinnamon with Somali merchants who re-exported it to the Roman and Greek Empires. The following section begins in the seventh century, which is the onset of the Medieval Islamic period. The six centuries between the two periods mark a historical gap in which historic documents and written materials are still absent; as a result, nobody knows what happened to the flourishing cities and civilizations in the Somali peninsula during this period.

### **The Medieval Islamic Period**

The medieval Islamic period in Somali history begins in the seventh century, during which Islam was introduced to Somalia. Some hagiological sources ponder that Islam reached the northern Somali coast shortly after the first Muslim migration to Abyssinia before Islam even reached Medina in 624 AD.<sup>50</sup> The first Muslim migration occurred when the Muslim minority in Mecca were persecuted and the Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him) directed his

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45 George Wynn Brereton, Huntingford, [\*The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea\*](#). (Ashgate Publishing, 1980).

46 Mohamed Jama, *An Introduction to Somali History from 5000 years B.C Down to the Present Times*, 1962.

47 Opone corresponds that Hafun town, Essina, was somewhere between Barava and Marka; Sarapion was between Mogadishu and Warsheikh; Nikon was near Kismayo; Malao corresponds Berbera; Damo near Cape Guardafui; and Moslyn near Bossaso.

48 Wilfred H. Schoff, *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*. (London, 1912), 60-61.

49 Eric Herbert Warmington, *The Commerce Between the Roman Empire and India*. (The University Press, 1928), 54.

companions to migrate to Abyssinia, the “land of truth”, which was ruled by “a king under whose domain no one will be wronged.”<sup>51</sup> As expected, the Abyssinian king of Negus, headquartered in the city of Aksum, whom under the Arabic tradition was named Ashama Ibn Abjar, extended Muslim migrants his full protection and utterly rejected the Quraysh emissary’s demand for repatriation to Mecca.<sup>52</sup> The companions enjoyed and lived peacefully in the custody of the Emperor for about 13 years (615-628 AD). During these long years, it is plausible to have some Abyssinian conversion to Islam in a favorable environment of freedom and friendship.<sup>53</sup> However, this proposition remains sheer speculation, since we lack reliable historical evidence that ascertains the occurrence of such conversion.

With respect to the early Somali conversion, it is even harder to accept this fact as accurate, because the distance between Aksum and the town of Zayla, the center of the Somalis, is more than 1000 km by land and even further by sea. The other possible scenario regarding the early Somali conversion to Islam is related to the early Yemeni Muslims who reached Abyssinia during the first migration. It is known that a group of early Yemeni Muslims undertook a voyage across the Red Sea to meet the Prophet after migration to Medina; however, due to strong waves, the group was forced to land on the Western coast of the Red Sea. From there, they decided to join their Muslim companions in Aksum.<sup>54</sup> The Yemeni Muslims may have reached Zayla after they had returned to Yemen. Regarding the Muslim migrants to Abyssinia, it was reported that some of them had returned earlier to Mecca and participated in the Migration to Medina in 622

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50 Salahadin Eshetu, “King Nagash of Abyssinia.” Available from <http://dcbun.tripod.com/id17.html> (accessed on July 4, 2016).

51 Ibn Kathir, *Albidaya wa Nihaya*, volume 2 (Arabic)

52 Amr bin Aas led a Quraysh delegation to Abyssinia to demand the repatriation of the Muslims to Mecca. Martin Lings, *Muhammad: His Life based on the Earliest Sources*. (Inner Traditions, 2006), 81-84.

53 Ismael Mukhtar, “Milestones in the History of Islam in Eritrea.” A paper delivered at the Eritrean Muslim Council’s 6th annual convention held in Washington D.C. in July 2008, 2. Available from [http://www.muslimpopulation.com/africa/Eritrea/Eritria\\_Islam\\_PDF.pdf](http://www.muslimpopulation.com/africa/Eritrea/Eritria_Islam_PDF.pdf) (Accessed on December 20, 2016).

54 Ibid., 1.

AD, and those who remained behind also returned later to Medina in 628 AD. Somali historians are in agreement with the lack of evidence of the early Somali conversion to Islam before Islam reached Medina, as generally believed. For instance, Said Samatar questioned the possibility of some of the migrants remaining in the region, writing that “Might some have remained behind to plant the seed of the new religion in the soil of the Horn?”<sup>55</sup> Moreover, Mohamed Mukhtar asserts a “lack of evidence” of early Somali converts to Islam before the Muslim migration to Medina. Furthermore, Ali Abdirahman Hersi in his Ph.D. thesis *The Arab Factor in Somali History* considers the introduction of Islam to Zayla in early years of Muslim migration to Abyssinia as “largely conjectural.”<sup>56</sup> Nonetheless, historiography on the early reach of Islam in Somalia becomes more problematic considering the fact that the Mosque of the two-mihrab (Masjid al-Qiblatayn) which means the mosque of the two niches, one facing Jerusalem and the other in the direction of Mecca, is located in Zayla.<sup>57</sup> As a matter of fact, the direction of Qibla was changed from Jerusalem to Makkah in 624 AD after two years of Muslim migration to Medina. The story of the Mosque of the two-mihrab is indeed puzzling and requires comprehensive examination, which sheds some light in the early history of Islam in Somalia. This undertaking is very crucial to avoid mythological hearsay or “idle superstition and uncritical acceptance of historical data”, as Ibn Khaldun repeatedly warned against.<sup>58</sup>

The early introduction of Islam in Somalia usually took place in Zayla and Berbera in northern Somalia and Mogadishu in southern Somalia, usually in the form of commercial outlets. Mukhtar speculates that the first wave of Muslim migrants was most probably Umani tribes who were defeated and severely persecuted during the Apostasy War (*Hurub al-Riddah*). The easiest escape route and the closest geographic location was the Somali Peninsula, which was

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55 Said Samatar, “Unhappy masses and the challenge of political Islam in the Horn of Africa.” Available from [http://www.ethiomeia.com/newpress/political\\_islam.html](http://www.ethiomeia.com/newpress/political_islam.html) (accessed on November 24, 2016),

56 Hersi, *The Arab Factor*, 113.

57 More in-depth research is needed to examine when the mosque was constructed and who constructed and why the mosque has two Qiblas.

58 Ibn Khaldun, Franz Rosenthal, N. J. Dawood (1967), *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*. (Princeton University Press, 1967), 10

historically connected through trade. Mukhtar concludes “thus, there is good reason to believe that the earliest wave of Muslim immigrants to the Somali coast occurred as early as the period of Abu Bakar, the first Caliph of Islam.”<sup>59</sup> Other pieces of historical evidence show that the early Islamization of Mogadishu may have taken place during the Caliphate of Omar Ibn Khitab (634-644 AD), meaning the first half of the seventh century AD. Moreover, the migration of an Omani group led by brothers Suleiman and Sa’id of Juland settled on the East African Zanj coast in 695. This account is very close to the historical facts witnessed by the inscription on the tombstone of Fatima bint Abdisamad Yaqub, who died in Mogadishu in year 101 of the Islamic calendar.<sup>60</sup> This evidence is strengthened by the records reports in *Kitab al-Zunuj*, an anonymously authored book discovered by Italian scholar Enrico Gerulli in Somalia, which reveals the presence of Muslims in Mogadishu during the Caliphate Abdulmalik bin Marwan (685-705 AD). The Caliph dispatched an expedition under the command of Musa ibn Umar al-khath’ami to Mogadishu and Kilwa, who reported that these city-states accepted Islam during the Caliphate of Omar Ibn Khitab (634-644 AD) and swore their allegiance to the Caliphate.<sup>61</sup> Mogadishu continued as part of the Caliphate during the reign of Abu-Ja’far al-Mansur as Yahya ibn Umar al-Anzi, a representative of the Caliph in the East African region, reported.<sup>62</sup> However, many East African cities, including Mogadishu rebelled against the Harun al-Rashid Caliphate (786-809 AD) and his son, al-Ma’mun (813-833 AD), sent two punitive expeditions to them.<sup>63</sup> It was also reported that a group led by the “Seven Brothers of al-Ahsa,” from the Persian Gulf, settle in Mogadishu

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59 Mohamed Mukhtar, Islam in Somali History: Fact and fiction” in *The Invention of Somalia*, edited by Ali Jumale Ahmed. (Lawrenceville: The Red Sea Press, 1995), 5. The author quoted from Hassan Ibrahim Hassan, *Intishar al-Islam wa al-Uruba fi ma Yali al-Sahra al-Kubra, Sharq al-Qarra al Ifriqiyyah wa Gharbiha*. (Cairo: Madba’at Lujnat al-Bayan al-Arabi, 1957), 127.

60 Hersi, *The Arab Factor*, 91. Also, Ahmed duale Jama, *The Origins and Development of Mogadishu AD 1000 to 1850: A Study of urban growth along the Banadir coast of southern Somalia*. (Repro HSC, Uppsala 1996).

61 Mukhtar, Islam in Somali History, 3. Hersi, *The Arab Factor*, 86.

62 Ibid., 4.

63 Hersi, *The Arab Factor*, 112.

and Barawa, Somalia in 920, and other large group from Persia led by Hassan ibn Ali al-Shirazi migrated to East Africa in 1000.<sup>64</sup>

In the medieval Islamic period, explorers from China, the Arab/Islamic World, and Portugal disembarked on the Somali Peninsula, writing detailed descriptions of its people, cities, and trade linkages with the Asian and Arab states and empires. As African travel specialist, Philip Briggs illustrates, "the earliest medieval description of the Somali region, and arguably the most detailed, was penned by the Chinese explorer and writer Tuan Ch'eng-Sbib in the mid-9th century."<sup>65</sup> Tuan named where he visited as "Po-pa-li" and provided a detailed description of the customs of the inhabitants, which most historians assumed to be the town of Berbera. A similar description of the Somali people was provided by another Chinese writer, Chou Ju-Kua, which dates back to approximately 1225 AD.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, another Chinese explorer, Zheng, visited Somali cities such as Mogadishu, Zayla, Merca, and Berbera in 1430. On the other hand, a Somali Islamic scholar and explorer from Mogadishu called "Imam Said al-Muqdishawi" traveled to China in the 14th century during the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368 AD). Historical records affirm that Said traveled from Mogadishu and studied in Mecca and Medina for 28 years. He traveled across the Muslim world and visited Bengal and China. He met Ibn -Battuta on the west coast of India, to whom he is said to have shared accounts of his travels in China, which were most probably included in the Ibn-Battuta chronicles.<sup>67</sup> In the medieval period, the Somali Peninsula exported Giraffes, zebras, horses, exotic animals, ivory, and other goods to the Ming Empire of China (1368–1644 AD) in exchange for ceramics, spices, and muskets.

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64 Mohamed Mukhtar, *Historical Dictionary of Somalia, New Edition*. (The scarecrow Press, 2003), xxvi

65 Philip Briggs, *Somaliland with Addis Ababa with East Ethiopia*. (Bradt Travel Guides, 2012), 11.

66 Ibid.

67 Charles H. Parker & Jerry H. Bentley (ed.), *Between the Middle Ages and modernity: Individual and community in the early Modern World*. (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2007), 160. Also, see Peter Jackson, "Travels of Ibn Battuta", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 264.

Arab/Islamic geographer Ibn-Said al-Maghribi (d. 1286) produced detailed written account on Somalia in the Islamic Medieval period and described that southern Somalia was predominantly populated by Sunni Muslims and called Mogadishu, the city of Islam “*Dar al-Islam*”.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, al-Idrisi (1100-1166) described the commercial coastal cities of Merca, Barawe, and Mogadishu, as well as the inland commercial routes. Furthermore, al-Hamawi (d. 1229 AD) describes Somalis as black to distinguish them from the migrant Asian population, and describes Mogadishu as “predominantly populated by foreigners and not blacks”.<sup>69</sup> He also reports the presence of strange animals “not found elsewhere in the world”, such as the giraffe, leopard, and rhinoceros. Finally, Ibn Battuta’s (1304-1369) visit to Mogadishu in 1331 revealed that the city was at the zenith of prosperity and was "an exceedingly large city" with many rich merchants, which was famous for its high-quality textile fabric that it exported to Egypt. The remarkable description of Mogadishu by Ibn Battuta indicates that the city was highly advanced as a center of trade and Islamic learning. Ibn Battuta was puzzled by Somali Sultan Abubakar bin Mohamed and his judicial Islamic system, which he considered to be a highly advanced hierarchical system of governance.<sup>70</sup> Ibnu Battuta, in his travelogue, described how he was welcomed in Mogadishu. He noted that,

The Qadi took my hand and we came to that house which is near the Shaikh’s house. And it was bedded out and set up with what is necessary. Then he came with food from the Shaikh’s house. With him was one of his wazirs who was in charge of guests. He said, “*Maulana gives you al-salamu ‘alaikum*’ [i.e., peace be unto you] and he says to you, “you are most welcome.” Then he put down the food and we ate.<sup>71</sup>

Medieval Arab writers like al-Mas’udi and al-Hamawi also visited northern cities such as Zayla and Berbera and described their population as comprising blacks and Arab emigrants, who were not highly visible as compared to Mogadishu.

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68 Mukhtar, *Islam in the Somali History*, 6

69 Ibid. Also, Hersi, *The Arab Factor*, 102-103.

70 David D. Laitin, Said S. Samatar, *Somalia: Nation in Search of a State*. (Westview Press: 1987), 15.

71 Walker, R, *When we ruled: The ancient and medieval history of Black civilisations*. London, U.K: Every Generation Media, 2006, 475.

The city of Zayla, the Somali gateway to the Arabian Peninsula, became the capital of the multi-ethnic Adal Sultanate which flourished from 1415 to 1577 AD. Adal Sultanate succeeded the Sultanate of Ifat, who was later defeated by Emperor Amda Siyon of Abyssinia in 1332.<sup>72</sup> The Muslim-Christian relations were cordial since the early Muslim migration to Abyssinia, and the subsequent centuries. This relation was bolstered with the Prophet's high regard to Abyssinia, relating that "Abyssinia is a land of justice in which nobody is oppressed", which spared Ethiopia from Jihad.<sup>73</sup> The early historiography of Muslims relates the history of the Abyssinian king converting to Islam and exchanging presents with the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Also, when the news of the death of the Abyssinian king reached the Prophet, he performed a funeral prayer (*Janaza*) for him in absentia.<sup>74</sup> Such friendly relations continued until the sixteenth-century; however, this relationship later became marred because of the interest in controlling the trade routes, in addition to the growing fear of religious rivalry. Islam had been growing in Abyssinia, and since the ninth century, sultanates being established. The first such sultanate was the Makhzumi dynasty (896-1285) in Shewa, followed by the Ifat (1285-1415 AD) and Adal sultanates (1415-1577 AD), headquartered in Zayla. The Muslim Sultanates controlled the trade routes between the Christian highland and the coastal cities of the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean, and had cordial agreements with Ethiopian highlanders to share part of the trade revenues. Sometimes, their relations soured and they engaged in economic push-pull wars given religious coloring: Islam versus Christianity.<sup>75</sup> When cities changed hands between Muslim sultanates and the Abyssinian Empire, the Muslims lived peacefully with the Christians until the period of Imam Ahmed Ibrahim's later Jihad. Conversely, "when the Abyssinian king Negus Yakuno Amlak (1270-1285) conquered Seylac [Zayla], [he] killed many Muslims and forcibly converted survivors to Christianity and converted mosques to churches."<sup>76</sup>

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72 Ibid., 4.

73 The authenticity of this Hadith is questionable but it expresses Muslim sympathy to Abyssinia and directing their Jihad to other directions such as Persians and Byzantine empires.

74 Bukhari, Book of Funerals. Also, Hirsi, *The Arab Factor*, 78.

75 Nahemia Levtzion and Randall Pouwels, *The History of Islam in Africa*. (Ohio University Press, 2000).

The most dramatic episode of wars between the Muslim Sultanate and Abyssinian Empire took place during the reign of Imam Ahmed Ibrahim Al-Gazi (1506–1543) and the Ethiopian Emperor Lebna Dungal “Dawit II” (1501–1540). It seems that the Muslims who played a subservient role to the Ethiopian Empire for centuries were eager to liberate themselves, refusing to pay tribute and avenge for the past wrongs. It is also important to mention the inspiring slogan of war as Islamic Jihad against Christian Abyssinians. This is an indication of the change of power relations between Muslims and Christians in Abyssinia and growing conception from the Muslim side as the war being legitimate against the century’s aggressive Christian Abyssinians. The confrontation that began earlier continued during the reign of Emperor Gelawdewos (1521 – 1559). The magnitude of the war was so massive that it had attracted the intervention of the two super powers: the Portuguese and Ottoman Empires. These two superpower empires had intervened the conflict by allying the Abyssinian Christians and the Adal Muslim Sultanate respectively. In this period, the campaign known as the Conquest of Abyssinia (*Futuh al-Habasha*) took place, which started around 1527.<sup>77</sup> Iman Ahmed started his campaign to conquer the Abyssinian Empire and succeeded to conquer more than a half of its territory, thereby inflicting massive devastation on Abyssinian Empire and converting many Christians into Islam. Nevertheless, complete seizure of Abyssinian Christian Empire was thwarted by a timely intervention from the Portuguese, led by Cristovão da Gama, the brother of Vasco Da Gama, the famous Portuguese explorer and the first European to reach India.<sup>78</sup> The Portuguese military expedition included 400 musketeers, as well as a number of artisans and other non-combatants, while the Imam requested the Ottoman Empire for help and received 700 Turkish troops. The Conquest of Abyssinia remains in the memory of many generations of Ethiopians. "In Ethiopia, the damage which Ahmad Gagn [imam Ahmed Ibrahim] did has never been forgotten," wrote Paul B. Henze. “Every Christian highlander still hears the tales of Gagn in his childhood. Haile

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<sup>76</sup> Ben I. Aram, “Somalia’s Judeo-Christian Heritage: A Preliminary Survey.” *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 22.2 2003, 8, quoted from Bertin, G. Bertin, *Christianity in Somalia*. (Muqdisho: Croce del Sud Cathedral. Manuscript, 1983), 9-10.

<sup>77</sup> The chronicle of the campaign is well recorded in the Arabic language written book. Shiba ad-Din Ahmed bin Abd al-Qadir, *Futuh Al-Habasha: The Conquest of Abyssinia*, translated by Paul Lester Stenhouse. No date.

<sup>78</sup> R.S. Whiteway, *The Portuguese Expedition to Abyssinia in 1441-1543*, 1902. (Nendeln, Liechtenstein: Kraus Reprint, 1967), 42.

Selassie referred to him in his memoirs, "I have often had villagers in northern Ethiopia point out the sites of towns, forts, churches, and monasteries destroyed by Gragn, as if these catastrophes had occurred only yesterday."<sup>79</sup> The military campaign between the two camps was temporarily halted in 1543, when Imam Ahmed was killed in the battle of Wayna Daga. Nonetheless, the wife of Imam Ahmed Bati del Wambara repudiated to accept defeat and was highly committed to avenging her husband. As a result, she married his nephew, Nur ibn Mujahid, on the condition that he would avenge Imam Ahmad's death. Thus, the hostilities between the two camps continued under the successor Iman Nur Ibn Mujahid, who reignited the war in 1554 and fulfilling his wife's condition, he avenged for Imam Ahmed by killing Ethiopian Emperor Galawdewos in 1559.<sup>80</sup>

Historiography of the early wars between the Abyssinian Empire and the emerging Muslim Emirates was depicted as though Abyssinia was "a beleaguered fortress in the midst of a sea of Islam."<sup>81</sup> This conception was originally forwarded by J.S. Trimingham, an Orientalist historian who was criticized by the lack of evidence and a counter argument was produced. The contesting narrative was articulated by Travis J. Owens, who wrote "that the Muslim neighbors of the Ethiopian Empire were besieged by Christian Ethiopia throughout the medieval period."<sup>82</sup> Moreover, Travis considered the wars between the two camps as a legitimate Muslim reaction to the expansionist Ethiopia. Expressing this position, he wrote: "the jihads of Imam Gran and Amir Mahfuz before him were reactions to the expansionary policies of the Empire that continually subjugated its neighbors."<sup>83</sup> Furthermore, Tavis concluded his analysis that,

79 Paul B. Henze, *Layers of Time: History of Ethiopia*. (London: Hurst & Company, 2000), 90.

80 E. Cerulli, *Documenti Arabi per la Storia dell'Ethiopia*. Memoria della Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Vol. 4, No. 2, Rome, 1931.

81 J. Spencer Trimingham, "The Expansion of Islam," In *Islam in Africa*, edited by James Kritzeck, and William H. Lewis, (New York: Van Nostrand-Reinhold Company, 1969), 21.

82 Travis J. Owens, *Beleaguered Muslim Fortress and Ethiopian Imperial Expansion from the 13th to the 16th century*. A MA Thesis in Security Studies submitted to Naval Postgraduate school, 2008. Available from [http://calhoun.nps.edu/bitstream/handle/10945/4031/08Jun\\_Owens.pdf?..](http://calhoun.nps.edu/bitstream/handle/10945/4031/08Jun_Owens.pdf?..)(accessed on December, 2016), 1.

83 Ibid.

The Muslim threat of violence rose as the Empire increasingly subjected the Muslim sultanates to violence, taxes and loss of control of trade. The Muslim sultanates were a threat to the Ethiopians not because they wanted to overthrow Christian territory but because they desired to reclaim their own territory, trade routes and independence.<sup>84</sup>

Tavis' narrative was in support of an earlier position of Ethiopian historian Ahmed Hussein, who published a paper in 1992 titled *The Historiography of Islam in Ethiopia* in the *Journal of Islamic Studies*, in which he challenged the Orientalist view of Islam in Ethiopia.<sup>85</sup> Other scholars have studied the medieval history of this region, such as Kapteijns, who argues that the sixteenth century war between the Christian Empire of Ethiopia and the Muslim Emirates was an indigenous civil war between Ethiopians.<sup>86</sup> This means that the war was not between indigenous Christian power defending herself from the intrusion of immigrant Muslims.

In medieval Europe, Portugal ascended as an imperial power during what was called "the Age of Discovery." As part of such venture, the Portuguese were the first European explorers to visit Somalia. Portuguese writer and officer Duarte Barbarosa (1480-1521), who participated in the expedition of Ferdinand Magellan, the first circumnavigator of the Earth, noted the many ships arriving from India to Mogadishu with clothes and spices to exchange gold, wax, and ivory.<sup>87</sup> Vasco Da Gama (1460-1524), a Portuguese explorer who passed the coast of Mogadishu on January 2, 1499 in his return from his first trip to India, observed that Mogadishu was a large city with houses of four or five stories high, with big palaces in its center and many mosques with cylindrical minarets.<sup>88</sup> Moreover, Indian merchants bypassed both the Portuguese blockade

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84 Ibid., 40.

85 Hussein Ahmed, "The Historiography of Islam in Ethiopia," *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 3 (1992): 15.

86 Lidwien Kapteijns, "Ethiopia in the Horn of Africa," in *The History of Islam in Africa* edited by Nehemia Levtzion, and Randall L. Pouwels, (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2000).

87 Mensel Longworth Dam (translated and ed.), "The book of Duarte Barbosa: an account of the countries bordering on the Indian Ocean and their inhabitants." Asian Educational Services, 1989.

88 Joao de Sa Alvaro Velho, *A Journal of the First Voyage of Vasco Da Gama, 1497-1499*. Hakluyt Society, 1898, 88.

of the Somali coast in the 16th century, with Omani traders using the Somali ports of Merca and Barawe, which were out of their jurisdiction, to conduct their trade in safety and without interference.

In the medieval Islamic period, Somalis developed a new culture of state-building. The first native state they established was the Ajuran Sultanate, the largest multi-clan and longstanding Somali state that emerged in the fourteenth century. Its headquarters was the city of Merca and its territory included much of southern Somalia, extending from Mareeg in the north (Elder district in Galmudug State of Somalia); to Qalafo in the west; to Kismayo in the south, from the thirteenth to seventeenth centuries. The sultanate secured trading routes and promoted foreign trade, which flourished in the coastal provinces. Large ships loaded with a variety of commercial goods were coming from Arabia, India, Venetia, Persia, Egypt, and as far away as China.<sup>89</sup> The Ajuran Sultanate instituted a strong standing army, which successfully resisted the Oromo invasion/migration from the west, as well as the Portuguese incursion from the Indian Ocean. The Oromo invasion, also known as the Black Infidel War (*Dagaalkii Gaala Madaw*), which took place in the mid-17th century, was defeated, with some of the migrants converted to Islam while others shifted their migration away from the Ajuran territory. Under the rule of Ajuran, many clans of East Africa were converted to Islam and defended its territory from the Portuguese incursion that initially burned and looted Barava under the command of Tristão da Cunha.<sup>90</sup>

The Portuguese plan to attack Mogadishu was averted due to the preparedness of the Ajuran Mogadishu province under the rule of Muzzaffar Dynasty, which mobilized large troops that included many horsemen and battleships in defense of the city. Nonetheless, the Portuguese did not abandon the plan of conquering Mogadishu, and several decades after their earlier attempt, they sent a punitive expedition against Mogadishu under the command of João de Sepulveda, who also failed to conquer Mogadishu.<sup>91</sup> As a reaction to the Portuguese threat, the Ajuran Sultanate strengthened its relations with the Ottoman Empire in Istanbul. As a result, a

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<sup>89</sup> Fred M. Shelley, *Nation Shapes: The Story behind the World's Borders*. (ABC-CLIO., 2013),358.

<sup>90</sup> Duarte Barbarosa, *A Description of the Coasts of East Africa and Malabar in the Beginning of Sixteenth Century*. (London: the Hakaluyt Society, 2008).

military pact was established to collectively thwart the Portuguese threat in the Indian Ocean. Therefore, the marine forces of Ajuran and the Ottoman Navy organized common expeditions to break the Portuguese blockades of the coastal towns of the Indian Ocean. This cooperation reached its peak in the 1580s during Mir Ali Bay's command of the Turkish fleet in the Indian Ocean, when a Somali-Turkish expedition was sent as far as South East Asia.<sup>92</sup> Historical records of the Ajuran Sultanate and its encounter with Oromo and the Portuguese is very limited. Certainly, the Ajuran Sultanates had played an important role in defending the southern Somali territory and spreading Islam in the whole region of East Africa. Alas, the history of the formation of the Somali state, as symbolized by the Ajuran Sultanate, was not given deserved attention. One of the reasons may be that a major Somali nationalist movement, the SYL, were shying away from clan names, and since the sultanate were carrying a clan name, they were simply neglected. Another possibility is the lack of historical awareness and deficiency of the historical records. However, another reason that is more plausible may be the dominance of the colonial historiography imaging, in that the Somalis were fragmented clans with only a colonial history in its production and implication.

The Adal sultanate was weakened after the death of Amir Nur due to the Oromo raids in 1577 and its headquarters were relocated to the oasis of Aussa in the Danakil desert under the leadership of Mohamed Jasa.<sup>93</sup> The sultanate of Aussa (Afar Sultanate) declined gradually in the next century and was destroyed by the local Afar nomads in 1672. Conversely, Harar flourished and established a new dynasty under Ali Bin Daud in 1647, which was the ruling dynasty until the city was conquered by Egypt in 1875.<sup>94</sup> After the hurried Egyptian evacuation, the city gained short-lived independence, after which Emperor Menelik took over the city and incorporated it into its Empire in 1887. On the other hand, the Ajuran Sultanate declined in the seventeenth

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91 Justus Strandes, *The Portuguese period in East Africa*. (Kenya Literature Bureau, 1989), 112.

92 Sidney Welsh, *Portuguese rule and Spanish crown in South Africa, 1581-1640*. Junta, 1950.

93 Lee Cassaneli, *The Shaping of Somali Society*, 120.

94 Avishai Ben-Dror, *The Egyptian Hikimdāriya of Harar*.

century after the defeat in its major provinces: the Mareeg province,<sup>95</sup> the Muzzaffar dynasty in Mogadishu in 1624 and the Sil'is Sultanate in Afgoye.<sup>96</sup>

In the precolonial history, the Hirab Imamate and the Geledi Sultanate succeeded the Ajuran Sultanate in Mogadishu and its surrounding regions. The Sultanate of the Geledi ruled parts of southern Somalia during the late- seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. It was founded by Ibrahim Adeer, who defeated the Sil'is dynasty and made its headquarters in the city of Afgoye (30 km south of Mogadishu). The sultanate was incorporated into an Italian Somali colony in 1908.<sup>97</sup> On the other hand, the Hiraab Imamate that revolted against the Ajuran Sultanate on the watering rights and established an independent rule from 1624 and onwards. The rest of the previous Ajuran territories in southern Somalia were segmented into independent clan sultanates, while the entire region was occupied by Italy at the beginning of the twentieth century. At this time in north-eastern Somalia, the Warsangali Sultanate and the Majeerteen Kingdom became highly visible. The Sultanate of Hobbio, an offshoot of the Majeerteen kingdom, under the rule of Sultan Yusuf Ali Kenindid, entered into a treaty with the Italians in 1888, while the Kingdom of Majeerteen, which controlled much of the current Puntland state of Somalia, also entered such treaties in 1889. Both territories of these mini-states were incorporated into the Italian colony by 1927.

The Warsangali Sultanate was one of the largest sultanates that included the Sanaag region and parts of the northeastern Bari region, an area historically known as the Maakhir coast. The Sultan of Warsengeli signed the first treaty of the protectorate in 1884, with Britain heralding the new era of British protectorate in the northern Somali Peninsula. The British Government signed protection treaties with the other five clans residing in the British Somaliland: the Gadabursi, Issa, Habar Gerhajis, Habr Toljaala, and Habr-Awal in 1984 and

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<sup>95</sup> According to the hagiography, the last imam of the Ajuran was killed by the confederacy of Dalandoole Mudulood clans at the well called *Ceel Cawl* near Messagaway, one of the towns in the Elder District. This city is located in the old Mareeg province (one of the districts of Galmudug State of Somalia).

<sup>96</sup> The Sil'is controlled a large part of southern Somalia from Afgoye, the headquarters of the dynasty. However, in the late seventeenth century, Ibrahim Adeer took over Afgoye and founded the Geledi Sultanate. For more information, see Luling, *The Somali Sultanate*, 111.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

early 1885.<sup>98</sup> In such a situation of clan fragmentation, expanding European and Ethiopian powers took the opportunity to seize the strategic Somali Peninsula.

### Conclusion

This paper undertook a concise overview of the ancient history of the Somali Peninsula and exposed that the region was the cradle of the human race and the kernel of ancient civilizations, which traded with other world civilizations of the time including the ancient Egyptians, Phoenicians, Mycenaeans, and Babylonians. Archeological studies and historic linguistics revealed the original homeland of the Cushitic speaking people, to whom Somalia belongs and who have been indigenous people in northeast Africa for the last 7000 years. *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* was the first written document in the first century AD, which describes the coastal ports in the littorals of the Indian Ocean. The history of Somali Peninsula experienced six centuries of historical gap from the first century to the seventh century, in which we do not know anything about what happened during this period.

Since the seventh century of the medieval Islamic period and onward, Somalia entered a new phase of its history. The historiography of the Somali peninsula began to receive fresh historical sources from various writers and explorers, such as the Chinese, the Arab/Islamic people, and the Portuguese. These travelers left behind some records describing their people, religion, and their commercial connections with world communities. Their description depicts that Somali people accepted Islam since first century and their total conversion may have occurred from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries. The Somali speaking people were incorporated in the emerging Muslim sultanates of Ifat (1285-1415) and Adal (1415-1577) in the northern part of the Peninsula. Moreover, the Somalis established their own state, the Ajuran Sultanate, the largest and longest standing Somali state that emerged in the fourteenth century.

Somali history since the medieval period revolves around two poles: Islam and colonialism. During this period, the early history of Somalia is mainly the history of introduction

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98 D. J. Latham Brown, "The Ethiopia-Somaliland Frontier Dispute". *International and Comparative Law Quarterly*, 5 (2): (1956), 245-264.

of Islam, spreading Islamic education and conflict with the Christian Abyssinian Empire and other ethnic communities that believed in African religions. The Ajuran sultanate was the first Somali Islamic state, ruling a large territory extending from the central regions to the far southern Somali territories. Regrettably, studies on this embryonic formation of the Somali state are scant.<sup>99</sup> The little available records depict that the sultanate was headquartered in Merca, applied Islamic Sharia, established a strong standing army, and gave priority to building water supplies and building fortifications. The Ajuran sultanate is credited with defending the Somalian territory from the Oromo and Portuguese raids and spreading Islam across the whole region. However, the later Ajuran rulers abandoned Sharia law, became oppressive, and introduced heavy taxation, which were the main catalysts for the revolts against the Ajuran rulers in the 17th century. All Islamic Sultanates in the Islamic medieval period was invaded by nomadic clans who dismembered them into a patchwork of smaller mini-states in the seventeenth century. After two centuries of setbacks in creating different states, the advent of colonialism created the second historical theme, with revolves around colonialism and its impact, the period in which an abundance of literature was produced.

The historiography of ancient and Medieval Islamic history exhibits a historical gap in which we barely know anything about, in addition to a number of contested narratives. The historical gap is the period between the first century, with its flourishing civilization and commercial cities, as reported in the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* and the introduction of Islam in the seventh century. The first contested narrative is the origin of the Somali people, who are theorized to be immigrants from the southern Ethiopia or from the Arabian Peninsula. The new narrative deriving from archeological evidence puts forth that the people of Somalia are the indigenous dwellers of their current habitat for the last 7000 years. The second contested narrative is the time of the introduction of Islam to Somalia. The narrative of the venture of Islam during the first Muslim migration to Abyssinia was questioned because reliable evidence is missing. However, the puzzle that complicates the case is the presence of a Mosque of two niches in Zayla, which alludes that it was built before 624 (at least two years after the migration to Medina). The third contested narrative was Trimingham's depiction that the Abyssinian

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<sup>99</sup> Mohamed Haji Mukhtar, "Ajuran Sultanate." The Encyclopedia of Empire, 2016. Available from <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/9781118455074.wbeoe146/abstract> (accessed on December 23, 2016).

Christian Empire was “a beleaguered fortress in the midst of a sea of Islam.” The counter-narrative was articulated by Travis J. Owens, who articulated that “the Muslim neighbors of the Ethiopian Empire were besieged by Christian Ethiopia throughout the medieval period.” All in all, the ancient and Medieval Islamic history of the Somali peninsula demands more research and attention.

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