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FACING THE LAND, FACING THE SEA: COMMERCIAL TRANSFORMATION AND URBAN DYNAMICS IN THE RED SEA PORT OF MASSAWA, 1840s-1900s

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FACING THE LAND, FACING THE SEA: COMMERCIAL TRANSFORMATION AND URBAN DYNAMICS IN THE RED SEA PORT OF MASSAWA, 1840s -1900s

VOLUME I

By

Jonathan Miran

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of History

2004

ABSTRACT

FACING THE LAND, FACING THE SEA: COMMERCIAL TRANSFORMATION AND URBAN DYNAMICS IN THE RED SEA PORT OF MASSAWA, 1840s-1900s

By

Jonathan Miran

This dissertation examines the making of a complex Red Sea urban coastal society in Massawa (in present day Eritrea) in the second half of the nineteenth century. As a centuries-old port town Massawa's traditional role and *raison d'être* has been to mediate between multiple commercial spheres connecting regions of the northeast African interior and beyond it with regions of the Middle East and South Asia. My study examines how a particular new conjuncture of political, economic, technological and migratory factors in the wider Red Sea and western Indian Ocean area in the middle decades of the century transformed Massawa. It re-organized the structure of its commercial relationships, which, as a result, shaped the particular social and cultural make-up of the port-town's inhabitants.

At the heart of the study is an examination of the town's leading families who traced their origins both to areas of the northeast African interior and to a variety of overseas locations and who operated in the port-town principally as merchants, brokers and entrepreneurs. This "aristocratic class," as one Italian colonial official qualified it, dominated the town's legal, commercial and religious institutions and developed a strong sense of local urban yet sophisticated worldly identity reflecting a distinct sense of *esprit de corps*. They particularly stressed their refined urban culture, a strong link to the wider community of Muslim believers (*umma*), and a sense of connectedness to Arab history

and culture. I analyze the social, religious and material bases of their power (or different forms of capital) as well as the complex social and cultural mechanisms and strategies that enabled them to perform and protect their role as a flexible janus-faced community simultaneously facing land and sea but remaining distinct from both. I thus reveal the inner structure of a community of mediators, tracing the chains and networks of linkages that connected the town's hinterlands to its forelands.

The study refutes perceptions viewing Massawa as "alien" to its environment by historically contextualizing its specificity and deconstructing the development of its culturally outgoing dispositions, but at the same time locally rooted social realities in a period of great political, economic and social change. The study presents a more local/region-based historical perspective in an arena of northeastern African historiography that is still being vigorously debated by scholars almost entirely in nationalist discourses. It also links the Eritrean-Ethiopian region – traditionally perceived as somewhat isolated from its broader environment - with the wider world of the Red Sea and Indian Ocean. The study is based on a wide variety of nineteenth-century European sources, Italian colonial archival materials, Arabic language sources, oral data collected in Eritrea, and a newly-discovered collection of legal records from Massawa's Islamic court.

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At Michigan State I am most grateful to my regretfully late advisor Harold Marcus. Harold put all his trust and confidence in me and supported me in every way throughout my years as a doctoral student. I miss him greatly, both as a friend and a mentor. David Robinson became my principal advisor after Harold's passing in January 2003. I owe Professor Robinson immeasurable gratitude for being a demanding and rigorous teacher, and at the same time profoundly supportive and generous. I feel privileged to have studied under him and I will always aspire to his excellence and commitment as a scholar and teacher. I am most grateful to Alan Fisher for everything I learned from him throughout the years. Our independent study sessions in Ottoman and Egyptian history are among the most memorable experiences that I cherish from my graduate work at MSU. Steve Gold from the Sociology department broadened my intellectual horizons by exposing me to various aspects of sociological theory and migration studies. I owe much to Professor Gold's support and friendship. Finally, I owe tremendous gratitude to James McCann from Boston University who kindly agreed to join my committee immediately after Harold's passing. Professor McCann was most

helpful in providing advice and criticism on the entire dissertation. The revisions, corrections and modifications that resulted from his judicious comments significantly strengthen it and helped me refine and clarify my ideas.

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NOTE ON LANGUAGE

Since this text includes names and words in a variety of languages spoken by the peoples inhabiting the region under study transliteration has not been a simple task. For Arabic names, terms and words I tend to follow the transliteration used by the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. In what concerns words in the relevant Ethiopic languages such as Tigre, Tigrinya and Amharic I have tended to leave them in a simplified form such as that used in other historical studies on the Ethiopian region. I have judged that a scientific transliteration as practiced by Ethiopianist philologists would render the text much less accessible.

Place names have presented a particular difficulty since they have sometimes been pronounced and spelt in different ways by different people, in different languages and in various historical contexts. I have tended to simplify and follow common usage as found in other studies and in some cases I have followed the common vernacular pronunciation (eg. Hirgigo, Hitumlo). I have spelt 'Massawa' (and not 'Massaua,' Massowah,' 'Maṣawwa',' 'Mitsiwa,'[or Bāḍi'] etc.), 'Hirgigo'(and not Ḥarqīqū, Hirghigho, Archico, Arkiko [or Dohono] etc.), 'Omkullo' (and not Moncullo, Monkulu, Um Kullū, etc), 'Hitumlo' (and not Hotumlo, Otumlo, Ḥuṭumlū, etc), 'Semhar,' 'Zula,' 'Sahel,' 'Keren,' etc.. The same is usually true for the Tigre and Saho-speaking groups: ''Ad Tamaryam,' ''Ad Takles,' 'Minifere,' 'Bet Asgede,' 'Bani 'Amer,' 'Asaorta,' etc. I have also left place names such as 'Mecca,' 'Hijaz,' 'Dahlak' in a simplified way. However – and this is at the heart of the difficulty of the task - I did use Arabic transliteration when writing the names of Tigre and Saho speaking groups whose names are specifically inscribed in or derive from Arab-Islamic culture. Examples include the 'Bayt Shaykh Maḥmūd' and the ''Ad Mu'alim'. Similarly, I have used an Arabic transliteration for many names that appear in the records of the *sharī'a* court in Arabic, even though the primary language spoken by some of the persons in question was often Tigre or Saho. By doing so, I may have employed my own sort of social engineering, which does not always do justice to a far more complex reality of the instrumentality of language usage in this context. I am fully aware that this method might not be optimal and can lead to some bias. I hope that the text itself will clarify such issues.

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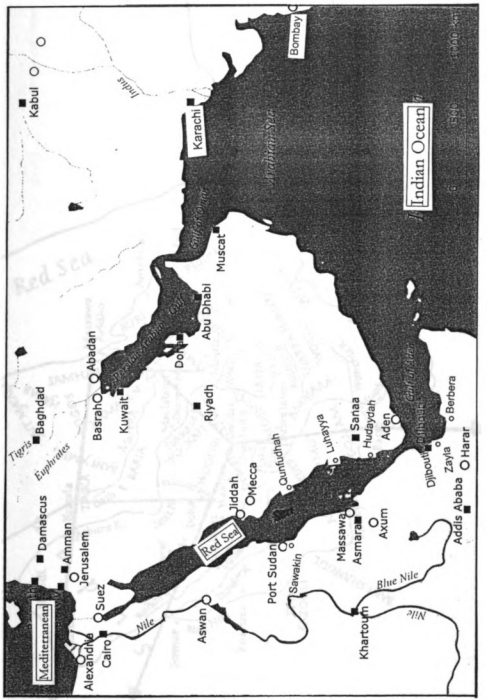
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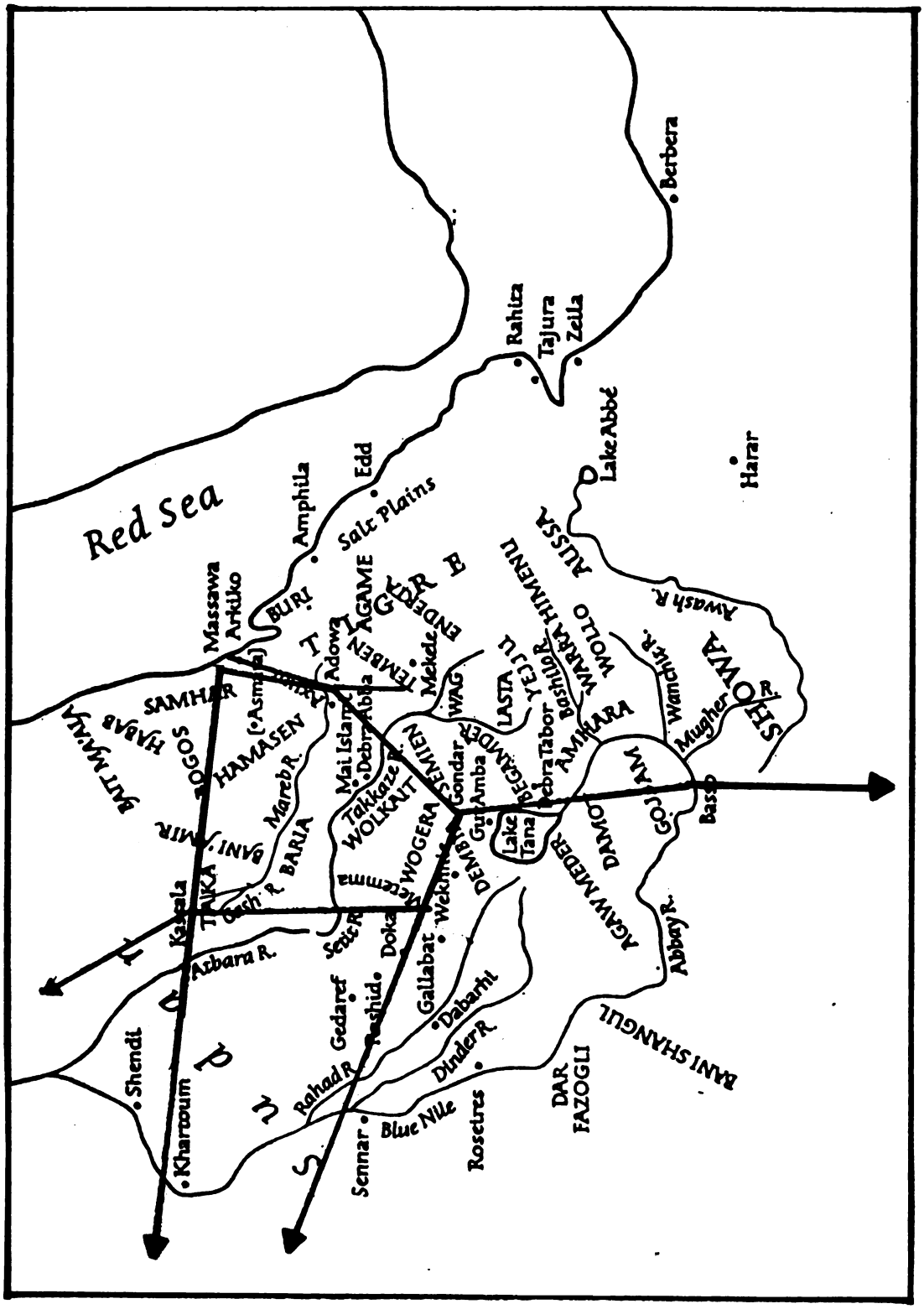
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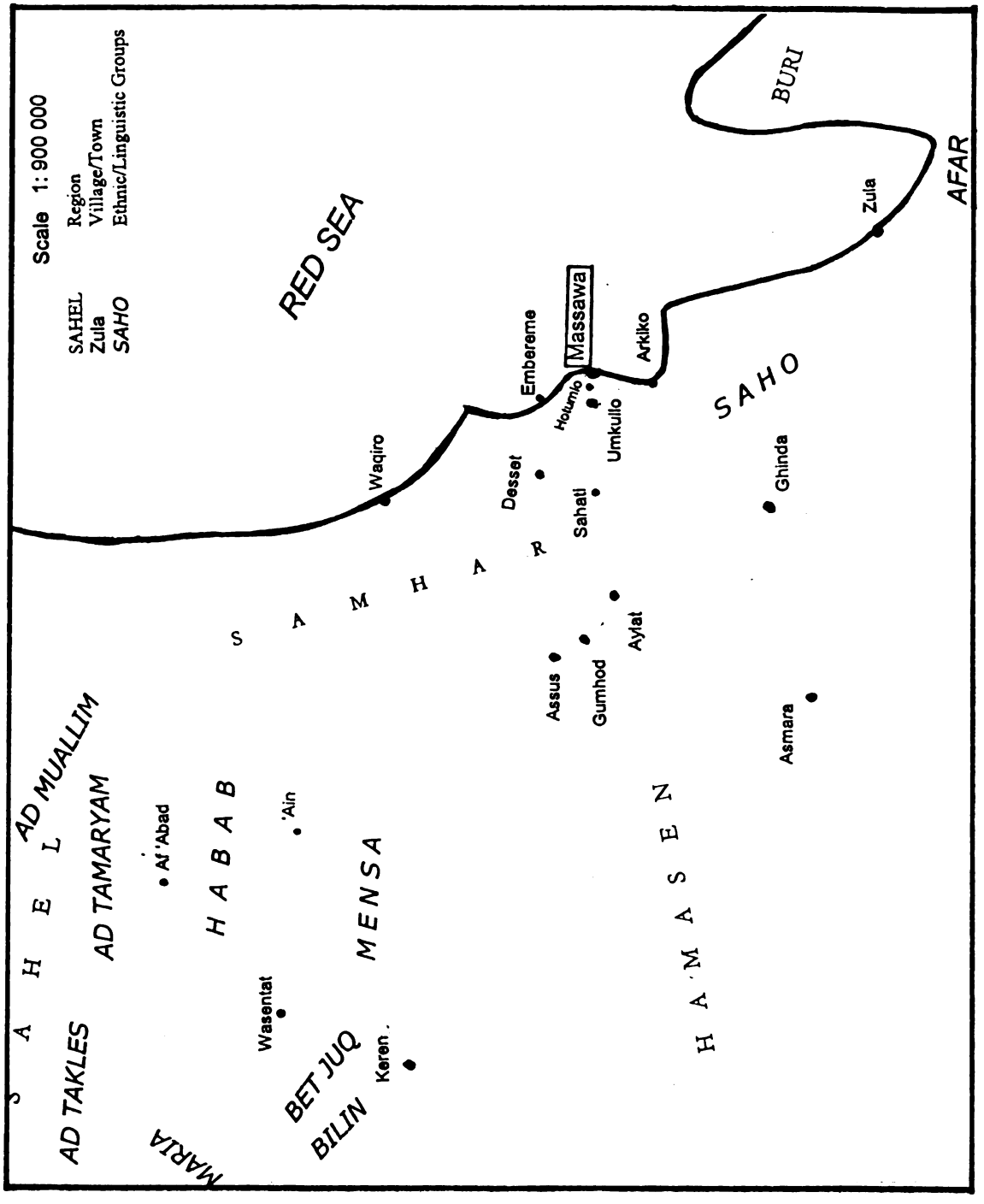
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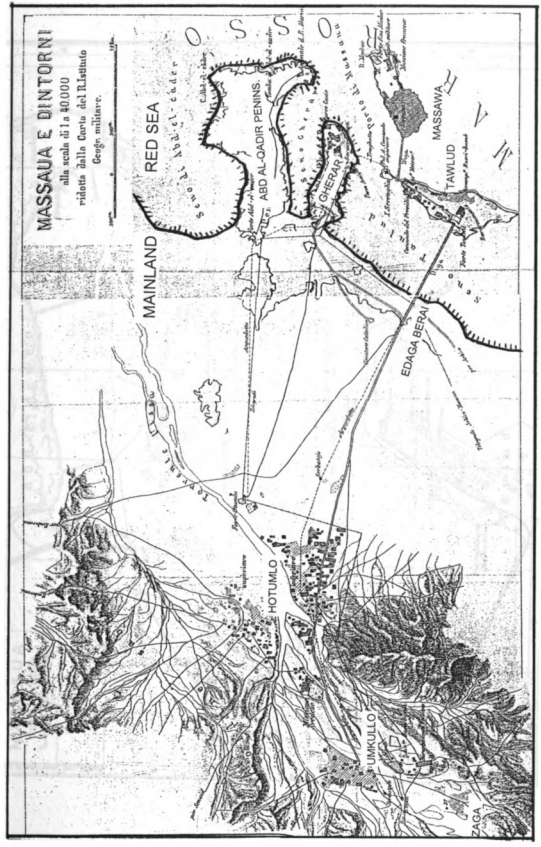
MAP 2: Main Long-Distance Caravan Trade Routes Culminating in Massawa
(adapted from M. Abir, *Ethiopia: The Era of the Princes*, London, 1968)



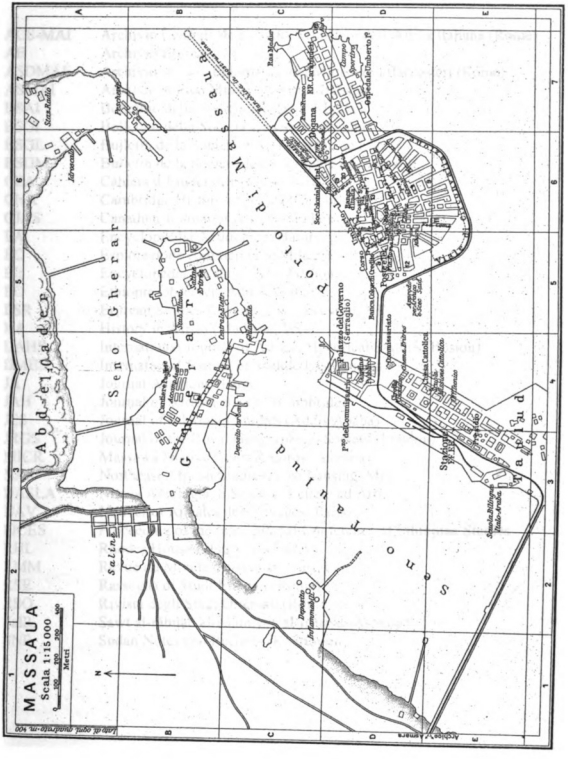
MAP 3: Towns, Villages, Regions, Ethnic and Linguistic Groups in Massawa's Interior



MAP 4: The Massawa Conurbation (Excluding Hirgigo), 1887
(Source: The Italian Geographic Society)



MAP 5: Massawa Island, Tewalet, Gherar and the Abd al-Qadir Peninsula, 1929
(Source: L. V. Bertarelli, *Possedimenti e colonie*, Milano, 1929)


MASSAUA
Scala 1:15.000
Metri
Abd el Kader
Seno Gherar
Porto di Massaua
Penisola di Gherar
Penisola di Abd el Kader
Seno Tewalet
Isola di Massaua
Isola di Tewalet
Isola di Gherar
Isola di Abd el Kader
Salina
Cimitero
Ospedale
Ospedale Militare
Ospedale Indigeni
Ospedale Europei
Ospedale Militare Indigeni
Ospedale Militare Europei
Ospedale Militare Italiano
Ospedale Militare Arabo
Ospedale Militare Indiano
Ospedale Militare Greco
Ospedale Militare Copto
Ospedale Militare Cattolico
Ospedale Militare Protestante
Ospedale Militare Ortodosso
Ospedale Militare Musulmano
Ospedale Militare Ebraico
Ospedale Militare Buddista
Ospedale Militare Induista
Ospedale Militare Sikh
Ospedale Militare Jainista
Ospedale Militare Parsi
Ospedale Militare Zoroastriano
Ospedale Militare Bahai
Ospedale Militare Rastafariano
Ospedale Militare Rastafariano
Ospedale Militare Rastafariano

ABBREVIATIONS

ACS-MAI	Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Ministero dell'Africa Italiana (Rome)
AE	Archivio Eritrea
ASDMAE	Archivio storico diplomatico del Ministero affari esteri (Rome)
ASMAI	Archivio storico Ministero Africa Italiana
BSAI	Bolletino della Societa Africana d'Italia
BSGI	Bolletino della Societa Geografica Italiana
BSGL	Bulletin de la Société de Géographie de Lille
BSGM	Bulletin de la Société de Géographie de Marseille
CEA	Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines (Paris)
CHA	Cambridge History of Africa (Cambridge)
CJAS	Canadian Journal of African Studies
EA	Encyclopaedia Aethiopica (Hamburg)
EC	Esplorazione commerciale (Milano)
EI2	Encyclopedia of Islam (New Edition).
EO	Ethiopia Observer (Addis Ababa)
ESR	Eritrean Studies Review (Lawrenceville, NJ)
HA	History in Africa (Madison, WI)
IJAHS	International Journal of African Historical Studies (Boston)
IJMES	International Journal of Middle East Studies
JA	Journal Asiatique (Paris)
JAH	Journal of African History (Cambridge)
JES	Journal of Ethiopian Studies (Addis Ababa)
JRGS	Journal of the Royal Geographical Society (London)
MICR	Massawa Islamic Court Records (Asmara)
NAS	Northeast African Studies (East Lansing, MI)
NASLA	Nuova Antologia di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti...
NAV	Nouvelles Annales des Voyages (Paris)
PICES	Proceeding of the International Conference of Ethiopian Studies
RHL	Rhodes House Library, Oxford
RMM	Revue du Monde Musulman (Paris)
RSE	Rassegna di Studi Etiopici (Roma)
RSO	Rivista degli Studi Orientali (Roma)
SalR	Ṣawṭ al-rābiṭah al-islāmiyya al-Iritriya (Asmara)
SNR	Sudan Notes and Records (Khartoum)

Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION: FACING THE LAND, FACING THE SEA

> "Massowah is a very peculiar place, both as regards its situation and the manners and customs of its inhabitants. Although geographically pertaining to Africa, the natives are more Arab than Abyssinian or negro in character. In dress, food and domestic habits, they resemble the people of Jiddah; and I imagine there is as much African blood mixed with that of the Arabs of the seaboard of the Hijaz, as there is Arab blood in the veins of the Africans at Massowah." (Hormuzd Rassam, 1869)[1]
>
> "The Massowah race is far from pure; being a mixture of Turkish, Arab, and African blood" (Henry Blanc, 1868)[2]
>
> "The mixture of races at Massowah renders it hopeless to give its inhabitants a distinct name," (Walter Plowden, 1868)[3]

This study attempts to deconstruct the Red Sea port of Massawa's "peculiarity," as reflected in the above quotations, by reconstructing the social, economic and cultural dynamics involved in the making of its complex urban mercantile community in a period of profound change in the nineteenth century. Situated between the Red Sea and the northeast African inland, Massawa is located on the Eritrean coast opposite the Dahlak archipelago at a point where the escarpment of the highland plateau and the Red Sea are dramatically closest to each other. It is today Eritrea's main port and a somewhat laid back town of some 40,000 inhabitants.

The foundation of Massawa is difficult to establish with any precision and is still subject to some debate. However, most scholars agree with the assertion that the ninth-

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[1] Hormuzd Rassam, *Narrative of the British Mission to Theodore, King of Abyssinia* (London, 1869), 10.
[2] Henry Blanc, *A Narrative of Captivity in Abyssinia* (London, 1868), 66.
[3] Walter Plowden, *Travels in Abyssinia and the Galla country with an account of a mission to Ras Ali in 1848* (London, 1868), 3. I am fully aware that the above statements say much about the mode of thought of those who had made them; unsurprisingly all British or associated with its empire.

century port identified by Arab authors such as al-Mas'ūdī, al-Maqrīzī and Ibn Hawqal as Bāḍī, was Massawa in its early days.[4] This study does not aim to provide a comprehensive treatment of its history and evolution as a coastal urban site. It focuses on a period – the second half of the nineteenth century - during which sweeping political and economic transformations in northeastern Africa and the Red Sea region generated a series of social and cultural reconfigurations within an urban community and its hinterlands on the African coasts of the Red Sea.

Since its foundation, Massawa has served as one of the main coastal entrepôts linking the highlands of the Horn of Africa and beyond, with the Red Sea and Indian Ocean worlds in long-distance trading across lands and seas. Massawa emerged as a center of contestation in the sixteenth century, as a result of regional imperialist struggles for influence in the Red Sea region between Portugal and the Ottoman Empire. Since then, it has continuously held a central position in the diplomatic, military and political considerations and aspirations of the various powers who attempted to establish contact – forcefully or not - with the Horn of Africa. These powers, either struggled to control Massawa, controlled it, or attempted to prevent others from controlling it as a stepping-stone for advancing into the highlands or gaining access to the sea. This was especially the case in the heyday of European imperialism and the 'Scramble for Africa' in the 1870s and 1880s.[5]

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[4] Gianfrancesco Lusini,"Bāḍī'," *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, Vol. 1, 430-1. A different interpretation situating the ancient Badi to the north of present-day Massawa, in the island of al-Rīḥ (near the gulf of Aqiq) is argued by Salvatore Tedeschi, "La questione di Badi," *RSO*, LXIII (1984), 179-199. According to this view, the earliest appearance of Massawa in the historical record dates only to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. It should be noted that the name of Massawa in Bejja is Bāḍī, and in Tigre and Tigrinya, Batsi'.

[5] Among the detailed studies focusing on the period see Zewde Gabre-Sellassie, *Yohannes IV of Ethiopia: a Political Biography* (Oxford, 1975); Sven Rubenson, *The Survival of Ethiopian Independence* (Addis Ababa, 1991 [1st ed. 1976]) and Haggai Erlich, *Ras Alula and the Scramble for Africa. A Political*

This study attempts to go beyond and besides perspectives that put excessive and exclusive emphasis on polities, nations, occupiers and imperial powers as agents of transformation in the region. My analytical approach favors regional dimensions and mechanisms of change, and local agency acting and reacting in relation to wider historical developments. I emphasize a more regional perspective by focusing on the history of Massawa in the greater part of the nineteenth century as shaped by economic, social, cultural and religious dynamics at work in its urban environment, its close and more distant hinterlands, its forelands and in the interplay between these spheres. In other words the study attempts to link Massawa to the sea and to the land by revealing historically changing dynamics – navigational, commercial, migratory – that have shaped the society and culture of a Red Sea coastal town. Favoring local, regional and trans-regional spheres of action - for example cross-boundary commercial and religious networks - contributes to a more flexible and dynamic understanding of the complex history of the region and its inhabitants. An approach emphasizing continuities, but also discontinuities, in structures and processes, carries the analysis beyond historical narratives that see sharp breaks and divides between historical periods such as the "Ottoman period" (16th c. to 1865), the "Egyptian period" (1865-1885), and the "Italian period" (1885-1941).

In a published Ph.D. dissertation on Massawa and Sawakin under Egyptian rule (1865-1885), Ghada Hashim Talhami noted that "although greatly dependent on the caravan trade of the African interior, Massawa and Suakin remained, for most of their history, alien enclaves on the Sudanese and Ethiopian coastlines." She added that

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Biography: Ethiopia and Eritrea 1875-1897 (Lawrenceville, NJ., 1996 [Rev. ed. of 1982]). Control of or access to the port was also often crucial in terms of arms and ammunition supply to contending Abyssinian

"Although they included some indigenous elements, the people of Suakin and Massawa were basically different from the tribes of Kassala and the Semhar."[6] Echoing this idea Gabriel Warburg wrote that "both Suakin and Massawa had the characteristics of Red Sea towns, rather than African ones, as was evident in their mixed populations, architecture and modes of dressing and living. Only after they were ceded to the Khedive Ismā'īl in 1865 were they forced to rely on their African hinterland for their economic development."[7] Similarly, M.C. Jedrej noted that "not only were Suakin and Massawa political dependencies of the Ottoman *vilayet* of Jedda, these towns were also Arabian rather than African in a cultural sense and therefore resembled Jedda, Hodeida and Mocha rather than the settlements of the Nile Valley in the interior of Africa."[8]

Although the first part of Warburg's observation correctly points to the cultural distinctiveness of Red Sea port towns – a phenomenon that I propose to deconstruct historically - this study challenges directly perceptions viewing Massawa as an alien element in its environment and argues to the contrary. The coastal urban settlements of Massawa and Hirgigo were, from their inception, intimately linked to their hinterland and interior in a dense web of relationships and networks, and were thus very "African" (today some would say "Eritrean") settlements from their grass roots. Indeed, one of the principal arguments of the present study is that historical and popular accounts have over-emphasized Massawa's outgoing and "foreign" nature by focusing on 'cultural' representations without deconstructing their character, function and without exploring their historical evolution. I attempt to contextualize historically Massawa's specificity

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rulers.

[6] Ghada H. Talhami, *Suakin and Massawa under Egyptian rule, 1865-1885* (Washington D.C., 1979), 38, 55.

[7] Gabriel Warburg, *Historical Discord in the Nile Valley* (Evanston, 1992), 5.

and analyze the development of its culturally outgoing dispositions, but at the same time locally rooted social realities.

Locating Massawa in the Historiographical Landscape/Seascape: The View from the Coast

A central question that is raised when coming to study Massawa's history is how to situate it on the historiographic horizon and how to conceptualize it in terms of writing its history. How, in other words, should one organize a study of Massawa in terms of time and space? Due to its distinct geographic position, economic roles and specific political trajectory, Massawa may be imagined in multiple historical frames of reference. As a port and a trade emporium situated between the Red Sea world and beyond, the Ethiopian highlands and the Sudanese and Eritrean lowlands, Massawa has related with all spheres, discretely or in concert, depending on specific historical contexts and in various degrees of intensity. Massawa's interaction with multiple spheres and boundaries in its hinterlands and forelands has shaped its historical evolution. Proposing an analytical framework for the study of Asian port cities and informed by a multi-disciplinary approach, historians, geographers and comparative urbanists have suggested that port cities "link together their respective hinterlands and forelands in dynamic unions."[9] Drawing attention to the unique historical dynamics of the port city, the historian Frank Broeze noted that "it is above all the active intertwining of all forces from foreland and hinterland through the physical and mediating function of the port which

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[8] M.C. Jedrej, "The Red Sea and the Eastern Sudan in the early nineteenth century," in J.C. Stone (ed.) *Africa and the Sea* (Aberdeen, 1985), 108.

[9] Frank Broeze, "Introduction: Brides of the Sea," in Frank Broeze (ed.), *Brides of the Sea: Port Cities of Asia from the 16th-20th Centuries* (Honolulu, 1989), 4.

explains the extent, the pace and manner of each port city's specific development."[10] Predrag Matvejevic advanced the following insight distinguishing between cities with ports and city-ports: "cities with ports differ from city-ports, the former building their piers out of necessity, the latter growing up around them by the nature of things. In the former they are a means and an afterthought; in the latter, starting-point and goal."[11] These insights raise the question of how does one then write the peoples of Massawa and its region into a historical narrative that considers the weight and meanings of the various historical dynamics– from both land and seas - that have shaped it.

Past historical representations have exclusively tended to attach Massawa to politically dominant forces in the region and ignored the multifaceted dynamics of its historical experience. In northeastern Africa, historical studies have tended to place the Ethiopian state, in its historically varied configurations, as the central organizing theme of the history of the area. But "writing from the center" (and from the highlands) – physically or mentally – has produced an often biased, limited and rather rigid understanding of the fluid political, social, economic and cultural dynamics at play among the various societies that inhabit the wider region. Such perceptions have also contributed to the writing of history "backwards," from present to past, and have therefore promoted a monolithic and static understanding of the dynamics of Massawa, the northern lowlands and the Red Sea coasts, viewed as a marginal periphery, having a

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[10] Frank Broeze, Peter Reeves and Kenneth McPherson, "Studying the Asian Port City," in Frank Broeze (ed.), *Brides of the Sea: Port Cities of Asia from the 16th-20th Centuries*, Honolulu 1989 and Frank Broeze, "Brides of the Sea Revisited," in Frank Broeze (ed.), *Gateways of Asia: Port Cities of Asia in the 13th-20th Centuries* (London, 1997), 3. See also the following conference proceedings: Dilip K. Basu (ed.), *The Rise and Growth of Port Cities in Asia* (Santa Cruz, CA., 1979).

[11] Predrag Matvejevic, *A Mediterranean: A Cultural Landscape* (Berkeley, 1999), 13-14. Cited in Michael N. Pearson, *The Indian Ocean* (London, 2003), 31.

unique and exclusive role: Ethiopia's access to the sea.[12] The present work attempts to join recent scholarship on the Ethiopian region that moves beyond this rationale, privileging approaches that examine the complex histories, relationships and interactions among the different societies, linguistic groups, religions, modes of production, and systems of governance of the peoples of the area.[13]

The historical perception of Massawa and the eastern Eritrean lowlands have been "dominated" by their relations to highland Abyssinian polities. Popular perceptions of Massawa by Ethiopian and Eritrean highlanders also reflect monolithic tendencies. As one Tigrinya-speaking informant in Asmara put it, "Massawa alone has no history. It is only with the *kebessa*, the highlands, that it has any sense."[14] Such rigid perceptions understand the port of Massawa as "Ethiopia's port," the "Gateway to Ethiopia" or the outlet of the Ethiopian long-distance trade without taking into consideration other political, economic, and social spheres of activities and influences shaping its evolution.[15] Various politically-motivated Ethiopian *claims* to historical sovereignty over the port should not be confused with actual connections and relationships. Through this lens, Massawa is seen as unrelated to its surroundings or any other historical political or

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[12] See Richard Reid, "The challenge of the past: the quest for historical legitimacy in independent Eritrea," *History in Africa*, 28 (2001), 246-7.

[13] For a rethinking of Ethiopia's southern and western peripheries see the path-breaking Donald Donham, "Old Abyssinia and the new Ethiopian empire: themes in social history," in Wendy James and Donald Donham (eds.), *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia: Essays in History and Social Anthropology* (Cambridge, 1986). See also Donald Crummey's review article "Society, State and Nationality in the recent historiography of Ethiopia," *JAH*, 31 (1990), 103-119.

[14] I would be surprised to hear, for example, a statement asserting that without the Kenyan hinterland, Lamu has no history. The problem here is the deeply entrenched *mentalité* of a highland-centric view of history, because, yes, I agree that neither Massawa nor Lamu have any sense without their inlands. In this study I consciously distance myself from the Ethio-centric centrifuge and, I should add, bearing in mind the weaknesses that such an approach might entail!

[15] Examples may be drawn from numerous studies of Ethiopian history. But one good example is the book by Franz Amadeus Dombrowski *Ethiopia's Access to the Sea* (Wiesbaden, 1985). Historically deterministic views tend to perceive periods in which Massawa was not directly under Ethiopian sovereignty as almost 'historical anomalies'.

economic unit except in relation to its utility to Ethiopia. Notwithstanding its important historical role in the political and commercial relations between highland Abyssinian polities and the outside world, Massawa's history as a trade emporium and an entrepôt in a Red Sea economic and navigational system has not always been exclusively dependent on its relationship with Ethiopian highland polities.

In the nineteenth century, the reconfiguration of the Red Sea seascape and its system of port hierarchy in terms of regional and international roles, the development of steam navigation and the changing values of commodities on world markets, all influenced the evolution of Massawa as a port and as a town. Similarly, the British occupation of Aden in 1839 and the new regional dynamics generated by the ascending effectiveness of Egyptian dominance in the Red Sea area had made a direct impact on the development of Massawa - the composition of its population, new patterns of migration, and its mercantile ecology. Egyptian attempts to link its economy more closely to its surroundings from the 1860s onwards resulted in the redefinition of its closer hinterlands involving new patterns of production, exchange and trade.

In political terms, Massawa's long-term association with the Ottoman Empire and Egypt has attached its administrative and political, but also social and cultural evolution to other Red Sea ports such as Jiddah, Sawakin, Hudaydah and Luhayya to take but a few examples.[16] An example reflected in the historiography is Ghada H. Talhami's study *Suakin and Massawa under Egyptian Rule, 1865-1885*, which examined Egyptian imperialism in the Red Sea area but especially over the two ports and placed the

[16] See judicious comments on the affinities shared by ports in the Red Sea 'space' in Marc Lavergne, "Les relations yéméno-érythréenes à l'épreuve du conflit des Hanish," *Monde Arabe, Maghreb, Machrek*, no. 155, janvier-mars 1997, 79-86. On the historical relations between the African and Arabian shores of the

expansionist Egyptian polity under Khedive Ismā'īl at the center of the account. Her study perceives Massawa as forming part of a temporally and spatially distinct historical unit shaped by Egyptian expansionism in the Red Sea. Talhami wrote the study as a student of Middle Eastern and Egyptian history and based it largely on Egyptian published archival documents.[17]

Because of its economic and strategic importance Massawa's political history was shaped by a distinct trajectory of having been occupied by Ottomans, Egyptians, Italians, British and Ethiopians before the State of Eritrea gained its independence in 1993. Massawa's unusual historical course has also linked it to multiple, and often competing, ideological representations, discourses and struggles, at times utterly opposed to each other. Since the 1940s Eritrean representations of Massawa have played a role in the construction of nationalist ideologies and conceptions of identity in Eritrea and thus reflected [real or imagined] discursive dichotomies between highlanders and lowlanders, Christians and Muslims, but also pro- and anti-independence aspirations. In their attempt to rally Eritrean Muslims and define the specificity of their identity, pro-independence Muslim community leaders, nationalists and intellectuals discussed and wrote about Massawa's unique and symbolic position in Eritrea's Islamic past. In their writings, they perceived Massawa, Hirgigo and the Dahlak archipelago as important historical centers of religion and culture, intimately related with the Islamic world and the Middle East. These writings portrayed Massawa and Hirgigo as the first important "civilized"

Red Sea see remarks in Marco Lenci, *Eritrea e Yemen. Tensioni italo-turche nel mar Rosso, 1885-1911* (Milano, 1990), 13-18.

[17] Talhami, *Suakin and Massawa*. See also Alessandro Triulzi's review of the book in *IJAHS*, 14 (4) 1981, 764-6.

settlements and urban political and administrative centers in the country.[18] Arab and Islamic-centered perceptions of Eritrea placing Massawa and its area at the center of a rich and glorious Islamic past in the region were grafted onto the 1960s and 1970s by the Arab and Muslim-oriented liberation movements.[19] Indeed, some of the most prominent leaders and ideologues of these movements, such as 'Uthmān Ṣāliḥ Sabbi, were themselves from Hirgigo.[20]

Throughout the thirty-year Eritrean struggle for independence and up to this day, a critical ideological cleavage has existed between Ethio-centric and Eritrean nationalist views. The former still claim Massawa and the Red Sea coast as forming part of a historical "Greater Ethiopia" who had traditionally maintained some type of sovereignty on the rulers of the coast. Eritrean nationalists, in contrast, claim the "Eritrean-ness" of Massawa and the coast since time immemorial.[21] These two conflicting views also reflect

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[18] For the 1940s and 1950s see the writings of Shaykh Ibrahim al-Mukhtar Ahmad 'Umar, Grand Mufti of Eritrea. See especially his text devoted to Massawa and its history. *al-Jāmi' li-akhbār jazīrat Bāḍī*, (MS), completed in 1378/1958, 122 pp. But see also his text on Eritrea's urban history: *Al-rāwiya fī ta'rīkh mudun Iritriya*, (MS) completed in 1372/1953, 146 pp. On the Mufti's life and career see Jonathan Miran, "Grand mufti, érudit et nationaliste érythréen: note sur la vie et l'oeuvre de Shaykh Ibrâhîm al-Mukhtâr Ahmad 'Umar (1909-1969)," *Chroniques yéménites*, 2002, 35-47. Still for the same period see various articles in *Ṣawt al-rābiṭah al-islāmiyya al-iritriya* (1947-52).

[19] For the literature since the 1960s-70s see especially the writings of 'Uthmān Ṣāliḥ Sabbi. See also subsequent texts by Muḥammad 'Uthmān Abū Bakr and Muḥammad Sa'īd Nāwad. For this type of representation see also Nafi' Hassan Kurdi, *L'Erythrée, une identité retrouvée* (Paris, 1994), especially the first four chapters. With the exception of Muḥammad Sa'īd Nāwad, the authors mentioned here are originally from Hirgigo.

[20] See his massively documented biography written by his friend and comrade in struggle (and fellow native of Hirgigo). Muḥammad 'Uthmān Abū Bakr, *'Uthmān Ṣāliḥ Sabbi wa-l thawra al-iritrya* (Cairo, 1998). Sabbi wrote a general history of Eritrea in Arabic, later translated into English. 'Uthmān Ṣāliḥ Sabbi, *Ta'rīkh Iritriya* (Beirut, 1974).

[21] Ethio-centric representations are abundant. One revealing and indicative example for this atmosphere is Paul B. Henze's recent book *Layers of Time: A History of Ethiopia* (London, 2000) in which the photograph of a mosque in Massawa is given as an example for Ethiopia's Islamic past! Such examples are not misprints – they reflect deeply held convictions. For the growing interest in Massawa's past and its cultural, religious and architectural heritage since the independence of Eritrea, see press articles and publications containing strong historical dimensions: Jacky Sutton, "Dateline Massawa: a desert pearl revives," *Eritrea Profile*, Vol 1, No 49, February 18, 1995; Marianne Scott, "Magical Massawa," *Eritrea Profile*, Vol 5, No 47, January 30, 1999, 4; Tedros Abraham, "Cara Massaua...," *Eritrea Profile*, April 15 2000, 6; Daniel Tekeste, "Massawa Reflections," *EriTempo*, May 2000, 31; Hermon Berhane, "Massawa on my mind," *Eritrea Profile*, Vol 7, No 43, December 30, 2000; (unsigned), Mesghid Shekh Hammal: kab

in scholarly writings. These examples show how the histories of Massawa and the coast have been instrumental in furthering politically oriented ideological agendas. The independence of Eritrea in 1993 was, and still is, accompanied by a gradual process of the "liberation of its historiography."[22] The approach that the present study takes is one that attempts to grow from and focus on the peoples and societies of a particular region in the nineteenth century – societies who today form part of the Eritrean nation.

As noted at the outset, the chronological framework of this study attempts to go beyond rigid approaches of periodization mostly founded on 'external' political determinants that do not always fully reflect the complex dynamics of economic, social, and even political change, on the ground. However, it is important to offer a brief linear survey locating Massawa within the tortuous history of the powers that controlled or ruled it throughout the nineteenth century. The Ottoman Empire maintained its sovereignty over the port from the sixteenth century until 1813, when Muḥammad 'Alī of Egypt, defeated the Wahhābis in the Hijaz. From that date until 1841 the port was under Egyptian domination but not sovereignty, which remained with the Porte. In 1841 the Egyptians evacuated most of their acquisitions and the Red Sea territories – including Massawa –nominally returned to the Ottomans.

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salasta mi'at zamlatat tarikhawit hintza," *Hadas Ertra*, 9th year, No 113, 20 Genbot 2000, 5; Hashim Bashir, "Sirr al-Maṣawwi'in... wa fiḍa waḥad yujma' mudun al-baḥr al-aḥmar," *Iritriya al-ḥadītha*, 11th year, No 33, 17 October 2001, 5. And two official pamphlets: *Risālat Maṣawwa'*, (in Arabic. Published by the Massawa City Administration on the occasion of the commemoration of the 4th year of its liberation). 4 February 1994, 12 p, and *The Pearl of the Red Sea*, (published in three versions [English, Tigrinya, Arabic] by the Massawa City Administration on the occasion of the commemoration of the 10th year of its liberation), 10 February 2000. A book in Tigrinya on Eritrea's coastal history is: Abba Yshaq Ghebre Iyasus, *Gemagem Bahr Ertra* (Asmara, n.d. [1998-1999?]).

[22] Richard Reid, "The challenge of the past: the quest for historical legitimacy in independent Eritrea," *HA*, 28 (2001), 239-272. See also remarks on the inherent problematic in this process in Irma Taddia, "Modern Ethiopia and Colonial Eritrea," *Aethiopica*, 5 (2002), 125-138.

The Ottomans were unable to exercise effective control and Massawa remained practically in the hands of the local Balaw *nā'ibs* (also 'Bäläw' or 'Belew,' the local power brokers ruling for the Ottomans since at least the seventeenth century). In 1846 the Ottoman Sultan leased Massawa and Sawakin to Muḥammad 'Alī against payment of an annual tribute of 5,000 purses but this arrangement lasted only until 1849 when the ports were again reverted to the Ottomans. The period during which notions of sovereignty and autonomy were radically transformed in the area culminated in 1865 when both ports were transferred to the Egyptians under Khedive Ismā'īl who administered Massawa and Sawakin for twenty years until in 1885 Italy occupied Massawa. In 1890 the colony of Eritrea was established with Massawa serving as its capital, until 1899 when it transferred to Asmara in the highlands.[23]

Towards a Regional Approach: Spaces, Fields and Networks

This study adopts an approach that does not intend to revert to re-write history "backwards," this time from the perspective of an Eritrean nationalist meta-narrative. It proposes to go beyond categories such as states, nations, ethnic groups, political boundaries and attempts to write Massawa into a historical narrative that emerges from a multi-angled dynamic perspective that emphasizes the local, the regional, the cross-regional, the trans-regional and the interactions and spatial connections between all these spheres.[24] Calling for a writing of history forwards and thus avoiding the traps of the

[23] For the Ottomans and Egyptians in the Red Sea see Georges Douin, *Histoire du règne du Khédive Ismaïl*, (Cairo, 1936-41).

[24] See some preliminary and cursory remarks along this line in Irma Taddia, "Modern Ethiopia and Colonial Eritrea," 133-8. But I would take this even further and argue that a regional approach to study the Horn of Africa should go beyond 'Eritrea' and 'Ethiopia' and include the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden and Nile valley regions and areas located at present in Djibuti, Somalia and the Sudan. Such an approach should go

manipulation of history for nationalistic ideological constructions that project present collectivities into the past Frederick Cooper observed that:

> Approaches that emphasize region, network, and patron-client relations – as opposed to nation, ethnic group, and status category – have enriched the study of Africa before colonization as much as after, and, above all, facilitate analysis that stress the dynamics of political and social relationships without assuming either continuity or a sharp break between "eras."[25]

Analyzing the inadequacy of the concept of 'globalization' for writing African history - since it assumes "coherence and direction instead of probing causes and processes" - Cooper called for an approach that is "more than local and less than global." Studying cross-boundary networks, trade systems, religious circuits and boundaries of interaction "open[s] the door to examination of the wide variety of units of affinity and mobilization, the kinds of subjective attachments people form and the collectivities that are capable of action." [26]

In studying Massawa my work adheres to such insights by exploring political, economic, social, cultural and religious spheres of influence and fields of action in its hinterlands and forelands. For example, Ottoman indirect rule and *nā'ib* ascendancy in the region lying between the coast and the highlands had helped to shape and crystallize this region as a unit of relative coherence. Trans-regional commercial networks – including illegal circuits - connecting the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean with Massawa's African interior through the mediation of its mercantile communites contributes to understanding the development of Massawa as an urban mercantile community of cross-

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beyond the focus on politically-dominant entities and write history from the periphery and the "margins" of hegemonic polities.

[25] Frederick Cooper, "Africa's pasts and Africa's historians," *CJAS*, 34 (2) 2000, 318.

[26] Frederick Cooper, "What is the concept of globalization good for? An African historian's perspective," *African Affairs*, 100 (2001), 208-211.

cultural brokers. Furthermore, studying Muslim networks and their fields of action in Massawa and the lowland Eritrean region such as the Khatmiyya, the 'Ad Shaykh and Bayt Shaykh Maḥmūd holy families explain how Islamic movements maneuvered through changing economic and political conditions and spread their influence in the region and in Massawa's urban environment with spectacular effectiveness. To account fully for some of these processes it is useful to move from the 'regional' to the 'local' and focus more closely on the port-town of Massawa and its close surroundings.

The study of port cities has generated useful insights on how to study ports and littoral societies. Building on *Annales* historians, Michael Pearson argued for a consideration of the broader concept of "littoral society" - a community extending inwards from the coast with porous frontiers acting as filters through which the salt of the sea is gradually replaced by the silt of the land. By definition, littoral societies include both land and sea; in other words a littoral is "land located on the sea shore, or that part of the land which is influenced by the sea."[27] Pearson stressed that the "littoral forms a frontier zone that is not there to separate or enclose, but which rather finds its meaning in its permeability."[28] Using the concept of littoral society therefore enables us to study "a porous, transitional area, located somewhere near the middle of a continuum" and "forces one to be comparative, to avoid an overly schematic and discrete writing of a part of total history."[29]

The expansion of the Red Sea commercial system from the 1830s onwards transformed the nature of port – hinterland dynamics and reconfigured the structure of

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[27] Michael N. Pearson, "Littoral Society: The Case for the Coast," *The Great Circle*, 7 (1) April 1985, 1.
[28] Michael N. Pearson, *Port Cities and Intruders: The Swahili Coast, India, and Portugal in the Early Modern Era* (Baltimore, MD., 1998), 38.
[29] Pearson, "Littoral Society," 8.

relationships between distant and close hinterlands and ports. In this changing economic system privileged access to productive areas, control of trade routes and markets, maximization of commercial profits, and clientship relations all gained new importance and had to be reformulated and reorganized. Broad transformations and developmental patterns on the regional level led to local changes that reordered the specificities of ports - a process shaped by the particular dynamics of each port and the structure of its economic and political relationship with its hinterlands. These processes combined, in consequence, transformed what Pearson termed 'littoral societies'.

The concept of 'littoral society' may complement that of umland in thinking about Massawa's close surroundings and hinterlands. An analytical concept originally developed by urban geographers, umland is defined as an area that is culturally, economically and politically related to a particular town or city; it is the immediate surrounding area, directly connected to the town, positioned in a way as a transitional area between town and countryside.[30] Some scholars of the Swahili coast have put to the forth the concept of 'conurbation' in designing the close grouping of a number of villages and neighborhoods, centered on a particular Swahili patrician town such as Lamu, Mombasa or Zanzibar. The conurbation constitutes a micro urban economic system of complementary production by exchange between different categories of settlement and is "tied together into a single unit by various bonds of neighborhood, kinship, political and religious authority, and by some expression of shared or complementary ethnicities."[31] This insight sustains a basic idea, inspired by *Annales* scholars, that a port creates in its surrounding community "a distinctive form of environment," an interstitial milieu

[30] On the term 'umland' see Pearson, *Port Cities and Intruders*, 66-8 and Pearson, *The Indian Ocean*, 31.

between land and sea that derives its uniqueness from the physical and economic dominance of the port.[32]

From the middle of the nineteenth century, Massawa's population increased progressively through the migration of entrepreneurs, merchants and financiers from the Arabian Peninsula and India, on the one hand, and Tigre- and Saho-speaking pastoralists and nomads, on the other. The physical limitation of the island led to the development of a group of settlements – satellite villages and neighborhoods – on nearby islands and on the mainland opposite Massawa. Together these spheres formed a 'conurbation,' or a local economic system of complementarity centered on the island of Massawa and subject to a particularly dynamic social and cultural evolution that is at the heart of this study.

Middlemen, Mediators and Brokers: Coastal Merchant Societies in a Comparative Perspective

Massawa's urban dwellers have historically performed the role of commercial mediators and cultural brokers between partners situated in multiple commercial and cultural settings. The mercantile community of the port is a society of middlemen composed of commercial and cultural brokers mediating between the commercial world of the sea and African producers in the hinterland in a trans-regional system of long-distance trade. Studying Massawa's mercantile community inevitably relates to wider questions and debates about the social and cultural formation and transformation of coastal mercantile communities at large. In eastern Africa, studies and debates on the

[31] Mark Horton and John Middleton, *The Swahili: the Social Landscape of a Mercantile Society* (Oxford, 2000), 136-7.

history and identity of the Swahili-speaking peoples have long been contentious. By analyzing archaeological, linguistic and historical evidence historians and anthropologists have successfully refuted the "alien origin" theory of coastal societies and have proposed interpretive frameworks for understanding the dynamics of Swahili history in terms of internal forces.[33] East African coastal society developed as an African society closely related to its hinterland but increasingly differentiated from it due to its role in cross-cultural brokerage mediating between economic spheres of production, exchange and commerce in its hinterlands and forelands. Balanced views of Swahili history such as Middleton's assume the African roots of the Swahili and interprets their origins and civilization in a cultural, rather than a racial or ethnic sense.[34]

Several models have attempted to explain the structure and operation of cross-cultural brokers and trade diasporas. The anthropologist Abner Cohen was the first to articulate the idea of a trade diaspora, a community whose strategy was to monopolize a certain commodity, a trade route or a particular stage in the process of long-distance trade. In order to accomplish this "a diaspora of this kind is distinct as a type of social

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[32] Traian Stoianovich *French Historical Method. The Annales Paradigm* (Ithaca/London, 1976), 86.
[33] For a recent essay on the state of the field, see Spear, T., "Early Swahili History Reconsidered," *IJAHS*, 33 (2) 2000, 257-290. See also Derek Nurse and Thomas Spear *The Swahili: Reconstructing the History and Language of an African Society, 800-1500* (Philadelphia, 1985); Randall Pouwels, *Horn and Crescent: Cultural Change and Traditional Islam on the East African Coast, 800-1900* (Cambridge, 1987); James de Vere Allen, *Swahili Origins, Swahili Culture and the Shungwaya Phenomenon* (Oxford, 1993). Two specific historical studies that have shaped my understanding of the dynamics of Swahili societies in the nineteenth century are Marguerite Ylvisaker, *Lamu in the Nineteenth Century: Land, Trade, and Politics* (Boston, 1979); Jonathon Glassman, *Feasts and Riot: Revelry, Rebellion, and Popular Consciousness on the Swahili Coast, 1856-1888* (Portsmouth, NH, 1995).
[34] John Middleton, *The World of the Swahili: An African Mercantile Civilization* (New Haven, 1992) and John Middleton and Mark Horton, *The Swahili: The Social Landscape of a Mercantile Society* (Oxford, 2000).

grouping in its culture and structure. Its members are culturally distinct from both their society of origin and from the societies among which they live."[35] Cohen suggested that trade diasporas tended to develop autonomous informal political and judicial organizations in order to provide stability and order and thus respond successfully to external pressures. This idea supports the existence of certain urban institutions in Massawa that were dominated by local merchant families, institutions such as the *sharī'a* court, the 'Local Council' and the professional guilds all controlling and regulating commercial interests, social practices and communal affairs.[36] The members of such a community, Cohen suggests, "form a moral community which constrains the behaviour of the individual and ensures a large measure of conformity with common values and principles."[37]

Returning to the concept of 'trade diaspora,' historians of Asia such as André Wink and K.N. Chaudhuri have attempted to refine and revise our understanding of the concept. The historian André Wink suggested that "trade diasporas" were not necessarily exclusively composed of foreign and alien members but could include individuals belonging to local communities who had come to adopt distinct identities in order to perform the role of cultural mediators between local and overseas partners. [38] This

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[35] Abner Cohen, "Cultural strategies in the organization of trading diasporas," in Claude Meillassoux (ed.), *The Development of Indigenous Trade and Markets in West Africa* (Oxford, 1971), 267. See also Cohen's *Custom and Politics in Urban Africa: A Study of Hausa Migrants in Yoruba Towns* (Berkeley, 1972) and Philip Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History* (Cambridge, 1984), 3-4.

[36] Regarding an example of the role of the court in group cohesion see Marc J. Swartz, "Religious Courts, Community, and Ethnicity among the Swahili of Mombasa: An Historical Study of Social Boundaries," *Africa*, 49 (1), 1979, 29-41.

[37] Cohen, "Cultural strategies," 267.

[38] See especially André Wink, *Al-Hind: The Making of the Indo-Islamic World* (Leiden, 1991), 66-67. For a criticism of Curtin's model of "trade diaspora" see K.N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge, 1985), 223-228.

process is suggestive of the modes of identity formation among other coastal mercantile societies such as the Swahili and the southern Somali coastal societies of Benaadir.[39]

Such models are, in principle, useful in thinking about the evolution of the history of Massawa's mercantile society. The case of Massawa suggests that the monopolization of commercial mediation by the town's merchants gradually led to the development of a distinct sense of local corporate identity and culture that served to define the social borders of the community and maintain its role in cross-cultural brokerage. However, in socio-ethnic terms, this community had emerged as a result of a gradual process of interbreeding and intermixing between local and foreign elements in Massawa. Local mercantile individuals and families originally from the Semhar, Sahel, Barka, Dahlak islands and Tigray regions, on the one hand, and Egyptian, Hijazi, Yemeni, Hadhrami, and Indian merchants and entrepreneurs, but also Ottoman soldiers and officials, on the other, settled in Massawa in periods of heightened economic opportunities. They were subsequently linked to systems of family and business networks ranging from the Indian sub-continent to the eastern Mediterranean and into the African hinterlands in order to facilitate the movement of people and commodities and benefit from socio-commercial webs of trust. Some families or individuals mixed with others while the community at large adopted a distinct – and locally perceived as superior - sense of identity based on specific notions of its strong affinity with Islamic religious traits and Arab cultural ideals,

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[39] For the Benaadir coast see Scott Reese, 'Patricians of the Benaadir : Islamic Learning, Commerce and Somali Urban Identity in the Nineteenth-Century', Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, (Philadelphia, 1996); Edward A. Alpers, "Muqdisho in the Nineteenth Century: A Regional Perspective," *JAH*, 24 (1983), 441-459; Lee Cassanelli,, *The Shaping of Somali Society: Reconstructing the History of a Pastoral People, 1600-1900* (Philadelphia, 1982) and M. Molon and A. Vianello, "Brava, città dimenticata," *Storia Urbana*, 1990, 14 (53), 199-240. Several other studies are referred to in Federico Cresti, F., "Città e società urbane a sud del Sahara: studi fonti e documenti d'archivio italiani," in Adriana Piga (ed.), *Islam e città nell'Africa a sud del Sahara. Tra sufismo e fondamentalismo* (Napoli, 2001), 95-113.

and a strong attachment to a self-perceived highly "civilized" urban culture. This urban culture was characterized by specific notions of prestige, status, authority and power involving an elaborate sense of urban identity and complex mechanisms of translating material capital to social and symbolic forms of capital.

In this setting being "Massawan" inevitably meant being urban, figuring as a central component in local identity and pride. Common historical experiences closely associated with the Middle East and Islam and a shared economic role in Massawa's mercantile ecology were also features shaping the community's *esprit de corps.* Massawa's mercantile urban dwellers defined society and culture by maintaining a sense of distinctiveness and corporation in order to participate in cross-cultural and trans-regional networks and resist growing competition from European, Indian and Levantine merchants in a commercially expansive system. My study examines the construction, formation and inner workings of these features in the nineteenth century, during which economic and political change shaped, catalyzed and enhanced such socio-cultural processes.

The distinct social structure of Massawa's urban community placed the institution of the family as a tightly-knit corporation at the center of social and economic life. Higher status Arab families, including the *ashrāf* and the *sayyids*, maintained their socio-cultural distinction by intermarrying among themselves, by taking women in Arabia, Yemen and in Red Sea ports, and by marrying into established families of Arab descent in Massawa. However, they also married into locally prestigious Muslim families among the Tigre and Saho-speaking clans such as the Balaw, the Bayt Shaykh Maḥmūd, the 'Ad

Shaykh and the 'Ad Mua'lim.[40] These alliances enabled them to reproduce their high status and deal with family relatives, who were also business associates, in other Red Sea ports such as Jiddah, Sawakin, Luhayya, Hudaydah, Qunfudah and at the same time with kin-related groups of the African interior. Massawa families constituted the link between these worlds. In cultural terms, these processes resulted in a competition over religious and cultural prestige involving mainly their association to prestigious origins and descent. Designation and self-designation as 'Arabs' could be functional in such a setting but did not always reflect locally-grounded social realities.[41]

In such a setting, it is not surprising that conceptions of identity and distinctiveness have preoccupied Massawans from the middle of the nineteenth century to this day. One informant in Massawa told me the following revealing story. After the independence of Eritrea in 1993, the government had asked all the country's residents to fill out an application form for the issuance of an Eritrean identity card. Applicants were asked to fill in the ethnic group (or *qabīla* [Ar. 'tribe'], *qawmīyya* [Ar. 'nationality']) to which they belonged. According to my informant this caused a problem to the town's inhabitants since they did not belong to any ethnic group but were organized in families. They thus refused to note their ethnic belonging as 'Tigre,' which is the region's ethnic

[40] For studies of Hadhrami migrants' assimilation into host societies (in southeast Asia) and the resulting creation of creole senses of identity, see the studies of Engseng Ho. "Hadhramis Abroad in Hadhramaut: The Muwalladīn," in Ulrike Freitag and W. G. Clarence-Smith (eds.) *Hadhrami Traders, Scholars and Statesmen in the Indian Ocean, 1750s-1960s* (Leiden, 1997), 131-146; "Before parochialization: diasporic Arabs cast in creole waters," in Huub de Jonge and Nico Kaptein (eds.) *Transcending Borders: Arabs, politics, trade and Islam in Southeast Asia* (Leiden, 2002), 11-35; and specific comments in "Empire through Diasporic Eyes: A View from the Other Boat," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 46 (2) 2004, 215-216.

[41] Some writers have designed the town's population in terms such as the "Arabicized inhabitants of Massawa and its surroundings." Edward Ullendorff, *The Two Zions: Reminiscences from Jerusalem and Ethiopia* (Oxford, 1988), 139. The present study tries precisely to test the validity, study the nature and historical construction of the process that this statement insinuates.

majority. The authorities finally accepted the claim and permitted the town dwellers to inscribe their family name as their ethnic affiliation.[42]

By focusing on Massawa I hope to contribute and stimulate further studies focusing on African port towns situated on the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden and Somali coasts (between Egypt and Somalia) such as Sawakin, Tajura, Zayla', Berbera, Muqdishu, Merca, Brava and Kismayo. Even though these towns share different characteristics vis-à-vis each other and in relation to the East African Swahili coast, the comparative study of the mechanisms and dynamics that have shaped them may contribute to understanding crucial questions and problems in the study of coastal histories, cultures and identities elsewhere. I also believe that my study can be of interest to the growing number of scholars in the last decade or more who are trying to propose ways for thinking about the Indian Ocean world in historical terms.[43] Examples or case studies from the Red Sea and East African coasts are sometimes missing, or less well covered, in attempts at providing broad overarching theoretical and comparative analyses of the Indian Ocean.

For various reasons, not the least of which is the specialized philological tradition of Ethiopian studies, there has been a tendency – by both *éthiopisants* and Africanists - to perceive Ethiopia and its region as a separate historical entity in the wider East African

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[42] Interview with Ḥāmid 'Abd al-Bāqi 'Abbāsī, Massawa 18 March 2000. However, Fu'ād Makkī has informed me that the form asked citizens to identify *both* their 'ethnic group' and '*qabīla*'. Many Massawans did indeed inscribe 'Tigre' as their ethnic group but, since their collective identity was preeminently urban, they left a blank space or inscribed 'none' under *qabīla* affiliation. Letter from Fu'ād Makkī, 30 July 2004. I would assume that there were different responses to the form and that some did indeed, as my informant confidently stated, put down their family name under '*qabīla*'. On ethnicity and politics in contemporary Eritrea see Tekle M. Woldemikael, "The cultural construction of Eritrean nationalist movements," in Crawford Young (ed.) *The Rising Tide of Cultural Pluralism: The Nation-State at Bay?* (Madison, 1993), 179-199, Assefaw Bariagaber, "The politics of cultural pluralism in Ethiopia and Eritrea: trajectories of ethnicity and constitutional experiments," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 21 (6) November 1998, 1056-1073, and Kjetil Tronvoll, "Borders of violence – boundaries of identity: demarcating the Eritrean nation-state," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 22 (6) November 1999, 1037-1060.

[43] Among these scholars are Edward Alpers, Michael Pearson, Sugata Bose, Kenneth McPherson, Frank Broeze, K. N. Chaudhuri, A. Das Gupta, but also others.

region. Inward looking perceptions rarely make the effort to address the wider world of Africanist scholars and the problems that concern them at large. Studying Massawa and the above-mentioned ports and the societies and cultures shaped by their respective and specific histories may bring, for example, new perspectives to the historiography of the East African coast and its urban settlements.[44] They may also challenge the intellectual and scholarly "barriers" that have followed the logic of states and national entities in favor of a more fluid and organic understanding of the interaction between sea and land, lowlands and highlands, ports and their hinterlands, in northeast Africa.

The Sources

This study is based on a wide variety of published and unpublished primary and secondary sources in Italian, English, French and Arabic.[45] Beyond written sources, I have collected data through oral interviews conducted in Eritrea during fieldwork research. Descriptions, reports and observations on Massawa since the sixteenth century are not rare. Many of those who have entered into contact with the port or its region have left accounts – some more valuable than others - of the town. While Portuguese accounts have been largely known to scholars and made use of in the historiography, Ottoman sources have been less accessible and therefore less familiar.[46] With the exception of the late Cengiz Orhonlu's study *Habeš Eyaleti* (published in Turkish) no scholar, to my knowledge, has yet turned to a systematic study of the Ottoman archives in Istanbul, which, according to Cengiz, contain important materials on Ethiopia and its region from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries.[47] This important task still awaits a scholar who

[44] See for example Lee Cassanelli's stimulating remarks on southern Somali studies. "New Directions in Southern Somali History: An Agenda For the Next Decade," in Hussein M. Adam and Richard Ford (eds.) *Mending Rips in the Sky. Options for Somali communities in the 21st century* (Lawrenceville, NJ, 1997), 99-103.

can combine the appropriate linguistic skills with a historical interest in the Horn of Africa.

With regards to the long nineteenth century, the broad temporal framework of the present study, significant European sources on Massawa open with the account of the Scottish traveler James Bruce published in 1790.[48] From then on, but especially since the revival of Red Sea commerce and navigation from the 1830s onwards, we have numerous accounts by German, French, British and other European expeditions and explorers who either landed in Massawa on their way inland or transited in the port before heading towards other Red Sea and Indian Ocean destinations. One source that was extremely useful for mid-nineteenth century ethnographic data and information about coastal and lowland societies and cultures is Werner Munzinger's *Ostafrikanische Studien.* Munzinger (1832-1875) was a Swiss explorer who lived in various parts of the region that became Eritrea, including eight years in Massawa and Keren. In the 1860s and 1870s he became very involved in regional politics while serving in various capacities the French and Egyptian governments, including Governor of Massawa for Khedive Ismā'īl.[49] For historically valuable information on Massawa under the Egyptian administration between 1865 and 1885, there is a useful collection of 79 military reports

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[45] Unfortunately, language limitations have prevented me from making extensive use of German-language nineteenth-century materials.

[46] For an old account of the Portuguese in Massawa see Francesco Gallina, "I Portoghesi a Massaua nei secoli XVI e XVII," *BSGI* (1890).

[47] Cengiz Orhonlu, *Habes Eyaleti* (Istanbul, 1974) and "Turkish archival sources on Ethiopia," *PICES*, 1972 (Chicago), 455-462.

[48] Bruce's account has made an important impact, alas all too often negative, on the perceptions of subsequent nineteenth century travelers in Massawa and Hirgigo. In some cases, even late nineteenth century accounts, seem to have been directly inspired by Bruce's exaggerated remarks on the *nā'ibs*, for example. Bruce's impact on the formation of pre-conceptions of nineteenth century travelers to Ethiopia deserves a short study on its own.

[49] The book was published in Schaffhausen in 1864. In this study I have used the Italian translation titled *Studi sull'Africa orientale* (Rome, 1890). For a biographical note see Giuseppe Puglisi, *Chi e? dell'Eritrea* (Asmara, 1952), 215.

sent between Massawa, Sawakin and Cairo in Shawqi Attallah al-Jamal's collection of published archival materials on Egypt's policies and activities in the Red Sea under Khedive Ismā'īl (1863-1879).[50]

Following the acquisition of the Bay of Assab by the Italian Rubattino shipping company in 1869, the increasing number of Italian travelers and observers visiting Massawa and the region - culminating in 1885 with the Italian takeover of the town - reflected the steady growth of Italian imperial aspirations. From 1885 to the early 1900s, there are numerous accounts in Italian – of every sort and quality, some extremely revealing of early Italian colonial perceptions and prejudice – on the *colonia primogenita* (the first-born colony) and its capital Massawa (until 1900). Some accounts from the 1880s expressed little enthusiasm and/or disappointment from the small, barren, unbearably hot and dry port and its region, deeming it unworthy of an aspiring imperial power such as Italy. Reaching Massawa in the beginning of the hot season in May 1880 L. Pennazzi could not have expressed his point with greater poignancy: "Had Dante known Massawa, his *Inferno* would have surely included one more pit into which the great poet would have sent the most guilty of his damned."[51]

Imperialist fantasizing was boundless, and passionate first impressions of this type were common among Italian travelers in the period. They usually mellowed a bit with time. In 1899 Saint Yves – a francophone observer – attempted to set the picture straight by replying to all those who attacked Massawa in their writings: "One should not condemn the ancient town and talk about it so mercilessly. If Massawa has had such a

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[50] Shawqī 'Atā Allāh al-Jamal *Al-wathā'iq al-ta'rīkhiyya li-siyāsat miṣr fī al-baḥr al-aḥmar, 1863-1879* (Cairo, 1959), on Sawakin and Massawa: 1-187. The reports are reproduced verbatim.

[51] Luigi Pennazzi, *Dal Po ai due Nili* (Modena, 1887), 29. Another expression that was often cited was British: "Pondichery is a warm bath, Aden is an oven, and Massawa hell."

long existence, if its port is – after the Graeco-Phoenician Adulis – the most prominent of ports on the African coasts of the Red Sea, its position must really be favorable."[52]

Nevertheless, several early colonial official and private accounts, ethnographic descriptions and studies have been fundamental in opening windows on social, cultural and religious dynamics at play in the town and among its inhabitants. This study makes extensive and systematic use of Dante Odorizzi's colonial handbook detailing the political, economic, geographic and social dimensions of the lands and peoples of the *Commissariato* of Massawa.[53] Most of the Italian archival material that I consulted at the Archivio del Ministero degli Affari Esteri (Rome) and at the Archivio Centrale dello Stato (Rome) consisted of correspondence and reports produced between 1885 and 1910. Some specific themes that I have focused on in these collections include the Khatmiyya family and various reports on the administration of law in Massawa. The collection of biographical notices on the chiefs and notables of the Tigre, Saho and Afar-speaking groups of Semhar, Sahel, Akkälä Guzay, the Dahlak islands and Dankalia was also a useful source for examining those in Massawa's hinterlands who have maintained political, commercial and social relations with the port.

As for Massawans themselves, unfortunately, due to the troubled decades that the town has gone through since the 1960s and the resulting experience of exile from Eritrea, we have but scanty evidence of local historical writing. From evidence gathered through oral interviews it is clear, however, that prominent members of the community such as *sayyid* Muḥammad 'Uthmān Ḥayūtī (1901- late 1990s) and Yāsīn Maḥmūd Bā Ṭūq (1914-1967), both of solidly established Massawa families of Hadhrami origins, have

[52] Saint-Yves, G., "A travers l'Erythrée italienne," *Bulletin de Société de Géographie de Marseille*, v 23 (1899), 148.

written texts on Massawa's history. It seems that some manuscripts were lost but further research among the exiled community of Massawans in Jiddah might prove useful in locating such writings.[54]

An important local source - even though not specifically from the town of Massawa – is the scholarship of Eritrea's Grand *muftī*, Shaykh Ibrāhīm al-Mukhtār Aḥmad 'Umar (1909-1969). In his intellectual quest for Eritrea's Islamic past, Shaykh Ibrāhīm devoted an entire unpublished manuscript of 122 pages to Massawa, its history, its population and its importance in the history of Islam in Eritrea. In another text on the history of Eritrea's towns, forty additional pages discuss Massawa's specific religious and historical features.[55] Since the independence of the State of Eritrea in 1993 several historical studies in Arabic have been published. A particularly useful volume that deserves mention is Muḥammad 'Uthmān Abū Bakr's *Ta'rīkh Iritriya al-mu'āṣir: arḍ wa-sha'ab* ('A Contemporary History of Eritrea: Land and People') which includes a copious chapter on the Semhar with useful ethnographic information on local societies and families. The author, himself a native of Hirgigo, has been able to collect some important data on the region and its inhabitants.[56]

But the most important local source that this study makes use of is a collection of records from Massawa's Islamic *sharī'a* court (*maḥkama sharī'iyya*) covering the period between the 1860s and the early 1900s.[57] The collection is archived in the office of the

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[53] Dante Odorizzi, , *Il commissariato regionale di Massaua al 1o gennaio 1910* (Asmara, 1911).
[54] Interviews with Ḥasan Muḥammad 'Uthmān Ḥayūtī, Asmara 27 November 1999 and Muḥammad Yāsīn Bā Ṭūq, Massawa 17 March 2000. Both were also editors of *Ṣawt al-Rābiṭah al-Islāmiyya al-Iritriya*, newspaper of the Muslim League, in the 1940s.
[55] See above note 18.
[56] Muḥammad 'Uthmān Abū Bakr, *Ta'rīkh Iritriya al-mu'āṣir: arḍan wa-sha'ban* (Cairo, 1994), Chapter 35 on Semhar, 279-353.
[57] Credit for drawing my attention to this source goes to Tom Killion who indicated its existence in his *Historical Dictionary of Eritrea* (Lanham, MD., 1998), 456. This is without overlooking the fact that Abdu

Waqf Council in Asmara and contains twenty-nine leather bounded registers, of which nineteen correspond to the period under direct Egyptian administration (1865-1885), five cover years under Italian administration (1885-1902) and five additional volumes relate to periods of transition between Egyptians and Italians.

Islamic court registers may offer an abundance of details and insights in vast spheres of human interaction: be it in the legal, political, economic, social, religious, or administrative fields in a given society over a period of time. Over the past two decades historians of the Ottoman Empire and its provinces have carried out sophisticated and systematic research based on the analysis of Islamic court records.[58] The most important advantage of the legal record is its nature as a local source produced by a local institution. The court was the site where civil and criminal disputes were adjudicated, but it also served as a notarial office where people came to settle various matters such as registering their property (houses, land, shops, boats), getting married and divorced, settling child custody and support, certifying signatures, signing contracts, liberating their slaves, converting to Islam, and regulating the affairs of communal institutions. Court scribes entered a formal description of each case in Arabic in the official court registers. The mere nature of this type of source favors a bottom-up reconstruction of history since it throws light on people who are usually left outside traditional historical narratives such as, for example, women, laborers, slaves, the poor, criminals, and the elderly – all those

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Ali Habib was the first to discover and make use of several registers in his thesis 'History of Massawa from early nineteenth century to the coming of the Italians,' B.A. thesis, Haile Sellassie I University (Addis Ababa, 1973).

[58] This literature is vast and rich. Two specific studies, among others, in eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries Middle Eastern socioeconomic historiography have shaped my understanding of historic research with Islamic court records. Abraham Marcus, *The Middle East on the Eve of Modernity: Aleppo in the Eighteenth Century* (New York, 1989) and Beshara Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine: Merchants and Peasants in Jabal Nablus, 1700-1900* (Berkeley, 1995). In an African context (Northern Nigeria) see the

"silent" groups whose voices are rarely heard in historical accounts. On the other hand scholars are calling for caution and awareness to the limitations of working with legal documents. Their apparent veracity is no longer accepted at face value and some historians argue that court records should be dealt with and deconstructed like any other text. Court records, it is argued, are "complex webs of meaning, in which a social "reality," a series of specific biases, contemporary codes and symbols, style and tropes of writing, the intervention of copiers and editors, all blend inextricably to form a written source."[59]

Among the twenty-nine volumes there are registers of different types. Some cover less than a year while one in particular covers fourteen years. Some contain but ten written pages while others are more voluminous and have up to 150 pages. Some registers include a table of the legal cases contained in the volume with page numbers, dates, names of the parties involved and the nature of the act.[60] This study has mostly made use of registrations of real-estate and moveable property transactions, marriage, divorce, power of attorney, inheritance, child custody, death acts, conversion to Islam, religious endowments (*waqf*), and slave manumission.

Real estate property transactions are particularly abundant in the final decades of the nineteenth century. Houses, coffee shops, stores and shops, water cisterns were all

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studies of Allan Christelow based on the records of the Emir of Kano's Judicial Council. *Thus Ruled Emir Abbas: Selected Cases from the Records of the Emir of Kano's Judicial Council* (East Lansing, MI., 1994).

[59] Dror Zeevi, "The use of Ottoman sharī'a court records as a source for Middle Eastern social history: a reappraisal," *Islamic Law and Society*, 5 (1) 1998: 37. In terms of methodology, historical research based on Islamic court records can be divided into three principal methods or techniques: quantitative history, narrative history, and micro-history. Each of these methods entails different ways of reading, analyzing and writing and each presents different types of methodological problems that historians should be aware of. Ibid, 38-39.

[60] The majority of these tables are bilingual Arabic-Italian. Many have been attached to the registers ulteriorly. Apparently, the Italian authorities referred to the registers while attempting to settle disputes over property, especially following a devastating earthquake that occurred in 1888. Abdu Ali Habib, 'History of Massawa,' 45.

properly registered in detail when bought and sold and title deeds were issued to individuals by the court. At times, the registers served as a type of "official gazette" into which government edicts or translations of official letters were copied. Several registers reproduce the various certificates issued by the court, mainly property title deeds and manumission acts. The majority of acts are usually authenticated by personal seals with the names (in Arabic) of the *qāḍī, muftī,* judicial council members, and/or witnesses present at court.

The methodological approach of using court records as a historical source adopted in this study is mostly a quantitative approach used in a framework of prosopographical analysis. Prosopography is defined by the French historian Claude Nicolet as "the history of groups as elements in political and social history, achieved by isolating series of persons having certain political or social characteristics in common and then analyzing each series in terms of multiple criteria, in order both to obtain information specific to individuals and to identify the constants and the variables among the data for whole groups."[61] By isolating specific social, economic, religious and ethnic attributes the use of this technique in studying the Massawa court records enables the identification of certain trends, patterns and dynamics that characterize classes, status and ethnic groups in particular periods or historical configurations.

A last category of sources is the gathering of oral data through interviews. Unfortunately, since the 1960s and 1970s Massawa's population has suffered multiple demographic and social shocks and upheavals resulting in the breakdown of communal

[61] Posted on the website of the 'Prosopographical Research Unit', Linacre College, Oxford. http://www.linacre.ox.ac.uk/research/prosop/prosopo.stm. For prosopographical analyses in Ethiopian historiography, for example, see Bertrand Hirsch and Michel Perret, *Notes de prosopographie éthiopienne* (Paris: ARESAE, 1992).

structures and forced outward migration. Many Massawans left their town and settled in the diaspora, mostly in the Middle East, while many newcomers from the highlands and from Massawa's vicinities came to settle in the port town. This reality, naturally, does not facilitate the gathering of oral data on earlier periods in the town's history. Notwithstanding these basic difficulties I have conducted interviews with more than 50 Tigre, Saho, Afar, Tigrinya and Arabic-speaking informants in Massawa, Asmara, Ghinda, Hirgigo, Embereme, and Hitumlo during fieldwork in 1999-2000. Interviews revolved around family histories, individual migratory and professional trajectories, commercial and economic activities and religious practices. Interviews provided basic data and complemented documentary evidence on social structures, communal dynamics, cultural characteristics, self-perceptions and the perception of other groups and historical events in the region under study. I have conducted all interviews in one [or more] of the following languages: Arabic, Italian and English.

A Note on the Geographical Setting: Climate, Seasonality, Peoples

A final introductory note is devoted to the physical and human setting of Massawa's region. One of the most striking geographical features in the Horn of Africa is the dramatic and spectacular geography of the landscape extending from Massawa and the Red Sea coasts to the highland plateau, rising abruptly above the narrow lowland plain only some three dozen kilometers from the sea. Any traveler who has descended the serpentine road from Asmara (2340 m.) in the highlands down to Massawa on the coast – or vice versa - has experienced the breathtaking and sharp transition from one

geographic, climatic and human environment to another in less than three hours and about 120 kilometers of road.

The Eritrean region's geography is dominated by its division between the hot and dry lowlands of the coastal and western plains, and the cooler and better-watered highlands of the central plateau (*käbässa* in Tigrinya) and northern highlands.[62] While in the dry lowlands annual average temperatures rise to around thirty degrees centigrade with average annual precipitations of less than ten centimeters, the highlands have an average temperature of seventeen degrees with average annual precipitation of over sixty centimeters. These topographic, climatic and variations in seasonality form different ecological regions that are also reflected in the economy, cultures and languages of the region's peoples.

A particularly striking aspect of climate in the region is that while the highlands have a bimodal rainfall regime (small rains between March and May and big rains between June and September) the coastal lowlands have only limited rains principally in December and January. In other words, while Asmara, on the highland plateau, for example, experiences the most torrential rains in the summer months, Massawa and the coastal plain live through its driest season. Such conditions lead to significant social consequences regarding seasonality and migration. Lowland nomadic groups move in a seasonal cycle up the hills and the slopes of the plateau for grazing and cultivation. In turn, some highlander nomadic groups and farmers migrate down the escarpments to the foothills and the plains during the winter in search for pastures and a second harvest.

[62] A more variegated division of climatic gradations as northeast Africans define it includes the *qolla* (hot lowlands: areas below 700 m.), the *wayna daga* (sub-tropical climate: 700-2000 m.) and the *daga* (temperate: 2000 m. and above sea level).

This pattern of migration and seasonality is typical of the central coastal region, often called the Semhar plain, where the mountains come closest to the sea. Even if still relatively dry, the Semhar region extending from Massawa to Ghinda (962 m.) situated half-way between Massawan and Asmara, enjoys far better conditions than the sparsely inhabited coastal plain extending from the Sudan down to Massawa as well as the barren coast extending south of Massawa towards Assab and Djibouti. Semhar is the region par excellence where Tigre and Saho-speaking pastoralists migrate up and down the escarpment. It is in the region straddling the plain, the foothills and the hills, in localities such as 'Ailat, 'Asus, Gumhod and Ghinda that the abrupt human variation in language, religion, and culture is most manifest.

The segments of this study relating to the interaction between Massawa and its hinterlands are mostly concerned with Tigre and Saho-speaking pastoralists and agro-pastoralists inhabiting Massawa's interior regions. Tigre-speaking groups inhabit a large arc around the highlands and northeastern lowlands. Like Tigrinya, the language of the predominantly Christian sedentary agriculturalists of the highlands, Tigre is a Semitic language. By the nineteenth century all Tigre speaking groups adopted Islam. The Tigre speaking groups are divided into a number of tribes and tribal confederations and include the Bani 'Amer of the western lowlands; the Marya, Bet Juq and a large part of the Mensa all inhabiting the area around Keren; the Habab, 'Ad Takles, 'Ad Tamaryam, the 'Ad Mu'alim of the northern highlands and segments of the 'Ad Shaykh, the 'Ad Shuma, Meshalit, 'Ad Tsaura, Bet Mala and other smaller groups inhabiting the region of Semhar of Massawa's close interior.

The Saho-speaking groups are Muslim agro-pastoralists speaking an Eastern Cushitic language and inhabiting parts of the coast, the eastern escarpment of the highland plateau south of Massawa, and in the foothills of Akkälä Guzay. The main Saho-speaking tribes are the Asaorta, Minifere, Hazu, Debremela, and the Taroa. Another important coastal group is the Afar-speaking people inhabiting the Danakil (or Afar) coast south of Massawa and the Buri peninsula. The Afar are mostly pastoralists but include many fishermen and some merchants. Afar is another Cushitic language – linguistically related to Saho – and the Afar people are all Muslims. One other interesting small coastal group is the Arab-speaking Rashayda who migrated to the Sudanese and Eritrean coasts from the Arabian Peninsula some time in the early nineteenth century. The Rashayda are traditionally pastoralists and have not assimilated into local Tigre or Saho-speaking societies.[63]

In contrast to interior pastoralist and agro-pastoralist societies, the population of the town of Massawa was sedentary, cosmopolitan and polyglot. It included individuals and families who came both from the African interior and from across the sea and created a complex Red Sea society almost totally devoted to commerce, strongly identified with its urban values and culture, and possessing a strong attachment to Islam.

As the case is in other settings throughout the Red Sea and Indian Ocean zone, languages flowed with great ease in greater Massawa. Turkish and Arabic were the languages of administration for the greater part of the nineteenth century, until Italy occupied Massawa in 1885. The predominant languages of the local population in the nineteenth century were Arabic, Tigre, and to a lesser extent Saho. Arabic was the

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[63] Tom Killion, *Historical Dictionary of Eritrea*, 1-8; Edward Ullendorff, *The Ethiopians* (London, 1965) (2nd ed.), 23-37.

literary and religious language, but was also employed with Arabic-speaking merchants who visited from across the sea. Tigre was mostly the everyday language of the home, the streets and the markets. But like in many other settings where commercial mediation is the primary occupation, urban Massawans usually had to use more than one of these languages, at times shifting from one language to another in one business transaction. Massawa was not only the town of its inhabitants; it regularly hosted a variety of people – traders, peddlars, laborers, fishermen, caravaneers – who came to the port to buy or sell goods, provide their labor and services. Many a traveler in the nineteenth century noted the numerous languages heard in town. Languages such as Amharic, Tigrinya, Oromo, Somali, Afar, Swahili, Farsi and several Indian languages were the music of its markets. In addition Greek, Italian, Armenian, Albanian and French were used by European merchants conducting business in the port.

Wider political and migratory developments shifted general patterns of language usage in the port throughout the century. In the second half of the century the use of Arabic was strengthened, especially due to the growing migration of merchants and commercial entrepreneurs from Arabic-speaking lands and the twenty-year Egyptian occupation. Similarly, the Italian creation of the Colony of Eritrea in 1890 with Massawa as its capital also began a gradual process of migration of Tigrinya-speaking highlanders to the Massawa conurbation.

Finally, it is important to stress the critical role of the yearly seasonal cycles in determining the rhythm of life of Massawa as a trading town and port. Seasonal shifts greatly determined all aspects of commercial and social life –including patterns of linguistic usage. Seasonal patterns determined the regime of winds and affected sail-

powered vessels bound to or from Massawa. On the other hand seasonal variations in the port's hinterlands affected the rhythms of the caravan trade and the arrival of merchandise, caravan traders and transporters, and the activities of the host of peddlars, laborers and service providers essential to the complex operation of caravans. The slightest change of climatic conditions could have far-reaching consequences in the port's complex commercial operation requiring a maximal degree of synchronization. It was not rare that camel and boat did not meet and that one had to wait for the other. Goods deteriorated, boat crews or caravaneers wandered around the town's narrow alleys and sipped coffee in its numerous coffee houses, and Massawan brokers had to keep all ends under control with great patience and social skills.

Chapter 2
DEMARCATING THE COASTAL REGION: *NĀ'IB* AUTONOMY AND DOMINANCE, TO THE 1840s

> "The Sultan rules in Istanbul, the Pasha in Egypt, and *Nā'ib* Ḥasan in Massawa!"
> (*nā'ib* Ḥasan to the Governor of Massawa). [1]
>
> I am the gate of Abyssinia.
> (*nā'ib* Idrīs to Lord Valentia).[2]

This chapter reconstructs the history of the lowland regions that extend from Massawa and the Red Sea coasts to the northern Abyssinian highlands. Departing from past accounts that have focused on the military and diplomatic struggles of large political entities and imperial powers - Abyssinian, Ottoman or European - for either access to the sea or a safe passage to the highland Plateau, the chapter emphasizes a more regionally-centered perspective. Several decades following their conquest of Massawa in 1557, the Ottomans delegated power to a locally powerful family of the Bejja-descended Balaws and appointed its chief as their *nā'ib*.[3] Historical accounts and historiographic studies have tended to perceive the *nā'ib*s negatively portraying them as naturally inclined "warmongers," "greedy" and "uncooperative" elements who were holding back the evolution of northern Abyssinia's history. Such views reflected state- and imperial-

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[1] Werner Munzinger, "Les contrées limitrophes de l'Habesch," *Nouvelles Annales des Voyages* (henceforth *NAV)*, 6e sér, 4e ann., avril 1858, 15, Guillaume Lejean, *Voyage aux Deux Nils* (Paris, 1865), 169.
[2] Letter from *nā'ib* Idrīs 'Uthmān to Lord Valentia, [July 1805]. Document no. 1, In Sven Rubenson (ed.) *Acta Aethiopica. Volume 1. Correspondence and Treaties 1800-1854* (Evanston, IL., 1987), 3. Also, George Valentia, *Voyages and Travels to India, Ceylon, the Red Sea, Abyssinia and Egypt in the Years 1802, 1803, 1804, 1805 and 1806* (London, 1809), Vol. III., 252
[3] "Deputy," in Arabic.

centric perceptions that also extended back to the biased accounts of European travelers and missionaries since the religious wars of the sixteenth century and influencing subsequent perceptions.[4] The *nā'ib* family was a locally-based dynasty of power brokers in control of a strategically important region in between larger rivaling political entities struggling to promote its own interests. In this context it succeeded in extending its own influence on societies in the region.

The chapter places the *nā'ib*s at the center of the account, examines their political, economic, social and religious role in the region, and explores the methods, meanings and limitations of their autonomy and dominance until their political power waned by the middle of the nineteenth century. It argues that the ways by which the *nā'ib*s have established and maintained their control over these territories have laid down the infrastructure of networks, alliances and spheres of influence - be they economic, social or religious - that gravitated towards Massawa as the major urban center and port on the coast. Even though these processes were accelerated with the establishment of Egyptian direct control [or effective rule] after 1865 and the Italian organization of the *Colonia Eritrea* following its proclamation in 1890, the Ottoman legacy of indirect rule and the

[4] This tendency was general. Numerous nineteenth-century observers – travelers and official envoys - were prejudiced against the *nā'ib*s, some having been inspired by James Bruce's negative account, that – to some extent – followed the biased missionary accounts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. See also Edouard Combes and Maurice Tamisier, *Voyage en Abyssinie* (Paris, 1838), 92-93; Werner Munzinger, "Les contrées limitrophes de l'Habesch," *NAV*, 6e série, 4e ann., avril 1858, 8-9; Georges Douin, *Histoire du règne de Khédive Ismail*, III, i, 235. Some "modern" writers also tended to denigrate the *nā'ib*s and attributed to them a natural hostile nature, greediness and the main factor for withholding the seemingly natural progression of the Abyssinian state and the source of some of northern Ethiopia's [internal] problems. In these writings the *nā'ib* s "attack travelers," they use "extortion," they "encroach" upon territories, etc. Acts of the same nature by the imperial forces be they Abyssinians, Ottomans or Europeans, seem all too normal and legitimate. These views promote a static and historically deterministic character to the evolution of the region whereby struggles are only "normal" between large "historic" polities each having its natural place and "reasonable" aspirations within these conflicts. In sum, the *nā'ib*s did not seem to welcome European merchants for fear of competition over resources in a period of increasing commercialization. See also Mordechai Abir, "Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa," *Cambridge History of Africa*, vol. 4, 550, 563, 567-8, and Mordechai Abir, *Ethiopia. The Era of the Princes* (London, 1968), 7.

role of the *nā'ib*s in the region shaped commercial, social and religious fields of action and webs. These various regional networks shaped Massawa's hinterlands especially when long-distance trade weakened following the revival of imperial struggles in mid-century. The Balaw *nā'ib* family was at the center of these processes maneuvering between diplomacy and force constantly testing the limits of their authority.

The waning and ultimate extinction of *nā'ib* political power beginning in the middle of the century reflected the transformation in the meanings of sovereignty that was common to other localities in Asia and Africa at that time. Under the Ottomans, the shared and layered concept of sovereignty (what I call "Indirect rule") enabled to create autonomous spaces for the inhabitants of Massawa, Hirgigo and the region. But from mid-century the notion of indivisible and unitary sovereignty was increasingly imposed - first by the Egyptians - and represented a major break from methods of governance and legitimacy that had been common under the Ottomans in the past.[5]

Before the 'Turks': The Balaw in Semhar

The origin of the Balaws leads to the north and more precisely, to the Sawakin area. It seems that a gradual fusion between Bejja-speaking nomads and Arabs gave birth to a ruling class called "Balaw" (also 'Belew' and 'Bäläw'). Some evidence suggests that following a long period of famine in the eastern Sudan at the end of the 14th century, the Balaw began migrating southwards through the Tigre-speaking regions of present-day northern Eritrea and the province of Tigray. Some continued to the Semhar region in present-day eastern Eritrea and further south along the 'Afar coast down to Zayla'. The

Balaw fused into local groups in all these regions, adopted local languages, and influenced social and political configurations. In some societies they attained political preeminence and leadership.[6]

Balaw historical traditions collected by Werner Munzinger in the middle of the nineteenth century report the gradual arrival of Balaw families to the coastal strip of Semhar in the fifteenth century.[7] The Semhar (Sämhar) is in essence the central coastal region of Massawa and Hirgigo extending inland to the foothills of the Abyssinian highland plateau, and from the region of the Lebka river, some seventy kilometers north of Massawa, to the coastal village of Zula in the south. According to these traditions the first family arriving from the Barca region following their expulsion by the Ja'līīn and establishing political ascendancy in Zaga[8] in the Semhar region as vassals of the *bahr negash*, was that of Balaw Bayt Yūssuf, themselves descendents of the Bayt Ḥasab Allāh.[9] Traditions further record that a certain Ḥummad, the son of Sayyid 'Āmir Qunnu, who was Yūssuf's servant in Zaga, overthrew Yūssuf with the assistance of a certain Shaykh Maḥmūd and became the leader of the Balaw in Semhar. Ḥummad then moved to

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[5] For this idea as reflected in the wider Indian Ocean world see comments in Sugata Bose, "Space and Time on the Indian Ocean Rim: Theory and History," in Leila Tarazi Fawaz and C. A. Bayly (eds.) *Modernity and Culture from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean* (New York, 2002), 378.

[6] "balâwi" means "Arab" in Bejja. For the most detailed analysis of Balaw etymology, origins and migrations see Didier Morin, *Poésie traditionnelle des afars* (Paris, 1997), 2-7 and *Le texte légitime. Pratiques littéraires orales traditionelles en Afrique du nord-est* (Paris, 1999), 15-17. See also Andrew Paul, *A History of the Bejja Tribes of the Sudan* (Cambridge, 1954), Chapter 8, 80-90. On the Balaw presence in the Eritrean region see also Carlo Conti-Rossini, "Schizzo etnico e storico delle popolazioni eritree," in Ferdinando Martini (ed.), *L'Eritrea economica* (Novara-Roma, 1913), 61-90.

[7] There is a sizeable literature on Werner Munzinger. See a note on him in Edward Peck, "A Swiss Pasha at Massawa: Werner Munzinger (1832-1875)," *Eritrean Studies Review*, Vol. 3, No 1, 1999: 127-138.

[8] According to Odorizzi Zaga was indeed a relatively old settlement in Semhar and was founded about two centuries before Moncullo, hence in the sixteenth century. The Balaw 'Ad Jamil are noted as important elements of its population. Dante Odorizzi, *Il commissariato regionale di Massaua al 1o gennaio 1910* (Asmara, 1911), 186. They are also noted as descendants of the Balaw Bayt Yūsuf Ḥasab Allāh in Muḥammad 'Uthmān Abū Bakr, *Ta'rīkh Iritriya*, 305. On Zaga see also Werner Munzinger, *Studi sull'Africa orientale* (Roma, 1890), [Italian trans. of *Ostafrikanische Studien*, Schaffhausen 1864], 111.

[9] Munzinger, *Studi sull'Africa orientale*, 113, 129; Muḥammad 'Uthmān Abū Bakr, *Ta'rīkh Iritriya*, 282, Abdu Ali Habib, "History of Massawa," 1.

Hirgigo (also 'Arkiko' and 'Docono'), situated several kilometers south of Massawa on the coast.[10] There he established the supremacy of his family and founded the dynasty which would carry the title of *nā'ib* up to the twentieth century.[11]

The town of Hirgigo predated the arrival of the Balaw and was the most important port on that part of the coast. Historically, it had replaced the ancient Axumite port of Adulis, and later Zula, situated ca. fifty kilometers to the south. As the Red Sea port closest to the Abyssinian plateau, Hirgigo offered convenient access to the caravans coming from Abyssinia and served as its gate of entrance. Hirgigo's other advantages were its position facing the island port of Massawa, whose deep-water harbour suited larger vessels, and its good provision of water in an extremely arrid area. An early seventeenth-century Portuguese observer reported that Hirgigo was a rather flourishing port consisting of some 400 houses made of clay and coarse grass, and essential to anyone in possession of the island port of Massawa. The island-port was indeed dependant on Hirgigo for supplying it with water and foodstuffs on a daily basis. But unlike Massawa, which was independent of Abyssinian political influence, Hirgigo was at times subjugated to the *bahr negash*, the ruler of the Abyssinian maritime province.[12]

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[10] According to traditions collected by Salvadei, Sayyid 'Āmir Qunnu was descended from 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abbās, the Prophet's uncle. Salvadei's informant was Idrīs Ḥasan, *nā'ib* of Hitumlo and Moncullo. He was in his eighties in 1905. Giovanni Salvadei, "Massaua" (Allegato N.110), in Ferdinando Martini, *Relazione sulla Colonia Eritrea*...1902-1907, 1831. "Docono" means "elephant" in Saho and Afar. The town is/was referred to as Docono by its Saho-speaking population. Its preeminently Tigre-speaking inhabitants call their town 'Hirgigo.' In its Arabized form it is also referred to as 'Ḥarqiqū,' subsequently Italianized to 'Archico.' On Hirgigo toponomy see Odorizzi, *Il commissariato regionale di Massaua*, 126-7.

[11] See descriptions and versions of this tradition in Munzinger, *Studi sull'Africa orientale*, 130, Odorizzi, *Il commissariato regionale di Massaua*, 132. Obviously, there are certain incoherencies and discrepancies regarding dates and persons stemming from the use/misuse of the term *nā'ib* as the leader of the family in its earlier stages in Semhar. Clearly, the *nā'ib* was appointed by the Ottomans only later, but nineteenth-century traditions were naturally inclined to establish a *nā'ib* as the founder of the Balaw dynasty in Semhar. Some versions place Ḥummad's father, Sayyid 'Āmir Qunnu as the founder of the dynasty. See the genealogical tree of the Balaw *nā'ib*s in Odorizzi, *Il commissariato regionale di Massaua*, 150-152.

[12] For details on Hirgigo prior to the nineteenth century see Richard Pankhurst, "Some notes on the historical and economic geography of the Mesewa area (1520-1885)," *JES*, 13 (1) Jan 1975, 93-5, and

Oral traditions attribute the foundation of Hirgigo to the Saho-speaking nomad group of 'Idda who, in some type of association with elements of the holy Muslim clan Bayt Shaykh Maḥmūd whose primary seat was Zula, settled in Hirgigo, which offered a better port site than Zula. As mentioned above, local Balaw founding traditions associated a Shaykh Maḥmūd with the liberation of Yūssuf from his master in Zaga and his arrival to Hirgigo. The association of the Balaw with the Bayt Shaykh Maḥmūd, the two most prominent family-clans in Hirgigo at the period (but also to this day), is meaningful since the latter closely cooperated with the *nā'ib*s in their control of the region. It exemplified the *nā'ib*s' association/collaboration with various holy Muslim families of the Semhar and Sahel in extending their authority among the societies of the region.[13]

Balaw historical traditions also provide some general indications on the early history of Massawa's inhabitants. Some of the Massawa families that claim to have been among the first inhabitants of the town belong to the Balaw Yūssuf Ḥasab Allāh and the Bayt Shaykh Maḥmūd.[14] The 'Adūlāy family, also believed to be among the early settlers, came from Zula. This data coincides with traditions of the foundation of Hirgigo by originally Saho-speaking elements coming from the south, the Zula region, and with Balaw Yūssuf Ḥasab Allāh supremacy in the sixteenth century. While Massawa's history may have included several periods of flourishing and decline in earlier times, these shreds

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Richard Pankhurst, *History of Ethiopian Towns from the Middle Ages to the early Nineteenth Century.* (Wiesbaden, 1982), 82-83.

[13] Interviews with Ṣālih 'Abd Allāh Zubayr, Hirgigo, 6 March 2000 and Nāfi' Khaydara, Hirgigo, 7 March 2000, both from the Bayt Shaykh Maḥmūd. See also Odorizzi, *Il commissariato regionale di Massaua*, 127, 159.

[14] Examples of the Balaw Yūsuf Ḥasab Allāh include the Shinītī and Ḥamidūy families, and examples of the Bayt Shaykh Maḥmūd include the Faras and Mantay families.

of evidence might point to a contemporary, i.e late 15th-early 16th century revival and renewal of the island port.[15]

Ottoman 'Indirect Rule' and the Autonomy of the "Black *nā'ib*"

In 1557 Özdemir Pasha conquered the island port of Massawa and the port of Hirgigo and made them one of the *sandjak*s of the Ottoman province of Habesh (*Habeš eyaleti*).[16] After having established their control over the two ports the Ottomans turned inland and took Dabarwa, the capital of *bahr negash* Yeshaq, who ruled the maritime province for the King of Abyssinia. Pushed back by the *bahr negash* and Abyssinian forces, the Turks remained but a short period of time in the highlands.

Following an Abyssinian attack on the coast in 1578, the Turks, seeking to re-establish their foothold on the plateau, and *bahr negash* Yeshaq, who had switched alliances following struggles of power with his master, *negus* Ṣarṣa Dengel (1563-97), allied their forces against the Abyssinian king but were defeated. At that stage, around 1589, the Ottomans withdrew their forces to the coast and, greatly enfeebled, abandoned their ambitions to establish themselves on the plateau. Ottoman authority declined well into the first decades of the seventeenth century. Leaving but a small garrison in Massawa, the Ottomans handed Hirgigo to the local Balaw chieftain who they appointed their *nā'ib*. Although in 1633 the *qā'im maqām* of the Pasha of Sawakin still ruled Massawa, by the time the Ottoman traveler Evliya Celebi visited the port in 1673 Massawa, he reported, was ruled by a *nā'ib* of the Balaw. Although at times exaggerated

[15] See detailed family lists with origins in Odorizzi, *Il commissariato regionale di Massaua*, Massawa families: 112-115, Hirgigo families: 159-160, and Muḥammad 'Uthmān Abū Bakr, *Ta'rīkh Iritriyya*, Massawa: 294-297, Hirgigo: 304-311.

and imprecise, Celebi's account remains a valuable source. He portrayed the ruler of Hirgigo as the "black *nā'ib*" (Tur: *kara nā'ib*) who spoke Turkish correctly even if with a marked Levantine accent. The other sources of authority next to the *nā'ib* was an Agha and a Turkish garrison.[17] Until new evidence emerges, it would be reasonable to assume that the Ottomans had appointed the first *nā'ib* of the Balaw some time between 1650 and the 1670s.[18] The Chronicle of Iyasu I (1682-1706) further confirmed *nā'ib* authority and dominance. It reported that in 1693 *nā'ib* Mussa b. 'Umar Qunnu attempted to use extortion against the Armenian merchant Khodja Murad who was on his way to Emperor Iyasu I with gifts. Following the Iyasu's threats to attack the *nā'ib*, the latter finally submitted.[19]

Nā'ib Balaw historical traditions relate that by the time of the Ottoman conquest the family had already acquired wealth and attained a position of considerable influence in Hirgigo and the Semhar. Ottoman provincial politics played on internal family struggles for authority in the region and created divisions within the family. Intra-family struggles may explain the divergence of traditions as to the appointment of the first *nā'ib* and reflect the viewpoints of different family factions. According to one version, Ḥummad 'Āmir Qunnu, who is designated as the most prominent Balaw chief at the time,[20] fled with his family, wives, slaves and servants, from Hirgigo to the Buri

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[16] For a yet untranslated detailed study of the Ottoman province of Habesh based on Ottoman archives see Orhonlu Cengiz, *Habes Eyaleti.*

[17] See Celebi's description of Massawa, Hirgigo and the Dahlak islands under the Ottomans in Alessio Bombaci, "Il viaggio in Abissinia di Evliya Celebi (1673)," *Annali dell'Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli*, nuova serie, vol II, Roma 1943, 263-270.

[18] It is not absolutely clear when the first *nā'ib* was appointed by the Ottomans. The confusion might be explained since the process of the handing over of authority might have been gradual, both in time and in space. See also n.18 below.

[19] Dombrowski, *Ethiopia's Access to the Sea*, 21-3, 32-4; A. Guérinot, "L'islam et l'Abyssinie," *RMM*, 34, 1917-18, 20-1; Emery Van Donzel, "Masawwa," EIḤ, 642, and Richard Pankhurst, *History of Ethiopian Towns*, 86-91.

[20] Some versions relate that he himself was the first *nā'ib* appointed.

Peninsula following an Ottoman advance from Massawa to the mainland possibly in the mid- seventeenth century. Ḥummad was chief in Hirgigo and opposed to the Ottomans who had limited his authority on the coast. While fleeing to Buri, Ḥummad killed his younger brother's son, 'Alī b. Mūsā, who he suspected of siding with the Ottomans. According to this version Ḥummad killed his brother Mūsā's son, who must have been the same Mūsā from Emperor Iyasu's chronicle mentioned above. Years later, the story continues, 'Āmir, 'Alī's son, sought the assistance of the Ottomans, came to Massawa and was appointed as the first *nā'ib*. In return for submitting to the Sultan's authority, supplying Massawa with water, and maintaining order on the mainland, the Ottoman authorities gave him a silk vest (robe), a golden-handled sword and a monthly payment from the customs of Massawa for maintaining a garrison of troops.[21]

Struggles and divisions within the family were commonplace during the first decades of *nā'ib* autonomy. Most revolved around the contestation to the office of *nā'ib*, with its privileges, attempting to gain Ottoman recognition to one faction or another. Another issue at stake was the relationship with the highland Christian rulers. According to traditions, the most significant division within the family occurred between the two sons of 'Āmir, the first *nā'ib* in office. The rivalry between the two brothers, Ḥasan 'Āmir (2nd *nā'ib* in office: 1720-1737) and 'Uthmān 'Āmir (4th *nā'ib* in office: 1741-1781) gave rise to a family division that continued into the twentieth century under Italian colonial rule.[22]

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[21] Alberto Pollera, *Le popolazioni indigene dell'Eritrea* (Bologna, 1935), 217-218, Odorizzi, *Il commissariato regionale di Massaua*, 132-4; Salvadei, *"Massaua,"* 1831. Odorizzi estimated that this had taken place around 1690. Salvadei put it around 1680. But see also n.14 above. Lejean reports that the Balaws of Hirgigo comprised 600 families. Lejean, *Voyage en Abyssinie* (Paris, 1868), 56.

[22] Odorizzi, *Il commissariato regionale di Massaua*, 137-8, Munzinger, *Studi sull'Africa orientale*, 130, Salvadei, *"Massaua,"* 1831-2. Full accounts of *nā'ib* dynastic history are given in Odorizzi, *Il commissariato regionale di Massaua*, 132-152, and Munzinger, *Studi sull'Africa orientale*, 130-140.

Relations between the Ottoman authorities and their representatives, and the Abyssinian state were strained throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Since Massawa handled the bulk of Abyssinia's foreign trade, the crucial issues at stake were Abyssinian access to the sea and the tax duties imposed on caravans and merchandise coming to or arriving from the coast from the highlands. However, in between incidents, a state of co-existence prevailed between the ports and Abyssinian rulers who did not shy away from continuously threatening to take over the ports but who in fact never showed any real intention of incorporating them into their domains.[23] The *nā'ib*s were at the center of these trials of strength.

Nā'ib authority and autonomy seems to have significantly increased beginning in the middle decades of the eighteenth century. Following the death of the *abuna* (Metropolitan of the Ethiopian church) in 1738 Emperor Iyasu II sent an embassy to Cairo in 1745 to have a new *abuna* ordained. The *nā'ib* detained the emperor's envoys in Hirgigo for six months and took most of their gold. Eventually, when the new *abuna* arrived the following year, the *nā'ib* again detained him on the coast until he had paid a fee.[24] This incident coincided with the beginning of the process of the weakening of the Abyssinian central polity in the middle of the eighteenth century: the *zämäna mäsäfint* (the "Era of the Princes").

The collapse of the Abyssinian monarchy's authority in favor of the ever more powerful regional rulers gave increasing power to the *nā'ib* in control of Massawa, Hirgigo and the lowland areas between the sea and the mountains. When James Bruce

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[23] Historically, in some cases when a strong emperor acceded to the throne he renewed territorial claims over the peripheral regions, including the coastal area.
[24] Dombrowski, *Ethiopia's access*, 38-39, Pankhurst, *History of Ethiopian Towns*, 91-92, John Spencer Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia* (London, 1952), 105.

arrived in Massawa in 1768 he reported that the *nā'ib* did not pay tribute either to the pasha of Jiddah, to which the Ottomans attached the port's authorities, nor to the Abyssinian king.[25] Now more than ever, the *nā'ib*s needed to maneuver their way and keep a viable balance of power in their relations with the rulers of the province of Tigray, who, while promoting their own autonomy vis-à-vis the Abyssinian central authority, devised their own policies of accommodation combined with intimidation of the *nā'ib*, ruler of the coast. The combination of the state of political instability in northern Abyssinia and the decline of Ottoman interest in their province of *Habesh* provided a fertile ground for the expansion and consolidation of *nā'ib* dominance in the wider region.[26]

The Infrastructure of *Nā'ib* Dominance

In the second half of the eighteenth century the *nā'ib*s were the most powerful rulers of the region. The success of the *nā'ib*s in extending their influence and dominance over the diverse societies inhabiting the regions between the sea and the highlands depended first and foremost on their ability to exercise actual control by coercion and force. It also depended on their ability to provide security to the pastoral societies that found themselves on the edges of the Abyssinian northerly provinces and the Sudanese region, vulnerable to attempts of expansion, subject to raids and attacks. In the later years of the 'Era of Princes' Walter Plowden had referred to the lowland nomad populations as

[25] James Bruce, *Travels to discover the source of the Nile*, Edinburgh, 1790, iii, 5-6.
[26] See a general note on the *nā'ib*s and their history with excerpts by travelers in Perini, R, *Di qua al Mareb (Marèb-Mellàsc')* (Firenze, 1905), 226-231.

"flying-fish" who "are preyed on by all."[27] Werner Munzinger wrote that "the inhabitants of Semhar depend on Abyssinia for its pastures, on Massawa for its market, on both for security."[28]

In a region that fell out of any coherent state control, the *nā'ib*s performed some functions of a centralized political entity in the absence of a state. Securing a viable regional economic system through the control of the main trading routes and of grazing and agricultural lands, and providing security for herds, flocks and camels were central factors in the process. Tribute paying, social, family and economic alliances, and recognition of *nā'ib* authority could provide this security.

The precise geographic limitations of *nā'ib* influence fluctuated over time. Moreover, the difficulty in determining geographical borders stemmed from the fact that the modern concept of fixed borders came to the play only later in the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, the evidence suggests that at their maximal extension the *nā'ib*s extended their authority over the totality of Tigre-speaking pastoral and agro-pastoral populations in the regions of Semhar, Sahel, and the coasts north of Massawa as far as Aqiq.[29] The most important groups, both numerically and in terms of wealth, were the Habab, the Mensa, and elements of the Bayt Taqwe (Bilen).[30] They also spread their influence over Saho-speaking pastoralists in the foothills of Tigray, Akkälä Guzay and Hamasien, of which the Asaorta and the Taora were the most dominant. Other 'Afar, Saho and Tigre-

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[27] Consul Plowden to the Earl of Clarendon (No. 184), Massowah, July 9, 1854. Report. *Great Britain, Parliamentary Papers. Correspondence Respecting Abyssinia, 1846-1868* (London, 1868), 124.
[28] Munzinger, *Studi sull'Africa orientale*, 109.
[29] On the coast approx 300 kilometers north of Massawa, in present-day Sudan. Douin, *Histoire du règne*, III, 1, 234.
[30] On the Bayt Taqwe – *Nā'ib* link see Munzinger, *Studi sull'Africa orientale*, 160.

speaking societies under *nā'ib* influence inhabited the Buri peninsula, the Zula area, and regions on the 'Afar coast as south as 'Edd[31] and the Dahlak islands.[32]

Military Superiority and Prestige

Nā'ib dominance rested upon several main fields of action and spheres of authority. The Ottomans withdrew their forces from Massawa in the mid to late-sixteenth century, leaving only a small policing force and the customs house personnel on the island. A militia replaced the Ottoman military troops, composed of two forces, one made up of "Arabs" and the other of "Turks," placed under the authority of the *nā'ib*.[33] The commander of the so-called "Turkish" semi-regular militia held the Ottoman title *sirdār*, and was a person often blood-related to the *nā'ib*. Lord Valentia, for example, reported in 1809 that the *sirdār* was *nā'ib* Idrīs's own brother.[34] The "Arab" irregular militia was composed of servants, slaves and poor relatives of the *nā'ib*, and was headed by a *kahya*.[35] Both functions/ranks became hereditary within the families that controlled them. This process also comprised a gradual mixing of soldiers of the Ottoman garrison (mostly Albanians, but also Turks and Bosniaks) who married into the Balaw familes.[36]

With time, several families who controlled troops and monopolized certain ranks emerged from this nucleus of forces, and designated by ranks or other military-related

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[31] On the coast, approximately 450 kms south of Massawa. Douin, *Histoire du règne*, III, I, 235, Munzinger, *Studi*, 139, Munzinger, *Les contrées limitrophes*, 9-10, Guillaume Lejean, *Voyage aux deux Nils*, 171.

[32] Valentia, *Voyages*, I, 31-2.

[33] Odorizzi, *Il commissariato regionale di Massaua*, 134. Pollera, *Le popolazioni indigene dell'Eritrea*, 218-9. Lejean, *Voyage en Abyssinie*, 56. According to Odorizzi this had occurred in the period of *nā'ib* 'Āmir (r. approx. 1690-1720, the year of his death).

[34] Valentia, *Voyages*, I, 54.

[35] *Sirdār* was later corrupted to give *Sardāl* and *Kāḥyā* to *Kekiya*. *Sirdār*, in Egyptian Arabic, is a 'supreme commander' or a 'commanding general'. *Kāhya*, in Turkish, is a 'majordomo' or a 'quartermaster'.

appellations as independent and powerful families. Thus, the Bayt 'Asker and the Bayt Shawīsh were both descended from the troops of the *kahya*.[37] These were in addition to the Bayt Sardal, Bayt Kekiya (Kahya), Bayt Agha who also became family-clans on their own. These families wielded much power in the region throughout the nineteenth century, and were able, consequently to convert their symbolic power and prestige into advantages in commerce and local politics. Some, like the Kekiya family, have been especially active in Eritrea's twentieth-century history and have maintained prestige and political and economic prominence in the country to this day. [38]

Nā'ib authority depended on military superiority over inland societies and access to firearms and gunpowder via the coast and through their relationship with the Ottoman secured this superiority.[39] When diplomacy and political alliances and agreements failed to serve their interests, the *nā'ib*s, supported by their military might, turned to outright force. They utilized their coercive powers for opening or securing trade routes, forcing "rebellious elements" to submit their authority, and extending their presence in strategic territories or routes. At the height of their power they attempted to challenge the power of larger entities such as the Ottomans, the Egyptians and the rulers of the Abyssinian northern provinces by recourse to force. The evidence makes it clear that the *nā'ib*'s forces had recruited among the Saho- and Tigre-speaking populations of Semhar for their

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[36] Often mentioned in various accounts as the "Arnauts" (irregular infantry serving in the Ottoman army, mainly composed of Albanians). Munzinger, *Studi sull'Africa orientale*, 130, Abdu Ali Habib, "History of Massawa," 3.

[37] *'Askari* means 'soldier' in Arabic. A *shāwīsh* is an Egyptian military rank, approx. : staff sergeant.

[38] On notable members of the Kekiya family see Giuseppe Puglisi, *Chi e? dell'Eritrea*,169, 262, and Killion, *Historical Dictionary of Eritrea*, 282-3.

[39] Munzinger reports that the *nā'ib*'s army always had many rifles. Munzinger, *Studi sull'Africa orientale*, 139. In the nineteenth century, they were provided gunpowder by the Ottoman government.

military expeditions and that together with the nucleus of Balaw soldiers their forces could often attain several thousand men.[40]

The third *nā'ib*, Muḥammad 'Āmir (r. approx. 1737-1741), conducted punitive expeditions against the 'Afar Damoheita clan of the Buri peninsula who had been raiding Zula. The fifth *nā'ib*, Aḥmad Ḥasan (r. approx. 1781-1801) was said to have been engaged in a long war with the inhabitants of Debarwa, in the highlands, who had supported several villages in Serae refusing to pay customary tribute to the *nā'ib*.[41] At the turn of the nineteenth century, the *nā'ib*s had conducted an expedition against the port of 'Edd on the 'Afar coast south of Massawa. 'Edd had been providing an outlet for Abyssinian caravans, a reality that displeased the *nā'ib*s whose interest was to have all northern Abyssinian trade pass through their dominions, use Massawa as an outlet and thus pay them passage dues. The *nā'ib*'s forces attacked 'Edd, burnt the village and forced the village chief to submit to their authority and swear on the Qur'an that he would not allow Abyssinian caravans to pass through the port.[42]

As the Ottoman-designated rulers of the region the *nā'ib*s also utilized their symbolic power in spreading their dominance. Appointment by the Ottoman authorities in Jiddah, Mecca or in Constantinople added to the *nā'ibs*' prestige and awe. Ferret and Galinier reported that the *nā'ib*'s clothes "resembled those of the rich merchants in Massawa, but he had, in addition, a beautiful silver-handed knife in his belt. He had elegantly-made red-leathered sandals. The top of his head was covered by a small silk

[40] Munzinger, Ibidem.
[41] Odorizzi, *Il commissariato regionale di Massaua*, 136.
[42] Munzinger, *Studi sull'Africa orientale*, 139, Lejean, *Voyage aux deux Nils*, 171.

skullcap of various colors, without a turban."[43] Their association with the most powerful Muslim empire in the region, local Muslim holy families, the Islamic legal authorities in Massawa and representatives of the Khatmiyya brotherhood who visited Massawa and Hirgigo, added to their position of prestige among Muslim societies. The use of the symbols of power may also provide an explanation to the process of turning Ottoman military terms and ranks into family names as noted above.

Controlling Land, Routes, Villages, and Markets

The control of valuable grazing and agricultural lands, caravan trading routes connecting Massawa to the inland and the means of transportation, and strategic market villages in Massawa's orbit were all central in establishing and securing *nā'ib* dominance between the mountain and the sea. This control included forceful domination, political agreements with highland and lowland rulers, marriage alliances with chiefs, and the settlement of Balaw families and merchants in specific strategic locations, sometimes leading to the establishment of new market-villages on the trading routes in the vicinities of Massawa and Hirgigo.

As a result of the prevailing state of political instability in the northern Abyssinian provinces the *nā'ib*s were also able to extend their authority over the Saho-speaking pastoral groups who moved their livestock between the lowlands, the foothills and into Akkälä Guzay, Hamasien and Tigray alternately between seasons.[44] They also controlled several Tigrinya-speaking, mostly farming, populations in the highlands. According to

[43] P. V. A Ferret and J. G. Galinier, *Voyage en Abyssinie, dans les provinces du Tigré, Samen et de l'Amhara*, (Paris, 1847), 378.
[44] Winter in lowland and summer in highlands. Munzinger, *Studi sull'Africa orientale*, 137, Lejean, *Voyage en Abyssinie*, 61-2, Ferret and Galinier, *Voyage en Abyssinie*, 389.

the traditions on which Odorizzi based his account, the fourth *nā'ib*, 'Uthmān 'Āmir (r.1741-1781), received from the highland rulers forty-four *gult* lands in exchange for firearms.[45] Odorizzi assumed that the number was exaggerated and located the territories at Zeban Zeghib near 'Addi Qayyeh, Maareda near Halai, Amba Derho in Dembesan, Belesa and Coasien in Carneshim, Bet Maca near Asmara, as well as other lands in Serae and some near Adwa.[46] Guillaume Lejean also reported that the *nā'ib* had sixteen villages in the region of Halaie and Alberto Pollera noted that the *nā'ib*s possessed *gult* lands on the edge of the plateau at Halale (possibly Halaie) in the Tzellima, and Mezbir in Tigray.[47] In various periods, in return for *gult* lands the *nā'ib*s were supposed to pay the highland rulers a tribute for grazing rights on the plateau. The possession of *gult* land by the *nā'ib* and his vassals in the highland regions relatively far from the coast points to the high degree of his power at the period. However, it is reported that by the 1870s, following the decline of the position of the *nā'ib*s, all *gult* land had been returned to highland rulers.

Beyond their actual settlement in Massawa's close environment in localities such as Omkullo, Hitumlo, Zaga and Emberemi, the *nā'ib*s controlled all the trading routes from Massawa to the interior. They could therefore levy taxes on the lucrative caravans making their way via these routes from the interior to the coast. Most caravans

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[45] 'gult' is a bundle of income rights associated with highland peasant agriculture. Unlike in Europe, where fiefs entailed ownership of land, *gult* granted 'sovereignty,' or tributary rights that derived from a position of political overlordship. See more in Donham, "Old Abyssinia and the new Ethiopian empire," 5-11.

[46] Odorizzi, *Il commissariato regionale di Massaua*, 136.

[47] Guillaume Lejean, *Theodore II. Le Nouvel empire d'Abyssinie et les interêts français dans le sud de la mer Rouge* (Paris, 1865), 145, Pollera, *Le popolazioni indigene dell'Eritrea*, 48; Anthony d'Avray, *Lords of the Sea: The History of a Red Sea Society from the 16th to the 19th centuries* (Wiesbaden, 1996), 5-6. Eduard Rüppell, *Reise in Abyssinien*, (Frankfurt am Main, 1838-40), I, 310. Lejean, *Voyage aux deux Nils*, 168-9. Pennazzi put the number at 17 villages. Luigi Pennazzi, "Massauah," *NASLA*, Vol. 22, 1880, 329. Abir's version of the circumstances of the handing over of gults: "Taking advantage of the disorder in Ethiopia ... the *nā'ib* of Hirgigo forced the weak *bahr negash* who ruled some of the provinces north of the Mareb to cede him a number of districts in Hamasien and Akkälä Guzay," Abir, *CHA*, 4, 567.

transported slaves, ivory, civet, coffee, wax, hides, ghee and other commodities for exportation via Massawa. Two important routes linked the coast to Adwa in Tigray: one leaving Massawa through Omkullo (Monkullo) and passing through Gura' and 'Addi Qhwalla; the other leaving Hirgigo and passing via Wi'a, Halay, and Zarana (Tsorena). On both routes there were stations where caravans and travelers were obliged to pay a passing fee. Some of these stations were directly controlled by the *nā'ib*s such as Halay where they held *gult* lands.[48] The *nā'ib*s also controlled both villages of departure in Massawa's suburbs: Hirgigo, as their main seat of residence and capital, and Omkullo, founded by Balaw families from Hirgigo in the period of the fourth *nā'ib*, 'Uthmān 'Āmir (r. approx. 1741-1781).[49] Numerous European travelers experienced the dependence on the *nā'ib*'s good will and permission to travel inland. Furthermore, the *nā'ib*s often controlled the means of transportation and one had to secure their services in order to be provided with camels and guides for travel towards Adwa.[50]

A second system of trading routes left Omkullo and bifurcated at 'Ailat, a relatively large village situated some 30 kilometers to the west of Massawa. Four main routes lying within *nā'ib*-controlled territories left 'Ailat towards Sanhit, Bayt Esheqan (Mensa), Karxum (?) and Hamasien.[51] 'Ailat was the most important *nā'ib* Balaw dominated village in the inland. It was founded by Balaws of Hirgigo, or more precisely by the descendants of the sons of *nā'ib* 'Āmir 'Alī (r. approx. 1690-1720), 'Abd al-Rasūl and Osman Shagarai, who migrated and settled at the site.[52] But it slowly attracted other

[48] Antoine d'Abbadie, *Géographie de l'Éthiopie* (Paris, 1890), 51.
[49] On Omkullo see Odorizzi, *Il commissariato regionale di Massaua*, 164-167.
[50] Antoine d'Abbadie, *Douze ans de séjour dans la Haute-Ethiopie (Abyssinie)*, (Paris, 1868) [Vatican City 1980], I, 10.
[51] D'Abbadie, *Géographie de l'Éthiopie*, 41.
[52] On 'Ailat see Odorizzi, *Il commissariato regionale di Massaua*, 175-180. See also an interesting and vivid description of 'Ailat's inhabitants, their customs and Islamic practices in Mansfield Parkyns, *Life in*

settlers, most importantly the Bayt Shaykh Maḥmūd (from Zula) and the Tsaura, both originally Saho-speaking groups who gradually adopted the Tigre language. Members of the Bayt Shaykh Maḥmūd cultivated and grew crops such as maize and durrah (sorghum), in the fields near the village.[53] 'Ailat was situated at an ideal geographic position at the foothills of the plateau between the highland and lowland grazing regions and at a crossroads of convenient cross-regional routes. Its position had made it the most important market village between the coast and the highlands in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. Surrounding pastoral groups brought livestock and produce were brought to 'Ailat, before being sent to Massawa by Balaw merchants. During the rainy seasons the villagers also practiced there agriculture.[54]

Near 'Ailat, on the plains towards Sabarguma, settled the 'Ad 'Asker, who were a mixed Saho clan (at basis) of Asaorta, Haso, Afar, Teroa, Sheka, Mensa, Abyssinians and people from Riot who gradually adopted the Tigre language.[55] Prior to their settlement in the region they were the servants and guards of the livestock of those soldiers from Hirgigo who had served in the *nā'ib*'s militias and moved to the area following the end of their service.[56] Although the settlements of 'Asus and Gumhod were slightly smaller than 'Ailat, their economic role as market centers at the foothills of the plateau and as points of encounter and exchange between coastal merchants and pastoralists, all of whom were

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Abyssinia (London, 1868), 34-38. 'Āmir Nūrāy was chief of 'Ailat in the mid-1880s. He was originally from Hirgigo and a descendant of the *Nā'ib* family. Archivio Storico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri (henceforth ASDMAE), *Archivio Eritrea* (henceforth *AE*), b. 53 (17) memo: "Amer Nurai," Massaua, 2 .5.1888.

[53] Interview with Ismā'īl Hājji Maḥmūd, Asmara 2 May 2000.

[54] Salvadei, "Massaua," 1835.

[55] On the 'Ad Asker see ASDMAE, *AE*, b. 178, "Notabili e capi indigeni dipendenti dal Commissariato Regionale di Massaua" (1902-3), entry: "Scium Idris Zaccari (Ad Ascar)," p. 20. 'Ad is a Tigre word meaning family, tribe, and/or village.

[56] Odorizzi, *Il commissariato regionale di Massaua*, 194-5, Pollera, *Le popolazioni indigene dell'Eritrea*, 220, Salvadei, "Massaua," 1836. The Ghedem Sicta clan also served in this function, see Odorizzi, *Il commissariato regionale di Massaua*, 208-211.

tributary to the *nā'ib*s, was fairly similar. Both Gumhod and 'Asus were settled by important Balaw elements originally from Hirgigo and family relatives of the *nā'ib*s who maintained clientship relations with local pastoral clans.[57] The importance of this lies in demonstrating the closely knit socio-economic webs that linked the people of the region as a result of the order established by Ottoman indirect rule, and the centrality of the *nā'ib*s in the process.

Nā'ib Revenues: Ottoman Stipends, Taxes and Tribute Collection

The control of grazing and agricultural lands, trade routes and centers of commercial exchange provided the *nā'ib*s with economic revenue as participants in the regional economic system. Traveling and settled Balaw merchants from Hirgigo and pastoral and agro-pastoral producers throughout the region, exchanged livestock, camels, goats and agricultural products for manufactured goods imported at Massawa. However, due to their position as representatives of the Ottoman Porte and rulers of the region, the *nā'ib*s also derived considerable revenue from Ottoman stipends, tax levying on caravans and travelers, and from the collection of tributes – mostly in kind - from the societies subject to them.[58]

According to Odorizzi the *nā'ib*s began receiving from the Massawa customs administration a sum of 1005 thalers per month at the time of the sixth *nā'ib*, Idrīs 'Uthman (r. approx. 1801-1831). This sum was aimed at the maintenance of their militias and enabled him to keep a force of approximately 400 soldiers.[59] The *nā'ib*, according to

[57] On Gumhod and 'Asus see Odorizzi, *Il commissariato regionale di Massaua*, 180-185. See also Salvadei, "Massaua," 1835.
[58] Munzinger, *Studi sull'Africa orientale*, 137, Douin, *Histoire du règne*, III, 1, 234.
[59] Odorizzi, *Il commissariato regionale di Massaua*, 141.

this arrangement, kept 1/15th of the sum for himself while the soldiers and the militias at Hirgigo shared the remaining sum. The *nā'ib*, for his part, paid the government 1000 thalers per year as a recognition of its sovereignty. For the supply of fire and wood from Hirgigo to the island port, the Massawa administration paid the *nā'ib*s 90 thalers monthly[60]

Between roughly 1750 and 1850 most foreign travelers, missionaries, official envoys, pilgrims and caravan merchants passing through *nā'ib*-dominated territories had complained of the high taxes that the *nā'ib* forced them to pay. The basic duty that the *nā'ib*s collected on entrance to Massawa was called the *avaït*. Caravan merchants paid the *avaït* giving their caravan the right of entry to the port. The *avaït* was divided among the branches of the Balaw family. The *nā'ib*s also collected the *fascès*, or exit rights, but handed these funds over to the Ottoman authorities, possibly the customs administration which had always depended on the provincial center in Jiddah.[61]

In addition to the *avaït* the *nā'ib*s levied taxes on commodities carried into Massawa by caravans or boats. In the first decade of the century Valentia reported that the *nā'ib* received 10% of the value of all goods exported and imported at Massawa and 1 thaler for each person entering the country to trade.[62] A report dating from the 1830s stated that the *nā'ib*s levied one thaler per slave, one thaler per horn of musk (the government taking 1/10 of all musk), and one thaler on every ivory tooth weighing 40 lbs. (equal to approx. 5% of its contemporary value).[63] South of Massawa, the *nā'ib*s

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[60] Combes et Tamisier, *Voyage*, 113, Ferret et Galinier, *Voyage*, 375, Nott, "Report from acting Commander Nott of the Indian Navy, on the Traffic in Slaves, etc. carried on at Massowah," *Transactions of the Bombay Geographical Society.*, v 2, Nov 1838, 34. Nott estimated the annual sum paid by the *nā'ib* to the government at 1600-1700 thalers.
[61] Lejean, *Voyage en Abyssinie*, 56.
[62] Valentia, *Voyages*, I, 57.
[63] Nott, "Report," 32-34.

established a post at Giumbedli, near Arafali, on the road to the Buri peninsula, where they collected one *rohoia* (between 3 and 4 litres) for every animal laden with salt arriving from the salt fields of Meka'enile. On every butter-laden camel arriving to Gherar, opposite Massawa, the *nā'ib*s could draw one *kubba* (a little less than a *rohoia*, hence, less than 3-4 liters).[64]

The *nā'ib* also required travelers, envoys and pilgrims to pay passage duties, although the sum was negotiatable with the *nā'ib*s, a straining and nerve-racking experience according to most European travelers in the region at the period. The *nā'ib* usually asked for relatively exorbitant sums from Europeans. Henry Salt, for example, was asked by the *nā'ib* to pay 1000 thalers and a group of Catholic missionaries were asked 1000 *écu*s for travel into the interior.[65] In the 1830s the *nā'ib* required a group of Christian Abyssinian pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem to pay money and leave all their animals with him at Hirgigo.[66]

The question of tributes collected from the populations under the *nā'ib*s passed through different phases between the late eighteenth century and the1850s. In the early period, evidence suggests that the *nā'ib* levied tribute mostly in kind for his own use, for maintaining his militias and for sale or exchange in Massawa's markets. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Lord Valentia reported that the *nā'ib* received 60 thalers in money and camels, goats and asses from the chief of the Dahlak islands.[67] From the evidence it seems that tribute collection in the early period was rather irregular, erratic and specifically targeted. Only later, after relatively wealthy groups came under the *nā'ib*,

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[64] *The Nakfa Documents*, Document 81, Captain Boari to the Gov. Civile e Militare della Colonia Eritrea (Massaua), Asmara, 11 March 1891, "Tributi nel Semhar e paesi limitrofi," in Anthony d'Avray (ed.) *The Nakfa Documents* (Wiesbaden, 2000), 274. Plowden notes that a *koba* is 2.5 lbs.
[65] Valentia, *Voyages*, I, 449, Munzinger, "Les contrées limitrophes," 15.

in particular the Habab, the payment of tribute had become a more important political symbol of authority and recognition, and an efficient mean of extracting revenues. As such, tribute was also collected following the investiture of chiefs and the mediation of disputes, both performed by the *nā'ib*. Thus, following the investiture of a *kantibay* of the Habab by the *nā'ib*, the newly elected *kantibay* gave the *nā'ib* 100 camels, 100 cows, 100 goats, 100 wool blankets, etc. in exchange for confirmation.[68] According to Captain Boari's analysis of the tributes in Semhar, the *nā'ib*s maintained a flexible balance in the collection of tribute and avoided heavy taxing that would disturb a regular flow of commercial activities.[69]

The transition from Ottoman indirect to direct rule and the increasingly "modernized" Egyptian administration beginning in the early 1850s, transformed the structure of tribute payment drastically reducing the *nā'ib*s' political power and ending their state of autonomy and *quasi* independence in conducting their regional affairs. The administration in Massawa introduced an annual money tribute on the groups of the Semhar and Sahel regions. The Habab were to pay 3000 thalers, the 'Ad Takles, the 'Ad Temariam and the Semhar groups 1000 thalers each. Exempted from the new tribute regime were the town of Massawa and the settled centers of Hirgigo, Hitumlo, Omkullo, and Embereme, which were commercial centers with little property in livestock or agricultural produce. Enfeebled politically, but still useful to the government, the *nā'ib*s

[66] D'Abbadie, *Douze ans dans la Haute Ethiopie*, I, 548.
[67] Valentia, *Voyages*, I, 55.
[68] Munzinger, *Studi sull'Africa orientale*, 111.
[69] *The Nakfa Documents*, Document 81, Captain Boari to the Gov. Civile e Militare della Colonia Eritrea (Massaua), Asmara, 11 March 1891, 273-4.

served as intermediaries between it and the various populations of the region and were given the role of collecting the tribute for the administration.[70]

Chief Investiture, Marriage Alliances, and the Administration of Justice

Writing in the 1850s with a typical strong anti-*nā'ib* bias, Werner Munzinger exposed his views on the political strategies devised by the *nā'ib*s in imposing their dominance over their subjects:

> The subjects in a strict sense included the Beduins of Semhar and Chohos [Saho]. Nevertheless, in their astuteness, the *Nai'b*s were able to impose their right of arbitration on the entire coast up to the Abyssinian borders by establishing their influence through marriage and by creating divisions and dissent [among these other societies], which they fully used to their advantage. After some time they were proclaimed, without any opposition, the princes of the land where the Tigre language is spoken. The aim of their efforts was to have all caravans from Abyssinia pass via Massawa, ensuring them significant revenues. [71]

Marriage alliances between members of the *nā'ib* family and important local chiefs or wealthy merchants were commonplace. The 'Ad Shuma, for example, tell of Shuma, the founder of the group, who married a member of the *nā'ib* family from Hirgigo. Her sister, Fāṭma, also married into the *nā'ib* family.[72] This was even more commonplace between the Balaw and certain prestigious Saho-speaking groups from the area between Hirgigo and Zula. One such group, the Muslim holy clan of Bayt Shaykh Maḥmūd, was closely allied through marriage connections with the *nā'ib*s.[73]

The history of the foundation of Omkullo, some 10 kilometers inland from Massawa, in the second half of the eighteenth century also stems from a marriage alliance

[70] Ibid., 274-5.
[71] Munzinger, "Les contrées limitrophes," 9.
[72] Interview with Muḥammad Sa'īd Shumāy, Asmara, 30 November 1999.

between the *nā'ib* family and a family of Hadhrami *ashrāf* who were merchants in Massawa. Traditions relate that *nā'ib* 'Uthmān's (r.1741-1781) daughter, Settel, married a member of the Bā 'Alawī family and for reasons of health, they both settled in the site of Omkullo. From that point on Beduin families from the Sahel and Semhar began settling there.[74]

The *nā'ib*s also invested chiefs, mediated between parties, and arbitrated in legal disputes. Munzinger described the *nā'ib*'s role as follows:

> The *nā'ib* traveled most of the year and was accompanied by a large party. To one site he came to pronounce arbitration, at another place he settled disputes concerning borders, repress brigandage and recover stolen goods. He also toured the region in order to collect the annual tribute. He seldom intervened in internal matters, except among the Beduins and the Chohos [Saho] in order to confirm the schum [*shum*]. His supremacy was not that of a regular monarch [sic], but was limited to arbitration among societies living in regular interaction and who were incessantly in conflict with each other. The only thing common to them all was their dependence on the *nā'ib*.[75]

The chiefs of 'Ailat received from the *nā'ib* several meters of silk or cotton cloth – a symbol of their investiture as chiefs.[76] The *nā'ib* judged cases in the *chassamet*, his court of justice, an institution that all recognized. Arbitrating between litigants, according to Munzinger, could be profitable for the *nā'ib*s, since they required the wrongful party to pay them the objects – slaves, cows, or money – that were the subject of dispute. [77]

Mensa local traditions provide a relatively detailed example of the *nā'ib*'s role in internal politics and the investiture of their chiefs. The Mensa were cultivators and pastoralists inhabiting a region approximately 50 kilometers northwest of Massawa. They

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[73] Interview with Captain Aḥmad Shaykh Ibrāhīm Faras, Massawa, 3 March 2000. For an example of further evidence to marriage alliances between the *nā'ib* family and Saho-speaking peoples see Denis de Rivoyre, *Au pays du Soudan* (Paris, 1885), 253-4.
[74] Odorizzi, *Il commissariato regionale di Massaua*, 164.
[75] Ibid, 14.
[76] Odorizzi, *Il commissariato regionale di Massaua*, 177.

were divided into two groups, the Mensa- Bet Esheqan and the Mensa- Bet Abrehe.[78] Alliance with (often through marriage) or opposition to the *nā'ib*s was instrumental in Mensa internal political struggles. Mensa chiefs manipulated regional politics by allying with one another, a strategy aimed at undermining the rivalry between the *nā'ib*s and the highland Abyssinian rulers for influence and authority over the Mensa.[79]

Mensa- Bet Abrehe historical traditions tell of the story of the investiture of Tedros by *nā'ib* Ḥasan Idrīs (r. approx. 1845-1849).[80] The account is revealing of the political processes of a small inland society and of the tortuous and complex relationship between the *nā'ib*s and their subjects. Following the death of *kantibay* Tesfamikael, Tedros, his grandson, expected to be invested as *kantibay* of the Mensa – Bayt Abrehe.[81] While *nā'ib* Ḥasan Idrīs was collecting tribute from the 'Ad Temariam in Afabet, the two brothers Giahad and 'Adala, from the 'Ad 'Alai clan of the Mensa – Bet Abrehe, approached the *nā'ib* and asked him to appoint Giahad as *kantibay* in return for 500 head of cattle. Fully aware of Tedros's anticipation to be appointed to office, the *nā'ib* sent for him to give him the opportunity to confront the brothers and establish his rights before them. Subsequently, Tedros's representative offered the *nā'ib* 1500 head of cattle in return for Tedros's investiture as *kantibay*. The *nā'ib* asked the brothers if they were able to match this offer or raise it. They eventually backed off and Tedros was invested as *kantibay* with the symbolic tribal drum, European sword, robe, cap, and golden bracelet.[82]

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[77] Munzinger, *Studi*, 124, 138.
[78] Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, 162.
[79] Karl Gustav Rodén, *Le tribù dei Mensa. Storia, legge e costume* (Stockholm, 1913), 49, 60.
[80] On *nā'ib* Ḥasan Idrīs see Odorizzi, *Il commissariato regionale di Massaua*, 138.
[81] Since Tedros's father, Idrīs, had died before his father, Tesfamikael.
[82] Rodén, *Le tribu dei Mensa*, 96-98.

Some time later, *nā'ib* Ḥasan was displeased with *kantibay* Tedros who failed to send him tribute in gifts of livestock. The *nā'ib* departed on a punitive expedition against the *kantibay* but the latter had already fled from his camp. Tradition relates that a man approached the *nā'ib* and informed him that Tedros was frightened but not rebellious. If the *nā'ib* promised not to arrest him, the man would bring Tedros to the *nā'ib*. *Nā'ib* Ḥasan promised but failed to keep his word. Tedros was taken to the *medún*, to Hirgigo, where he was imprisoned for two years.[83] Tedros was released and re-invested *kantibay* only after *nā'ib* Muhammad 'Abd al-Raḥīm overthrew *nā'ib* Ḥasan from power. *Kantibay* Tedros offered the new *nā'ib* a daughter in marriage and some cattle.[84]

Spreading Islam: *Nā'ib*s and 'Holy Families'

The extension and consolidation of *nā'ib* dominance accompanied a spectacular process of Islamic diffusion among the speaking lowlanders, namely the Bet Asgede confederation (Habab, 'Ad Takles, 'Ad Temaryam), Mensa, Maria, and Bilen in the first half of the nineteenth but especially between the 1820s and 1840s. Several extra and cross-regional factors account for the context of this process. The eastern Sudan had experienced waves of Islamic revival as a result of Wahhābi influence in the beginning of the nineteenth century. The energetic activities of several Muslim holy families and by the Sufi brotherhoods (Ar. sin. *ṭarīqa*, pl. *ṭuruq*) such as the Qādiriyya but much more

[83] 'Medún', derived from Arabic meaning 'town', 'city' (Ar. 'madīna') or 'urban setting'. This was how the Mensa referred to the urban centers on the coast. See more on this word in Rodén, *Le tribu dei Mensa*, 76 and Munzinger, *Studi sull'Africa orientale*, 106. Some sources claim that the term *mudun* designated the Semhar region. Odorizzi, *Il commissariato regionale di Massaua*, 108 and L. Gatta, "Massaua e le regioni circostanti," *Nuova Antologia di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti*, 2 serie, Vol 50, 1885, 476.

[84] Rodén, *Le tribu dei Mensa*, 102-104. Guillaume Lejean sees the episode as part of *nā'ib* Ḥasan's efforts to convert the Mensa to Islam. Lejean, *Voyage en Abyssinie*, 59.

notably the Khatmiyya, reflected strongly this reawakening in the wider area.[85] In the lowland plains between Massawa and the highlands the atmosphere of Islamic revival inspired and fueled intense and widespread propagating activities by Muslim holy clans and families such as the 'Ad Shaykh, the Bayt Shaykh Maḥmūd, the 'Ad Mu'alim and the 'Ad Derqi.

Egyptian imperialism under Muḥammad 'Alī (r.1805-1849) and its expansion over the Nile Valley and the Red Sea area on the one hand, and the political instability in northern Abyssinia during the *zämänä mäsäfint*, on the other, were two factors that contributed to the vulnerability of lowland societies. Some, such as the Bet Asgede confederation, the Maria, the Mensa and the Bilen, had practiced, to various degrees, Abyssinian Orthodox Christianity until then. The struggle between Egyptians and Abyssinians for the control of the northern territories and eventual Egyptian military superiority provided a fertile ground for the activities of Muslim preachers and traders, but also Egyptian official "persuasion" to adopt Islam.[86] Furthermore, the revival of Red Sea trade influenced the intensity and character of inland trade, and an increasing number of Muslim traders, both from the Sudanese region and from across the Red Sea, participated actively in preaching and propagating Islam along trade routes and in market villages.[87]

The *nā'ib*s and other *nā'ib*-related Balaw families from Semhar were active participants in the process of extending their dominance hand in hand with the diffusion

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[85] On the Qādiriyya in our region see Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, 239-242.

[86] See for example an account of the socially devastating Abyssinian and Egyptian raids against the Bilen in the 1850s. Michael Ghaber, *The Blin of Boghos* (Baghdad, 1993), 12-22.

[87] Sapeto tells of the numerous *faqīr*s who travel throughout the region (Keren and Bogos area, in this case) preaching Islam, giving talismans to the sick, and causing moral disorder. Giuseppe Sapeto, *Viaggio e missione cattolica fra i Mensa i Bogos e gli Habab* (Roma, 1857), 156-7. The book contains interesting and

of Islam.[88] Although, initially, they derived their power mostly from their political authority they slowly gained an increasing position of prestige as devout Muslims mainly by their association with the Islamic institutions at Massawa and with a number of holy clans and families in the Semhar and Sahel. One such clan was the Bayt Shaykh Maḥmūd, originally from Zula, who propagated Islam throughout the region as far as the Sahel, the Keren area and the Barka, mostly by marriage into local groups.[89] The *nā'ib* s were closely associated with the Bayt Shaykh Maḥmūd with whom they shared the control of important villages and suburbs of Massawa such as Hirgigo, Omkullo, 'Ailat and Gumhod.[90] In Hirgigo, the Bayt Shaykh Maḥmūd was the most prominent group, after the Balaws. Many Bayt Shaykh Maḥmūd families were linked in marriage to the Balaws, several in particular with the Kekiya family.[91] Evidence seems to suggest that the *nā'ib*s cooperated with the Bayt Shaykh Maḥmūd by sending families of this clan to provide a religious authority among certain groups. Specific examples are the Ghedem Sicta, 'Ad Ha and 'Ad 'Asker.[92] The same pattern of cooperation, perhaps to a more limited extent than with the Bayt Shaykh Maḥmūd, may have occurred with the 'Ad

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useful descriptions of the recently converted Tigre-speaking societies in the northern Abyssinian region. See esp. 145-262.

[88] Ibid. 156, 159.

[89] On the Bayt Shaykh Maḥmūd see Muḥammad 'Uthmān Abū Bakr, *Ta'rīkh Iritriyya*, 312-316.

[90] Odorizzi, *Il commissariato regionale di Massaua*, 159, 167, 178, 181.

[91] Interviews with "Captain" Aḥmad Shaykh Ibrāhīm Faras, Massawa, 3 March 2000 and 'Uthmān Hājjī Maḥmūd, Massawa, 5 May 2000. The families of both interviewees are linked to the Kekiyas by marriage.

[92] The Ghedem Sicta asked the *nā'ib* to send them a religious chief. Salvadei, "Massaua," 1837. Their chiefs were also appointed by the *nā'ib*: ASDMAE, *AE*, b. 178, "Notabili e capi indigeni dipendenti dal Commissariato Regionale di Massaua" (1902-3), entry: "Scium Ali Ghenenai," p. 35. The composition of the clan as noted in the early twentieth century includes important elements of the Bayt Shaykh Maḥmūd. So as the other clans mentioned. See Odorizzi, *Il commissariato regionale di Massaua*, 210 (Ghedem Sicta), 189ff ('Ad Ha), 194ff ('Ad Asker).

Mu'alim (serving especially the 'Ad Temariam) and the 'Ad Derki (active among the Habab)[93].

Of equal, if not surpassing in importance, a pattern of cooperation seems to have existed between the *nā'ib*s and the powerful 'Ad Shaykh holy family, the most influential in the region before its prominence was surpassed by the Khatmiyya *ṭarīqa* under Italian colonial rule. In the early nineteenth century, the family was especially active in the Sahel region. It was led there by Shaykh al-Amīn b. Ḥāmid b. Naf'ūtāy who gradually gained widespread reputation through his preaching and miracle working among the Muslim Tigre serf classes of the Bet Asgede who approached him to seek his *baraka* (blessing). Thus began a process of marriages with that group eventually resulting in the conversion of the Tigre class of the Bet Asgede to Islam marking their social liberation.[94] The 'Ad Shaykh capitalized on the social distinction between Bet Asgede 'nobles' and Tigre 'serfs' by allying themselves with the latter and providing them with a new ideology that could challenge their state of oppression and lead to a social revolution.[95] Subsequently Shaykh al-Amīn married the daughter of the *kantibay* of the Bet Asgede marking the conversion of the upper class as well. Many of the newly converted joined the 'Ad Shaykh holy family that enlarged itself relatively rapidly and gradually became an independent group. In the process the family accumulated considerable wealth from gifts and offerings in return for *baraka*.[96] In the course of the century, sections of the family

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[93] Muḥammad 'Uthmān Abū Bakr, *Ta'rīkh Iritriyya*, 312-316, Jonathan Miran, "'Ad Mu'alim," *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, Vol I., 67-8

[94] On the Bet Asgede and Habab adoption of Islam estimated at ca. 1820 see Munzinger, "Les contrées limitrophes," 10, Munzinger, *Studi sull'Africa orientale*, 112, Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, 113, 160-1, Pollera, *Le popolazioni indigene dell'Eritrea*, 200.

[95] See d'Avray, *Lords of the Sea*, 63.

[96] On the 'Ad Shaykh see Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, 153-155, Jonathan Miran, "'Ad Shaikh," *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, Vol I, 68-9; Pollera, *Le popolazioni indigene dell'Eritrea*, 204-210, Maria Höfner, "Überlieferungen bei Tigre-stämmen (I) Ad Šek," *Annales d'Ethiopie*, Tome IV, 1961: 181-203.

split off from the main group and moved westwards to Barka, and Anseba. One group, led by Shaykh Muḥammad b. Ali b. al-Amīn (c.1808-1877) settled in Semhar. After a relatively short period of stay in Hirgigo he moved to Embereme around 1840 where he established the 'Ad Shaykh center in Semhar.[97] The 'Ad Shaykh were also active in diffusing Islam and the Qādiriyya *ṭarīqa* among the Maria and the Mensa, operating in tandem with the *nā'ib*s.[98] The establishment and influence of the Khatmiyya *ṭarīqa* in the coastal region seems to have taken place later, as Egyptian direct control was consolidated and after the *nā'ib*s political power had considerably declined.

The *nā'ib*s may have also exercised some influence and authority in the field of Islamic law. Even though local *qāḍī*s judged within their societies, they tended to approach either the *nā'ib*, or knowledgeable *shaykh*s in the region, or the *qāḍī*s and *muftī*s of Massawa for further advice in complex matters.[99] An examination of the legal rites (*madhhab*) of the societies subject to the *nā'ib*s reaveals that a sweeping majority of them were Ḥanafi, the official *madhhab* of the Ottoman empire and the Egyptians.[100]

See also ACS-MAI, Gov. dell'Eritrea b. 1066. Allegato no 9. Amerio Liberati, "Note sul commissariato regionale di Cheren," Cheren, July 1928, 53-57 and Trevaskis Papers, Box 1, File 2, "The Tribes and Peoples of Northern Eritrea. A Survey of the Keren Division," 19-20.

[97] According to a short manuscript note on Shaykh Muhammad Ali al-Amin given to me during the celebrations of the yearly *ziyāra* (pilgrimage) in Embereme on 24.4.00. On the same occasion I was given the *nisba* (line of descent) of Shaykh Ḥāmid b. Naf'ūtay. The *nisba* is believed to have been given to Abū Bakr b. Ibrāhīm b. Ḥāmid b. Naf'ūtay in Mecca in 999/1590. See more on Embereme and Shaykh Muḥammad 'Alī al-Amīn in Lejean, *Voyage aux deux Nils*, 142 ("Beraimi [Embereme] est ainsi devenue une Mecque au petit pied...").

[98] On the Maria's adoption of Islam see Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, 113, 168, Pollera, *Le popolazioni indigene dell'Eritrea*, 185. On the Mensas adoption of Islam see Munzinger, "Les contrées limitrophes," 11, Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, 162, Pollera, *Le popolazioni indigene dell'Eritrea*, 176. On the propagation of Islam by the 'Ad Shaykh among specific groups in the region see Pollera, *Le popolazioni indigene dell'Eritrea*, 200, Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, 113, 161-2, d'Avray, *Lords of the Sea*, 63.

[99] Salvadei, "Massaua," 1830.

[100] Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, 232.

Quest for the Coast: The Transformation of *Nā'ib* Political Agency (1840s and 1850s)

The beginning of the nineteenth century marked significant geopolitical changes in the Red Sea and Abyssinian regions. The slow but steady revival of Red Sea trade, the increasing regional ambitions of Muḥammad 'Alī's Egypt and the gradual consolidation of political power in the northern Abyssinian province of Tigray led to a change in the regional power balance and confronted the *nā'ib*s with new pressures and challenges. The rulers of highland northern Abyssinia were increasingly interested in securing their access to the sea through which they could procure arms and hence strengthen their position among the Abyssinian provinces. Growing European interest in commerce and political influence in the Abyssinian highlands accompanied and fueled the renewal of imperial power politics and external intervention in the area. From the 1830s Europeans attempted to influence northern Abyssinian rulers about their interests in either bypassing the Ottoman-*nā'ib* coastal authorities or settling themselves on the coast. Another cause for the transformation of relations was the gradual change in the conception of borders imposed by Egyptian territorial advances on the Sudanese-Abyssinian borders. The *nā'ib*s found themselves at the heart of these conflicting forces and saw their power erode progressively.[101]

Historiographic views privileging political and diplomatic history have tended all too lightly to mark the end of *nā'ib* power with various skirmishes, gestures or incidents initiated by the larger contenders for power in the region be they Ottoman, Egyptian or Abyssinian. These perceptions might have reflected the wishful thinking of European

[101] Mordechai Abir, "The Origins of the Ethio-Egyptian Border Problem in the Nineteenth Century," *JAH*, 8 (3) 1967, 443-461.

semi-official and official envoys writing reports to their governments in London and Paris. Historians have advanced various dates - among which 1808-9, 1813-14, 1847-9, 1865-6 - as marking the 'end' of the power of the *nā'ibs*.[102] Clearly, the power of the *nā'ibs* had begun a process of gradual erosion due to increasing pressures since the first decade of the nineteenth century and the somewhat tortuous but overall progressive transformation of Ottoman indirect rule into Egyptian direct rule. However, their power was still several decades away from being totally eclipsed. At the regional level, the contrary was often true. The *nā'ibs* were able to maintain and even strengthen their power among Tigre- and Saho-speaking groups mostly as a result of conversions to Islam and the control of trade routes and markets in a period of commercial revival. Militarily too, the *nā'ibs* maintained their power up to the middle of the century as several examples of trials of force between *nā'ibs*, Ottoman, Egyptians and Tigrayans clearly demonstrate.

The first significant change in the *nā'ib*'s position occurred at the end of 1808 when the *sharif* Ghālib of Mecca sent troops to Massawa to establish his authority.[103] Sources based on *nā'ib* traditions suggest that the action resulted from growing internal struggles within the family following the request of *nā'ib* Idrīs 'Uthmān (r. approx. 1801-1831) for the assistance of the *sharīf* to suppress a local revolt, possibly instigated by a family rival.[104] Three years afterwards following the Egyptian conquest of the Hijaz, a

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[102] For example 1808-9: Abdu Ali Habib, "History of Massawa,", 4. 1813-14: Richard Pankhurst, "L'Ethiopie et la Somalie," in *Histoire de l'Afrique au XIXe siécle jusqu'à 1880*, Unesco, 423. 1847-9: Abir, *Ethiopia*, 132, Dombrowski, *Ethiopia's Access to the Sea*, 48, Sven Rubenson, *The Survival of Ethiopian Independence* (Addis Ababa, 1991 [1st Ed. 1976]), 117. 1865-6: Ruffillo Perini, *Di Qua al Mareb (Mareb-Mellasc)*(Firenze, 1905), 231.

[103] Abir, *Ethiopia*, 6, Rubenson, *Survival*, 44.

[104] Abdu Ali Habib, "History of Massawa," 4 and, *The Nakfa Documents*, Document 81, Captain Boari to the Gov. Civile e Militare della Colonia Eritrea (Massaua), Asmara, 11 March 1891, "Tributi nel Semhar e paesi limitrofi," in Anthony d'Avray (ed.) *The Nakfa Documents*, 274.

Wahhābi fleet unsuccessfully attempted to seize Massawa.[105] In 1814, the newly appointed of the *Wilaya* of Jiddah, Aḥmad Ṭūsūn, sent a force of 60 soldiers and a *qā'im maqām* to Massawa, which now came under Egyptian rule. The *nā'ib*, however, retained his authority and his monthly stipend.[106]

Muḥammad Alī's invasion of Arabia in 1811-18 and his campaign in the Sudan in 1818-20 opened an era of increasing Egyptian attempts to tighten their control over Massawa and a gradual process of the establishment of direct rule. The Egyptians constantly tested the limits of their power both vis-à-vis the Ottoman Porte and locally, in their newly occupied dominions. In 1826 the *qā'im maqām* at Massawa suspended the monthly pay of the *nā'ib*'s militias based in Hirgigo. This gesture prompted the rebellion of the *nā'ib* who cut the supply of water to the island port followed by its attack by his soldiers. The *qā'im maqām* fled from Massawa taking three of the *nā'ib*'s followers as hostages, eventually left in the Dahlak islands.[107] Following this conflict, and upon the request of the inhabitants of Massawa, a new Egyptian *qā'im maqām* returned to the port with a new modest garrison but real power still remained in the hands of the *nā'ib*.[108]

Political developments in northern Abyssinia, Europeans attempts to establish relations with highland rulers and Ottoman-Egyptian advances on Abyssinia's western borders and in the Red Sea in the 1830s greatly affected the situation on the coast. The new regional order that began taking shape brushed aside the *nā'ib*s - a dynasty of powerful regional power brokers. *Däjazmatch* Wube Haile Mariam (1799-1867) had succeeded by 1831 in placing himself as the most powerful ruler in the northern

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[105] Ruppell, *Reise in Abyssinien*, 188. (in Abir, *Ethiopia*, 6)
[106] Abir, *Ethiopia*, 6, Rubenson, *Survival of Ethiopian*, 57, Abdu Ali Habib, "History of Massawa," 4.
[107] Abdu Ali Habib, "History," 4-5, Pankhurst, *History of Ethiopian Towns*, 243-4.
[108] Ruppell, *Reise in Abyssinien*, I, 189.

highlands controlling a vast territory that included Tigray, Semien, Wolqayt and Wogera.[109] Wube's relationship with the *nā'ib* is not very clear but it is reasonable to assume that the pattern followed the concept of Tigrayan sovereignty in principle on the coast without the actual means, and/or desire, to enforce it.[110] Between 1832 and 1837 pressure escalated on Abyssinia's western borders as a result of Khurshīd Pasha's methodical extension towards and into the Abyssinian highlands.[111] The Egyptian takeover of Kassala in 1840 and the fear of imminent Egyptian ambitions to secure territorial continuity from these regions to Massawa and the coast led to a decade of triangular confrontations between Wube, the *nā'ib*s and the Egyptians, out of which the *nā'ib*s emerged considerably diminished politically. Tensions heightened as Europeans manipulated all sides in attempt to promote their own agenda and drag their governments into increased involvement in the region.

As a result of an agreement between the Porte and Muḥammad 'Alī the Egyptian soldiers had been evacuated from Massawa early in 1841. The Ottomans garrisoned Massawa under a *qā'im maqām* with a handful of soldiers. The Egyptians returned only five years later in 1846.[112] In the interval, the *nā'ib*s once again held real power in Semhar and challenged the authority of Wube. Conflict mounted during the last part of 1843. Following a raid by *nā'ib* Yaḥya Aḥmad's (r. approx. 1841-44) son in Hamasien in which he took 3000 head of cattle and burnt a village, Wube threatened to raid Hirgigo if the cattle and a sum of 4000 francs (ca. 600 thalers) of caravan taxes were not returned. The issue was brought before the *majlis* at Massawa and fearing a destructive raid, the

[109] Abir, *Ethiopia*, 33-7, Abir, "The origins of the Ethiopian-Egyptian border problem in the nineteenth century," *JAH*, 443-4; Rubenson, *Survival of Ethiopian*, 66-8.
[110] For an analysis of the Abyssinian concept of borders in the nineteenth century see, Abir. "The origins," 459.

nā'ib accepted Wube's demands.[113] However, Wube did conduct a short punitive raid in the *nā'ib*'s lands in December 1843 but returned rapidly back to the highlands. In September 1844 hostilities resumed but not for long. As a result of increased Egyptian military pressure on Wube's northern borders, his armies were busy raiding the lowlands of Bogos and Habab.[114]

As the struggle over the coast mounted Wube attempted to establish his authority in Semhar by exercising his power over the *nā'ib*s and playing on the historical division and rivalry within the Balaw dynasty between the Bayt 'Uthman and the Bayt Ḥasan. Following *nā'ib* Yaḥya Aḥmad's death in 1844 *nā'ib* Ḥasan Idrīs replaced him in office.[115] Wube exploited the divisions in the family by recognizing the late *nā'ib* Yahya's son, Muḥammad Yaḥya, as the only *nā'ib* but to no avail at that stage. Wube approached the French consul Degoutin seeking his government's protection in return for an eventual territorial foothold in the bay of Hirgigo and claiming his rights on the coast since the *nā'ib*s had paid him tribute, a statement that was only partially true. The French who were unwilling to risk their relationship with the Porte refused to adventure themselves in the affair.[116] In December 1845, Rustum Agha, the Ottoman governor of Massawa, appointed Muḥammad Yaḥya as *nā'ib*, and thus satisfied Wube's wishes. Soon after, following the withholding of their payment, the *nai'b*s rebelled against Ottoman authority. Rustum attacked Hirgigo but encountered fierce resistance by a united front of

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[111] Ibid, 449.
[112] Abir, *Ethiopia*, 119.
[113] Douin, *Histoire du règne*, III, 1, 235, Rubenson, *Survival of Ethiopian Independence*, 104-6.
[114] Rubenson, *Survival of Ethiopian Independence*, 108.
[115] Odorizzi, *Il commissariato regionale di Massaua*, 138, Abir, *Ethiopia*, 121.
[116] On the French role in the region see Georges Malécot, *Les voyageurs français et les relations entre la France et l'Abyssinie de 1835 à 1870* (Paris, 1972).

both branches of the *nā'ib* family compelling the Ottoman forces to withdraw back to the island which the Balaws blockaded again. [117]

The return of Massawa and the coast to the Egyptian government in 1846 signaled a further blow to *nā'ib* authority. The Egyptians, who perceived the connection of their Sudanese possessions - especially the province of Taka - with the Red Sea coast as vital to their hegemonic aspirations, pursued a more aggressive policy of direct rule in the ports and their surroundings. In March 1847 a new Egyptian governor, Ismā'īl Ḥaqqi, arrived at Massawa with a relatively important infantry force. Determined to remove the *nā'ib*s, his forces landed in Hirgigo on June 16 1847. They burnt down the village, destroyed the houses of the *nā'ib* and of other important Balaw dignitaries, and ordered the construction of a fortress and a batallion to guard the water sources provisioning Massawa. Many of the Balaws and their Saho-speaking allies left the area and sought refuge on the mountain slopes. Omkullo, an important Balaw stronghold, was also garrisoned by one hundred soldiers.[118]

Witnessing the forceful Egyptian establishment on the coast, Wube sent his own forces to raid the Semhar and attempt to capture Hirgigo. His forces raided Omkullo and destroyed it on 6 January 1849, before pillaging Hirgigo and other coastal villages and leaving 500 dead, taking 500 prisoners and taking 10 000 head of cattle. Observers reported that about 15 000 of the mainland inhabitants opposite Massawa and the surrounding villages sought refuge on the island port.[119] Wube continued to consider tribute payment as decisive in determining sovereignty and threatened to pillage the coast

[117] Douin, *Histoire du règne*, III, I, 236-7, Abir, *Ethiopia*, 122-3.
[118] Douin, *Histoire du règne*, III, I, 238-9, Abir, *Ethiopia*, 132.
[119] Douin, *Histoire du règne*, III, I, 240-1. See on the description of Wube's raid in Leon des Avanchers, *NA V*, 370 and Lejean, *Voyage en Abyssinie*, 56.

when payment was not made. The Egyptians, however, adopted the more modern concept of 'effective occupation' combined with an attitude of 'divide and rule' in relation to the *nā'ib* family.

Following Wube's devastating raid in Semhar and Egyptian developments as a result of the death of Muḥammad 'Alī in 1849, Massawa and Sawakin returned to the Porte in that same year. During the tortuous 1840s, sovereignty over the port was transferred between Ottomans and Egyptians three times. The *nā'ib* s enjoyed a high degree of autonomy especially in the period of Ottoman sovereignty (1841-1846). In 1847 Plowden noted that "within the last eight years it is evident also that the *nā'ib* has been considered in all respects (...) as an independent Sovereign on the mainland." The *nā'ib*, the consul's memorandum continues 'makes war or peace at pleasure, receives tribute from all the native tribes and sells land to individuals."[120] But the increasing involvement of Egypt in the second half of the decade had changed this state of affairs and, again, further limited the *nā'ib*s political power. Even following the return of Massawa to the Porte the gradual erosion of their power (authority) continued.

The change in the structure of relations between the *nā'ib*s and the Egyptians and then the Ottomans stemmed from their increasing military presence and "hands-on" approach in Massawa and the mainland. Furthermore, their involvement and manipulation of local politics - namely in the rivalry between the Bayt Ḥasan and the Bayt 'Uthmān branches of the *nā'ib* family - and the transition to a direct mode of tribute collection from the mainland groups all contributed to this process of change which eroded *nā'ib* dominance. The cooption by Ottoman governors of one *nā'ib* over a rival

[120] Plowden to Addington, August 28, 1847. Memorandum. *Great Britain. Parliamentary Papers. Correspondence Respecting Abyssinia, 1846-1868* (London, 1868), 8A.

pretender to the office characterized this transitional period and aimed at giving the governor more power. With the change of governors alliances tended to switch. A good example for this pattern was the rivalry between *nā'ib* Ḥasan Idrīs (Bayt 'Uthmān, r.1843-47 and r.1849-51) and *nā'ib* Muḥammad Yaḥya (Bayt Ḥasan, r.1847-49) and their descendants throughout the 1850s and 1860s.[121] The typical pattern involved the deportation of the deposed or unappointed *nā'ib* to Mecca, the seat of the *mushīr*, where he stayed until the authorities either reinstated him and sent him back to Hirgigo or until following the persuasion of the Mecca authorities he came back to Hirgigo in the company of a new governor with whom he was to govern in collaboration.[122]

Nā'ib Ḥasan Idrīs's re-appointment in 1849 changed his position considerably in comparison with his first term in office in the middle of the same decade. While in the past the *nā'ib*s had received an annual pay from the Ottoman authorities they were now required to pay tribute to the governor. To such request the *nā'ib*s are reported to have replied: "we are accustomed to receive tribute, not pay it."[123] *Nā'ib* Ḥasan's position, the sources continue, resembled that of a "civil servant" who received a pay of 30 thalers per month and who was charged to collect tribute for the Ottoman government from the pastoral populations of Semhar. "The governors from Constantinople," Consul Plowden remarked in his long report of 1854, "(...) have but one thought, the extraction of money."[124] The combination of these changes upset the relative state of stability in Semhar and unsettled the control of coastal authority over the mainland populations.

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[121] Odorizzi, *Il commissariato regionale di Massaua*, 138-9, 154-5, Douin, *Histoire du règne*, 238-243, Abdu Ali Habib, 'History', 5ff.

[122] See for example the tortuous career of *nā'ib* Ḥasan Idrīs. ASDMAE, *AE*, b. 178 'Notabili e capi indigeni dipendenti dal Commissariato Regionale di Massaua (1902-3)', p 11. Also Odorizzi, *Il commissariato regionale di Massaua*, 140-3.

[123] Munzinger, "Les contrées limitrophes," 22, Lejean, *Voyage aux deux Nils*, 168-9.

Plowden remarked again that "having destroyed the power of the *nā'ib*s, the whole land is without law or security."[125]

Indeed, the mainland groups - most notably the Saho-speaking and the Habab - rebelled against Ottoman attempts to extract the tribute by force. At the end of June 1850 a force of 250 Ottoman soldiers, together with some of the *nā'ib*s militias, attacked Habab territory where they were met with resistance. Similarly, in February 1853 the Pasha in Massawa prepared a joint land and seaborne expedition against Amphila, south of Massawa on the coast, to confirm there the Sultan's authority and collect tribute. There too, the Saho-speaking groups assembled 3000 men and threatened to pillage the territory to their north. The *nā'ib* succeeded partially in "pacifying" them and eventually called off the expedition.[126] However, the tensions between the so-called Saho and the Ottoman authorities in Massawa continued to destabilize communications between the coast and the highlands since the Saho controlled the principal routes and the means of transportation, namely camels. Munzinger remarked that following the clashes of 1853-54 the Saho "had lost all respect to these authorities and security was never totally re-established."[127] As was the case on several occasions in the past, *nā'ib*s that were either removed from office or out of official power allied themselves with mainland "rebellious" groups attempting to challenge coastal authority and rivalling acting *nā'ib*s. Thus, *naib* Idrīs allied himself with the Saho-speaking groups against the Ottomans and *nā'ib* Muḥammad Yaḥya, and attacked the villages of 'Ailat, Zaga, Omkullo and ravaged the suburbs of Massawa in December 1854. He demanded that the Ottomans withdraw

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[124] Plowden to Clarendon, July 9, 1854. Report. *Great Britain. Parliamentary Papers. Correspondence Respecting Abyssinia, 1846-1868*, 129, and Douin, *Histoire du règne*, 243.
[125] Ibidem.
[126] Douin, *Histoire du règne*, 244.

from Hirgigo but an Egyptian force of 360 soldiers coming from Taka assisted them in reestablishing a state of relative order only in 1856.[128]

The *nai'b*s' new capacity as tribute collectors for the Ottoman governor put them under considerable pressure. They were able to preserve their dwindling powers over societies between the coast and the mountains only through forceful tribute collection and subordination. Both the need for income from tribute and the redefinition of their position under an aggressive Ottoman administration on the coast and on the mainland put the *nā'ib*s in a difficult position. The transformation in the structure of relations between the *nā'ib*s and mainland populations was extreme and abrupt in relation to past, more flexible relations permitting various degrees of political and economic cooperation and involving a web of regionally-based social ties. "Modern" Ottoman-Egyptian regime of tribute collection ended this order. During the 1850s and 1860s the *nā'ib*s conducted forceful expeditions - often with Ottoman forces - against populations in the Hamasien, Mansa and Bogos areas.[129]

Even though the political power of the *nā'ib*s declined considerably, they were able to capitalize on the regional webs of commercial networks and on their position of prestige among lowland societies, established over a century at least. They thus transformed their political capital into economic capital. Following the trials of power of the 1840s-50s resulting in their enfeeblement and decline, and the destruction of their centers of power in Hirgigo, many Balaws left the area and devoted themselves to trade between the coast and the White Nile. They dispersed among all the lowland groups of

[127] Munzinger, "Les contrées limitrophes," 17-18.
[128] Munzinger, "Les contrées limitrophes," 19, Douin, *Histoire du règne*, 247, Lejean, *Voyage en Abyssinie*, 57.

northern Abyssinia where they often settled and married into local families. Dominating the commerce with the coast they brought ivory from the Nile region, wax and coffee from Metemma – passing through Keren to Massawa. Munzinger adds: "they are known everywhere by the name *'askar* (soldiers) and are in general highly esteemed....thus, the ex-inhabitants of Hirgigo flourish among strangers."[130]

Concluding Remarks: A Region in the Making

The Ottoman practice of indirect rule and instability of the Era of the Princes (*zämänä mäsäfint*) signified the absence of a strong state in the region between the coast and the mountain. This reality enabled the *nā'ib*s to exercise their political authority over the societies of the region. Until the middle of the nineteenth century the hegemonic order established by the *nā'ib*s provided relative security and stability in the area through political, economic and social means. The control of major trade routes, strategically important market villages and the ports of Hirgigo and Massawa were crucial in securing the basis for a relatively stable regional political economy. The pastoral groups of the interior benefited greatly from *nā'ib* control over grazing regions in the lowlands and the escarpments of the Abyssinian highlands.

The political, economic and social fields of action linking the coast-based *nā'ib*s with interior societies contributed to shape the lowland region of present-day eastern

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[129] Abdu Ali Habib, "History of Massawa," 8-9. See also *The Nakfa Documents*, Document 81, Captain Boari to the Gov. Civile e militare della Colonia Eritrea (Massaua), Asmara, 11 March 1891, "Tributi nel Semhar e paesi limitrofi," in d'Avray (ed.), *The Nakfa Documents*, 274-6.

[130] Munzinger, *Studi sull'Africa orientale*, 140. Douin, *Histoire du règne*, 255 and 258 ("Commerce is in the hands of the people of Hirgigo. They only pay their hosts small gifts *en route*. Their hosts, in turn, provide them with safe passage from one tribe to another."). Following the burning of Hirgigo approximately 80 Balaws settled among the Maria. Munzinger, *Studi sull'Africa orientale*, 190.

Eritrea gravitating towards the port town of Massawa.[131] *Nā'ib* association with Ottoman and Egyptian rule and the close administrative association with the Hijaz and the Islamic "holy lands" gave them a prestigious status among lowland societies, some of which converted to Islam in that same period. This point is important when thinking of the formation and development of a distinct sense of identity in Massawa and its region, a disposition that has closely associated itself with the history of Islam and its relations with the Red Sea world and Middle Eastern imperial entities.

From the 1840s heightened struggles for the coast by rivaling large entities – be they from the sea or from the land - and the resulting transition from indirect to direct Ottoman and Egyptian rule eroded the power of the *nā'ib*s and transformed their political status and influence. The notion of indivisible and unitary sovereignty was increasingly imposed with the growth of European imperialism. After a period of instability in mid-century, the establishment of Egyptian rule over the territories controlled by the *nā'ib*s until then and the rise of Massawa as an active port in a period of commercial expansion crystallized even further the region between the mountain and the sea. Massawa became the focal point for economic and political, but also social, religious and cultural activities and influence in the region. The laying out of a regional infrastructure of social, political, commercial, and religious webs, networks and alliances connected and gravitated towards Massawa was one of the results of these processes. The distinction between highlands and lowlands was more flexible prior to the nineteenth century. The conversion of many lowland societies to Islam, accompanied by increased Ottoman and Egyptian direct

[131] See an indicative illustration of how this became "common knowledge" in Abdu Ali Habib's definition of "Massawa" in his B.A. thesis. "My use of the name Massawa may confuse readers. Strictly speaking, the name refers to the island port. The author took it in a broader sense as to include all its suburbs and the

involvement in politics and economy, made the differentiation far more rigid and gave it very often the overtones of a religious and cultural dichotomy.

territory which extended from Zula to Ghinda since these areas were largely affected by events in the island." Abdu Ali Habib, "History of Massawa", introduction, i.

Chapter 3
MASSAWA'S ECONOMIC FIELDS: SPACES, STRUCTURES AND SPHERES OF PRODUCTION AND EXCHANGE, 1840s-1880s

This chapter situates Massawa in relation to spheres of production, exchange and commerce by describing and analyzing trans-regional, cross-regional and regional commercial fields in a period of economic expansion. In this period the introduction of steamship navigation gradually transformed position and role as an emporium and port in a Red Sea basin. It also examines the port's relationship to the overland long-distance caravan trade with the Ethiopian and Sudanese regions as well as the development of Massawa's regional fields of production and exchange in its close hinterlands, inlands, and islands. Beginning roughly in the 1830s, the expansion of commerce in the Red Sea area transformed Massawa's economic role and defined the structures of its relationships with these commercial spheres. The conjuncture, in Braudel's sense, of new international market forces with specific political and economic conditions in the port's inlands reconfigurated its economic hinterlands.[1] The chapter thus lays out a macro-level framework analyzing the economic and commercial processes and structures that contributed towards the shaping of Massawa's mercantile ecology.[2]

The chapter identifies several processes. The first is that nineteenth-century commercial expansion intensified and rearranged Massawa's seaward links with both large international entrepots and a number of growing regional and local emporia on both shores of the Red Sea. This process affected the constitution of navigation and maritime trading networks that were linked to it. Secondly, Massawa was linked to distant

[1] On Braudel's use of the term 'conjuncture,' see discussions in the essays reproduced in Fernand Braudel, *On History* (Chicago, 1980).
[2] The term is borrowed from Middleton, *The World of the Swahili*, 15.

producing inlands through two distinct overland caravan axes each having different historical, geographical and political contexts. Each axis connected to the commercial structures of the port in different ways, influencing the construction of land ward trading patterns and networks. Last, but not least, the balance between long-distance trade and regional trade at Massawa transformed significantly since the 1860s and 1870s.

A number of factors accounted for the gradual decline of long-distance trade and the spectacular development of regional production and commerce. Massawa was increasingly related to its closer inlands (and islands) that came to take the role of its primary economic hinterlands. Commercial transformation and the consequences of Egyptian expansionism made an important impact on the lowland societies of the region. Some pastoralists were led to modify their modes of production and ways of life increasingly integrating cultivation with herding and settling in villages. Others interacted increasingly with developing regional markets along caravan routes where they traded their products and offered transportation and brokerage services. The broad-ranging process drew the region and its inhabitants closer to urban coastal economic and social spheres of influence and consequently shaped Massawa's landward disposition.

Past perceptions based on nineteenth-century accounts have put excessive emphasis on periods of temporary stagnation, crisis and decline in the economy of the port in the second half of the nineteenth century. Ethio-centered narratives perceiving Massawa as the *natural* port of an imperial Ethiopia exclusively judged the port's performance in relation to the Abyssinian highland polity.[3] Observers reporting on

[3] See for example the imperial-centered framework of analysis in Stephen George Haar, 'Long-Distance Trade, Political Economy and National Reunification in the Christian Kingdoms of Ethiopia, c.1800-1900', Ph.D. Dissertation, UCLA, 1990, 228-242. However, Haar does recognize that Massawa's economy

conditions in Massawa – for example following the Egyptian-Ethiopian crisis of the mid-1870s or the ecological breakdown in northern Abyssinia in the late 1880s - somewhat overshadowed a large-scale and more complex process of commercial expansion and transformation fueled by forces in the wider region of the Red Sea and beyond. These narratives failed to assess fully Massawa's relationship with other distant and close hinterlands on the routes and in the lands between the coast and the Sudan, in Massawa's close interior and in the Dahlak Archipelago.

Commercial Revival in the Red Sea Area: Ports and Maritime Trading Networks

At the opening of the nineteenth century international commerce and navigation in the Red Sea basin were relatively stagnant. The Red Sea was on the margins of the great international waterways and the only European vessels that ventured in the area seldom went beyond the port of al-Mukhā where merchants purchased coffee. Up until the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Red Sea was, in the words of the historian André Raymond, a "divided sea" comprising a northern Egyptian-dominated sphere and a southern sector where Yemeni, Indian and European vessels operated.[4] This division was based on a different regime of winds governing navigation in the basin – from the Bāb al-Mandab strait to al-Qufundhah and from there to Suez.[5] Between the last quarter of the

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underwent a process of 'transformation' rather than 'decline' and identifies the rising importance of its close economic hinterlands, 238-239.

[4] André Raymond, "A Divided Sea: The Cairo Coffee Trade in the Red Sea Area during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," in Fawaz and Bayly, (eds.) *Modernity and Culture*, 53-56.

[5] Alamanni reports that Arab sailors divided the Red Sea into these two spheres. The northern sphere is dominated by northern winds making it difficult and slow to sail from south to north. On the other hand, the southern sector enjoys strong southern winds the closer one is located to the straits. Enno Alamanni, *La colonia Eritrea e i suoi commerci* (Torino, 1891), 682. See also William Facey, "The Red Sea: the wind regime and location of ports," Paper presented to the workshop Red Sea Trade and Travel, The British Museum, London, 6 October 2002. On the monsoon winds in the Indian Ocean – including specific comments on the Red Sea - see Pearson, *The Indian Ocean*, 19-23.

eighteenth century and Muḥammad 'Alī's final suppression of the Wahhābi revolt in 1818 the political troubles with the Mamluks in Egypt and the Wahhābis and their allies in the Hijaz and the Yemen also affected negatively regional commerce in the basin.

Beginning in the second and third decades of the nineteenth century several factors contributed towards the transformation of Red Sea commercial structures, relationships and dynamics, ultimately leading to greater European presence. From then on the Red Sea regained its importance as a waterway in the global system connecting the Mediterranean and Indian Ocean and gained a crucial position in the vast commercial triangle Zanzibar-Suez-Bombay. The rise of Muḥammad 'Alī in Egypt, his final suppression of the Wahhābi revolt in the Hijaz and his policies of expansionism in northeast Africa marked the beginning of a renewed coherency of Ottoman-Egyptian dominance in the basin, providing more security and stability for trade. The introduction of steamship navigation in the early 1830s with the opening of several British lines connecting Bombay with Suez also changed pre-existing navigational and commercial configurations and port hierarchies.[6] The port of al-Mukhā, until then the most important international entrepôt, declined in favour of Aden and Jiddah, which took al-Mukhā's place and role in the Red Sea and western Indian Ocean systems.[7] In order to provide its vessels with a port of transit between Bombay and Suez, the British occupied Aden in

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[6] Georges Malécot, "Quelques aspects de la vie maritime en Mer Rouge dans la première moitié du XIXe siècle," *L'Afrique et l'Asie modernes*, 164, Printemps 1990, 35. Although, in my opinion, the chapter is flawed in several ways, factually, conceptually and analytically, see Colette Dubois, "The Red Sea Ports During the Revolution in Transportation, 1800-1914" in Fawaz and Bayly, (eds.) *Modernity and Culture*, 58-74.

[7] See detailed accounts for both ports in this period and subsequent decades in R. J. Gavin, *Aden under British Rule 1839-1967* (London, 1975) and William Ochsenwald, W., *Religion, Society and the State in Arabia: The Hijaz Under Ottoman Control, 1840-1908* (Columbus, OH., 1984) and idem, "The Commercial History of the Hijaz Vilayet 1840-1908," *Arabian Studies* 6 (1982), 57-77. For a study of Britain's role in the Red Sea region see Thomas E. Marston, *Britain's Imperial Role in the Red Sea Area (1800-1878)* (Hamden, CT., 1961).

January 1839, before turning it to a free port in 1850. Following the removal of the Wahhābis the port of Jiddah regained importance as the port for pilgrims to Mecca, a development that closely affected trade since pilgrims often engaged in business while on the *ḥājj*. Jiddah also became the regional port serving Arabia, and an international entrepôt linking long-distance with regional navigation networks and redistributing European, Egyptian, Indian, Javanese and merchandise from the Arabian Gulf reaching it either directly or via the smaller cabotage networks from Ḥudayda, Luḥayya, Sawakin or Massawa.[8] Vessels from India increasingly arrived at Jiddah where new navigation lines connected to traditional regional Red Sea navigation networks.[9] In an expansive commercial system, merchants, financiers, sailors, laborers, career officers, pilgrims, slaves, and a variety of commodities crossed the seas from port to port more dynamically.

Political, navigational and commercial change had a critical impact on the relationships between European, Arab and Indian commercial systems operating in the Red Sea in the middle decades of the century. Contrary to the received wisdom of a sharp break as a result European growing influence in this changing context, Arab and Indian commercial networks proved resilient and capable of adjustment to political and economic change. They continued to establish or, alternately, revitalized business networks through ports ranging from the Indian sub-continent to the eastern Mediterranean. These socio-commercial webs could dominate the trade of a specific commodity or monopolize navigation routes between ports.

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[8] On Sawakin see J. F. E. Bloss, "The Story of Suakin," *SNR*, 19 (1936), 271-300 and 20 (1937), 247-280; Albrecht Hofheinz, "Sawakin," *EI2*; Massimo Zaccaria, "Sawakin nel ricordo degli italiani residenti (1880-1905)," *Storia urbana*, 74 (1996), 5-21 and Muḥammad Ṣālih Dirār, *Ta'rīkh Sawākin wa-'l-baḥr al-aḥmar* (Khartūm, 1991).

[9] Jean-Louis Miège, "Djeddah, port d'entrepôt au XIXe siècle," In Jean-Louis Miège (ed.), *Les ports de l'océan indien, XIXe-XXe siècles.* Études et Documents, No. 15, IHPOM (Aix-en-Provence, June 1982), 94ff.

It is significant to dwell upon several aspects of the *modus operandi* of these networks in order to provide the context for understanding the development of Massawa's seaward mercantile structures. The northern Red Sea 'Arab' system was a network of Egyptian, Hadhrami and Hijazi traders and agents extending along the basin and having main commercial house offices in Cairo and Jiddah and agents, or brokers, in Suez, Qusayr, Sawakin and Massawa.

Merchants and agents in these ports were linked to one another in networks and organized in tightly knit guilds and corporations with rigid operating rules. They coordinated navigation rigorously in order to maximize efficiency and minimize transportation costs. In 1840, for example, the rotation of vessels on the Jiddah-Suez line was of one leaving for Jiddah every three years so that other vessels would have the possibility to accomplish their tour. Twenty-five years later, in 1865, each vessel performed the rotation seven times a year. This spectacular change reflects clearly the commercial boom and transportation revolution in the Red Sea but particularly the linking of Arab with European navigation networks.[10] The historian Jean-Louis Miège described the exchange system of Arab Red Sea networks before the expansion of monetization:

> It is mainly a barter commerce, of product to product. This explains that sometimes, paradoxically, products are sold very cheaply below the usual rates because they were simply taken in order to exchange or purchase a complementary product. Pricing rules do not play as a function of the demand of the buyer. They are dependent on the seller's offer. He is the one who determines the price of exchange of the additional product that serves as a compensation.

[10] Several examples of the launching of new steamship lines: In 1829: the East India Company; 1842: Peninsular and Oriental; 1856: the Australian Navigation Company; 1862: Messageries Impériales; 1869: Austrian Lloyd's. See Miège, "Djeddah," 93 and Malécot, "Quelques aspects," 35.

> Money is very little utilized. There is a balance between imports and exports, a balance that is sought after and that tends to increase the turnover. [11]

The announcement of the Suez Canal project in 1854 led to increased European navigational and commercial involvement in the Red Sea leading to the heightening of competition between traditional Arab sailing boats – Dhows, Baggalas, Booms, *sanbūq* (may also be spelt 'sanbuk', 'sunbuk')[12] - and European steamships. However, owing to their methods of credit and monopoly, the solid relations of trust among their tight-knit networks, and their role in regional trade and cabotage, Arab networks proved resistant enough to maintain their position and keep most European competition away, at least until the late 1870s and the 1880s. Egyptian hegemony in the basin in the 1860s and the launching of the Khedivial Azizieh Navigation company (est. 1863) linking with regularity Suez with Sawakin, and from 1867 Massawa, was another way of resisting European penetration.[13]

The introduction of regular modern navigation lines between India and the Red Sea and the growth in importance of Aden and Jiddah in the 1840s and 1850s contributed to the strengthening of established Indian networks and trade systems in the area. Even if present in the region for several centuries, Banyan and Parsis from Bombay gradually settled in greater numbers in both ports, as well as in other ports such as Massawa, Sawakin, Luhayya, Hudaydah, and constituted a critical challenge to 'Arab' trade

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[11] Miège, Ibid., 97-8.
[12] See descriptions of these vessels with their special characteristics and functions in Malécot, "Quelques aspects," 30-31. Useful details are also provided in Alan Villiers, "Some Aspects of the Arab Dhow Trade," *Middle East Journal*, Vol. II, No. 4, Oct 1948, 399-416. See also Alain Rouaud, "Boats," *EA*, Vol. 1. (Wiesbaden, 2003), 599-600 and Edward Prados, "Indian Ocean Littoral Maritime Evolution: The Case of the Yemeni *Huri* and *Sanbuq*," *The Mariners's Mirror*, 83 (2) May 1997, 185-198.
[13] Richard Hill, *Egypt in the Sudan, 1820-1881* (London, 1959), 123.

networks.[14] Their paramount role as financiers and creditors, their backing by big merchant houses in India, their organization as a culturally distinct trade diaspora and their status as British subjects, all benefited Indian networks, reported as dominating the commerce of key Red Sea ports in the last decades of the century.[15] The reconfiguration of Red Sea navigation, commerce and trading networks greatly affected the traditional system of Arab networks and Indian, Greek, and European merchants were now able to control large shares of the trade in one commodity or another.

Massawa in a Changing Red Sea System: The View from the Sea

Situated on the southern stretch of the Red Sea African coastline, Massawa owed its existence and century-long vitality as a trade emporium to the advantages of its geography. Its proximity to the northeast African plateau at the mouth of a relatively convenient system of inland caravan routes connected to economically resourceful regions and its excellent natural deep-water harbor accounted for and sustained its viability as a port town.[16] The conditions of its harbor, indeed, account for Massawa's success as a port that could easily accommodate larger vessels following the transportation revolution in the Red Sea. As other ports in the basin, nineteenth-century transformations affected Massawa by reordering port hierarchies and altering the organization of shipping and commercial arrangements in the Red Sea area and beyond it.

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[14] On the Banyans and Indians in Massawa see Richard Pankhurst, "The "Banyan" or Indian Presence at Massawa, the Dahlak Islands and the Horn of Africa," *JES*, 12 (1) January 1974, 185-212 and Richard Pankhurst, "Indian Trade with Ethiopia, the Gulf of Aden and the Horn of Africa in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," *CEA*, 14 (55) 1974, 453-ff.

[15] Miège, "Djeddah," 100-101.

[16] See notes and ideas on Massawa's characteristics and role in the first half of the nineteenth century in Abir, *Ethiopia*, 5-8.

The port of Massawa was connected to several maritime spheres of navigation and commerce, all highly complex systems and at times overlapping and intertwined. On a large-scale commercial level, Massawa exported and imported commodities to and from Europe, Egypt and Arabia, on the one hand, and to and from India and the western Indian Ocean area, on the other.[17] On this level, Massawa was mainly connected to ports serving as international entrepôts such as Jiddah for its northern outlets, and Bombay for the handling of commerce with India. While, on the one hand, direct links with Jiddah were regular and intensive, evidence from mid-century suggests, on the other hand, that very few ship owners in Massawa were able to organize direct shipments as far as Bombay. Around 1840 Théophile Lefebvre saw in Massawa harbor two vessels that made yearly trips to and from India and a vessel that came from Ile Maurice to buy mules from Abyssinia.[18] Sources report that in 1841 Mussa Mufarrah, a rich merchant and "one of the four principal ship owners in Massawa," expected his ship's return from Bombay, laden with merchandise and a peculiar white slave destined for Istanbul.[19] In the early 1860s a British report noted that no English merchant vessels visited Massawa, that two Indian vessels belonging to the Banians at Massawa visited it each year and that about

[17] See details on quantities, values and directions of imports and exportations in nineteenth-century Massawa in Richard Pankhurst, "The Trade of Northern Ethiopia in the Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries," *JES*, II (1) January 1964, 49-159.

[18] Théodore Lefebvre, *Voyage en Abyssinie executé pendant les années 1839, 1840, 1841, 1842, 1843*, (Paris, 1845-51), I, 35.

[19] Antoine D'Abbadie, "Les causes actuelles de l'esclavage en Ethiopie," extrait de *La Revue des Questions Scientifiques* (Louvain, 1877), 20. Three years earlier, in 1838, "Moosa Maffairah" was reported by Commander Nott as Massawa's principal merchant and banker who used to loan money to the Governor of Massawa when the income of the authorities could not cover its expenses. Nott, "Report from acting Commander Nott of the Indian Navy, on the Traffic in Slaves, etc. carried on at Massowah," *Transactions of the Bombay Geographical Society*, V. 2, Nov 1838, 34.

thirty Arab 'bugalows' (baggala) rotated between Massawa and Jiddah, Suez, Hudaydah, Mocha and Aden throughout the year.[20]

With the gradual rise of Aden as an international entrepot at the entrance to the Red Sea in the 1840s and 1850s, Massawa's trade with India tended to pass through that port, through the mediation of Banyan merchants and agents established in growing numbers in the British port-colony. Furthermore, Aden's location beyond the Bāb al-Mandab straits, led to the development of the Yemeni ports of Luhayya and Hudaydah, both dependent on Jiddah, important points for the exportation of Yemeni highland commodities such as coffee and grains, and growing regional entrepôts and markets. Both ports interacted with Massawa, which provided them mostly with butter and who could in turn export to Massawa grains and dates in years of food shortage in the African inland.[21] Much like Massawa, Luhayya and Hudaydah hosted important communities of Arab and Indian merchants who were strongly tied into Red Sea and Indian Ocean networks.

According to a report composed by the Egyptians following their takeover of the port, Massawa's exportations for the year 1864-65 were directed towards Jiddah (789,338 Fr.), Aden (489,748 Fr.), Hudaydah (232,937 Fr.), Luhayya (82, 236 Fr.) and Sawakin (6,444 Fr.). Its imports were largest from Aden (1,663,656 Fr.), followed by Jiddah (888,517 Fr.), Sawakin (97,440 Fr.), Hudaydah (55,246 Fr.) and finally Luhayya (49,859 Fr.).[22] The data is significant in illustrating the port hierarchy that took shape - vis-à-vis Massawa - following the redefinition of Red Sea commercial activities since the 1830s. Jiddah and Aden served as entrepôts for 'luxury' products in international trade, such as,

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[20] 'Report by Vice-Consul Walker on the commerce, etc. of Abyssinia for the year 1863'. No 353. *Great Britain, Parliamentary Papers. Correspondence Respecting Abyssinia, 1846-1868*, 230

[21] Munzinger, *Studi sull'Africa orientale*, 84-86; Douin, *Histoire du règne*, III (1), 254.

ivory, mother-of-pearl, gold, wax, leaving Massawa on their way to the Middle East, Europe and India. A second set of regional emporia and entrepôts - Hudaydah, Luhayya and Sawakin - increasingly received from other ports on both shores of the Red Sea products such as butter, honey, civet and gum for local consumption and further regional marketing. This constituted another exchange sphere – an intermediate system, more regional in nature – involving an intensive traffic of boats regularly crossing the Red Sea and navigating between its islands.[23]

The revival of Red Sea commerce also affected the traffic of small scale sailing between Massawa, minor ports along the African coasts such as 'Aqīq, Hirgigo, Zula, Meder, 'Edd and the multitude of islands of the Dahlak Archipelago. Prior to the physical linking of Massawa and Tewalet (also 'Tawlud') islands with the mainland by two causeways in the 1870s, small boats transported people, goods and fresh water from Hirgigo and the mainland opposite the port on a daily basis. Commercial expansion had a significant impact on the extraction, exploitation and distribution of local resources on and off the Massawa coasts. In a period of increased demand and pressure for exportable commodities and the provisioning of a growing port, the means of transportation were crucial. In the mid-1830s a number of European observers in the Red Sea area reported a growing vitality in marine activities in Massawa's environment. Combes and Tamisier estimated the number of boats sailing in the port's surroundings at approximately 60, while Lefebvre counted 35 boats docked in the harbor. Boat builders constructed dhows and rowing boats in Massawa, which were destined to transport slaves to Jiddah but also

[22] Douin, *Histoire du règne*, III (1), 260. See also Richard Pankhurst, "The Trade of Northern Ethiopia in the Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries," *JES*, II (1) January 1964, 130-131.
[23] See Malécot, "Quelques aspects," 29.

coral stone and marine products from the islands to Massawa.[24] According to Ferret and Galinier most of the town's craftsmen were boat builders, almost all of non-African origins.[25] In the 1850s, Werner Munzinger qualified the boats built in Massawa as "very elegant and solid."[26]

To the Sea on Camel and Mule: Overland Caravan Systems

Massawa's century-long economic *raison d'être* was its role as the Red Sea outlet of two main axes of the overland caravan trade: the "Ethiopian" trade route and the final stretch of the West-East Trans-Saharan trade network connecting Kassala to the port.[27] Its geographic position at a point on the coast closest to the highland plateau (ca. 50-60 kms) made it an ideal point of access for caravans coming to the coast to sell their commodities for exportation and purchase imported items to take back to inland markets. The Ethiopian long-distance trade route originated in the rich Oromo southern and western peripheries of Ethiopia and passed through a web of cross-regional and regional trade networks in the Ethiopian highlands before ending on the coast in Massawa. The port's position on the Red Sea as the terminal of the Trans-Saharan axis reached even further. It connected Massawa to a complex web of trade routes that had their origins in northern and western Africa, as far as the port of Essaouira on the Moroccan coasts.[28] While the historiography has tended to focus more often on the Ethiopian trade route connecting the

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[24] Combes and Tamisier, *Voyage en Abyssinie*, 101 and Lefebvre, *Voyage en Abyssinie*, I, 39.
[25] Ferret and Galinier, *Voyage en Abyssinie*, 372.
[26] Munzinger, "Les contrées limitrophes," 29.
[27] See an interesting, even if somewhat outdated, essay on caravan trade and history in the wider region. Mordechai Abir, "Caravan Trade and History in the Northern Parts of East Africa," *Paideuma*, 14 (1968), 103-120. For maritime and caravan trade in Eritrea in the first quarter of the 20th century see Michel Perret, "Commerce maritime et commerce caravanier de l'Erythrée au début du XXe s.," In *Minorités et gens de mer en océan indien, XIXe-XXe siècles*, IHPOM, Université de Provence, Etudes et Documents No 12, 1979, 147-156.

southern, western and central highlands with the coast, the westerly routes from Kassala and the Sudan have been studied and mentioned less in the literature.[29] These two long distance trade routes connected Massawa with distant inlands and areas of production and exchange. However, they were tied to coastal commercial structures in different ways and thus affected geopolitical networks of trade in distinct ways. They consequently had an impact on the mercantile ecology of the Massawa conurbation.

The commercial revival of the Red Sea area in the nineteenth century and the framework created by new international market forces had an important effect on long-distance trade and far-reaching ramifications on interior, littoral and coastal peoples and societies. The increasing pressure to extract goods and slaves for exportation linked inland regions to the international market and generated a series of processes having a great economic, political and social impact on the societies of the wider region.[30]

The Organization and Economics of Caravan Trade on the Highland Ethiopian Trade Route

Most 'luxury' commodities reaching Massawa via the Abyssinian highlands originated in the Oromo regions of southern and western Ethiopia, often beyond the control of Abyssinian highland Christian polities. Nevertheless, its position on the trade routes between producing areas and the sea, its tradition of strong centralized polities (even if province-centered, as was the case during the *zämänä mäsäfint*) with armies and

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[28] Jean-Louis Miège, "Le commerce trans-saharien au XIXe siècle: essai de quantification," *Revue de l'Occident Musulman et de la Mediterranée*, 32 (1981-2), 93-119.

[29] See for example Abir's map of the main trade routes in nineteenth century Ethiopia, *Ethiopia : the Era of the Princes*, 45. The indication to the westerly route seems to be somewhat abstract. This is typical to past approaches that tried exclusively to contain historic processes in the present borders of the Ethiopian State.

taxation institutions, and the large markets in its towns all accounted for the highland Abyssinians' ability to exploit and benefit from long-distance commercial activities and exercise enough purchase power to consume imports.[31] Indeed, highlanders were, in fact, those who purchased and consumed almost the totality of imported manufactured goods – especially a wide variety of textiles and cloths imported into Massawa from India and Egypt.

Caravan trade on the Ethiopia route linked the port with distant inland areas. The road distance between, for example, Enarea, in the southwest, to Massawa, is approximately 750 miles. But the connection was not direct. Caravan merchants moved commodities gradually through a series of interrelated regional trading spheres and networks that moved in a northeasterly direction from one regional market to another before ending in Massawa. In practice, the length of the journey depended on the route taken, the type of animals employed, the size of the caravan, the trade done *en route*, and the problems – of any nature – encountered during the journey. Starting with the products of the west and southwest – slaves, ivory, gold, wax, civet and coffee – caravans swelled by smaller parties and traders as they made their way to the coast. The face and shape of a caravan, in terms of its commodities, porters, guides, merchants and pack animals, changed throughout its long journey. Some merchants made only part of the route, thus working and "specializing" on one stretch of the route such as Basso – Bure - Gondar for example; others made it all the way, most often from Gojjam to the coast.

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[30] See for example the last two chapters of Mohammed Hassen's *The Oromo of Ethiopia: A History 1570-1860* (Cambridge, 1990) and also Alessandro Triulzi, *Salt, Gold and Legitimacy: Prelude to the History of a No-Man's Land Bela Shangul, Wallaga, Ethiopia (ca. 1800-1898)* (Naples, 1981).

[31] See Haar, 'Long-Distance Trade, Political Economy and National Reunification,' chapters 1 and 2. On the impact of monetization and taxation on the political and economic dominance of central Ethiopian polities in relation to long-distance trade see also Richard Pankhurst, "The advent of the Maria Theresa

The operation of large-scale caravans was not haphazard; it involved an elaborate organization and a disciplinary regime that had to balance factors relating to climatic conditions, the topography, security, the organization of markets and the realities of sailing conditions from and to Massawa. The arduous conditions of transportation in a difficult mountainous terrain governed the progress of caravans towards Massawa and had to take into account the seasonal rhythms of the climate which left most areas impossible to pass through during the rainy seasons. Hence, between June and October trade in highland Ethiopia came to a practical standstill.[32]

'Big' highland Muslim *jeberti* merchants, usually organized and assembled large-scale caravans (Ar. *qāfilah*) at the furthest regional market of Basso in the Abyssinian province of Gojjam, to the north of the Oromo regions of the southwest (also the Gibe region).[33] Sometimes Abyssinian traders went further south as far as Saqqa in Limmu-Ennarya, where they could purchase commodities even cheaper, since they were closer to areas of production.[34] Big merchants announced the organization of a caravan leaving to the north and attracted smaller merchants who joined it, thus benefiting from the protection that a large and organized caravan could provide.[35] A hierarchical arrangement ordered the organization of merchants and commodities on the caravan. Munzinger noted that "the kind of merchandise that a trader takes to Massawa is regulated by custom. A

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dollar in Ethiopia, its effects on taxation and wealth accumulation, and other economic, political and cultural implications," *Northeast African Studies*, 1 (3) 1979-1980, 27-8.

[32] Abir, *Ethiopia: The Era of the Princes*, 50.

[33] On the *jeberti* see Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, 150-3.

[34] See a useful map of the southwestern region with trade routes and regional markets in Hassen, *The Oromo of Ethiopia*, 137.

[35] Combes and Tamisier, *Voyage en Abyssinie*, IV, 117.

small trader would be perceived very negatively if he showed up in the port with ivory and gold, which is only permitted to the big merchants."[36]

The leader and initiator of the caravan was the *Nägad Ras* (Amh. chief of trade); he was responsible for the caravan's security and for paying the duties and fees for the entire party in the numerous stations in the highlands along the route. In most centers requiring passage fees caravan leaders dealt with the local *Nägad Ras* who was also a Muslim (*jeberti*) himself and with whom many of the big merchants enjoyed good relations. In these stations caravan leaders paid fees in proportion to the goods carried by each party, while at other locations the caravan's *Nägad Ras* had to rely on his bargaining powers or on his good relationship with men of influence on the spot. [37]

From Basso caravans traveled northwards in Gojjam and into Begemder where they often stopped in Derita, before reaching Gondar, the largest commercial center of northern Ethiopia.[38] In Gondar caravans swelled with rich products such as ivory and gold that reached it with the itinerant *jalāba* from the Sudanese regions through Metemma. In the rich Gondari markets caravans also absorbed Abyssinian goods that reached it from Wolqayt (eg. rhinoceros and antelope horns) and from other regional markets in Begemder (eg. hippopotamus teeth, wax, mules, and cardamon from Gojjam). Some caravans left Gondar towards Sennar and the Nile Valley – the other south-north continental commercial route linking East Africa and the Horn with Egypt.

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[36] Munzinger, "Les contrées limitrophes," 43. On the distinction between the 'big' and 'small' traders see also Lejean, *Theodore II*, 281.

[37] Consul Plowden to the Earl of Clarendon, Massowah, July 9, 1854. Inclosure in No.184. Report. *Great Britain Parliamentary Papers. Correspondence Respecting Abyssinia, 1846-1868*, 112; Combes and Tamisier, *Voyage en Abyssinie*, IV, 116-117, Lefebvre, T., *Voyage en Abyssinie*, II, 26.

[38] Abdussamad H. Ahmad, "Darita, Bagemdir: An Historic Town and its Muslim Population, 1830-1889," *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 22 (3) 1989, 439-451. On the character and operation of Gondar as a regional market (in the 1880s) see Alamanni, *La Colonia Eritrea e i suoi commerci*, 779-791.

Caravans moved from one place to another rather slowly. Mules, the main mode of transportation in the highlands, could make but a limited distance every day. Slaves usually performed a double role on caravans, that is, beyond their being themselves a commodity to be exported: they served as porters and as servants to the wealthier merchants on the journey.[39] At halts, the caravan established a temporary camp outside the town or village, where enough shade was available or near a water-well, a spring or a river. Plowden provides a visually vivid description of one such caravan at halt:

> The packages are piled up to the height of four or five feet, with spaces left at intervals; the long sticks with which they drive the mules are thrown across these to form a roof, and soft hides are laid over all, making a series of waterproof cabins, in which the wealthy nestle among their goods; the followers erect temporary huts all round, and in the center the mules are tied at night. Numbers of young men are sent to cut grass; others to trade with the nearest villagers for supplies. Strict watch is kept all night by the light of large wood fires. At daylight they resume their journey, and a caravan of 200-300 mules will be on in less than a half an hour. The small traders who carry goods from market to market, disperse themselves at night in the villages amongst their friends....[40]

After the rainy seasons around the month of October, when the river waters began to decline, caravans in the northern highlands began to organize to continue towards Massawa. From Gondar, caravans advanced to Debarq, before crossing the Takazze and reaching Adwa, an important commercial center in the north, second only to Gondar.[41] In Adwa caravans met with other caravans coming from Massawa and the Afar coast – an occasion to exchange information and news about business and politics in Massawa and Gondar. Before descending to the lowlands towards Massawa, caravans provisioned

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[39] Combes and Tamisier, *Voyage en Abyssinie*, IV, 92.
[40] Consul Plowden to the Earl of Clarendon, Massowah, July 9, 1854. Inclosure in No.184. Report. *Great Britain Parliamentary Papers. Correspondence Respecting Abyssinia, 1846-1868*, 113.
[41] On the character and operation of Adwa as a regional market (in the 1880s) see Alamanni, *La Colonia Eritrea e i suoi commerci*, 770-775.

themselves with grain (cereals) to be consumed during their stay in Massawa since prices on the island were high.[42]

Antoine d'Abbadie provided a detailed itinerary of the two routes that connected Adwa to Massawa in the early 1840s. The first, continued north, passed through Hamasien via Addi Qualla and finished at Omkullo in Massawa's outskirts. The second took a more easterly route and descended the slopes of Akkälä Guzay via Halay and Digsa ending its journey at Hirgigo on the coast.[43] When descending the slopes of the plateau caravans usually changed their means of transportation from mules or oxen to camels, eventually leaving them at Hirgigo where, according to the French travelers Combes and Tamisier, "a local shaikh would take care of them for one thaler per month."[44] In the final lowland stretch before reaching the coast, both routes passed through territories that were traditionally controlled directly or indirectly by the Balaw *nā'ib*s or their dependents. There, before reaching Massawa, they stopped in places such as 'Ailat and Zaga where they were connected with coastal commercial structures, usually through the members of Balaw families in control of villages in Semhar. In the early 1860s Walker observed that caravans employed porters from Adwa to 'Ailat where they were discharged and paid a dollar a head for their service.[45] This reinforces the idea that caravans were linked to coastal structures of porterage and commerce immediately following their descent from the plateau.

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[42] Combes and Tamisier, *Voyage en Abyssinie*, IV 94.
[43] D'Abbadie, *Géographie de l'Ethiopie*, 51.
[44] Combes and Tamisier, *Voyage en Abyssinie*, IV 94. E. A. De Cosson, *The Cradle of the Blue Nile, A Visit to the Court of King John of Ethiopia* (London, 1877), I, 31-2.
[45] 'Report by Vice-Consul Walker on the commerce, etc. of Abyssinia for the year 1863'. No 353. *Great Britain, Parliamentary Papers. Correspondence Respecting Abyssinia, 1846-1868*, 229

Much evidence attests to the fact that in the middle decades of the century only one or two very large caravans reached Massawa every year, often in June or July.[46] Caravan merchants were under pressure to make it to Massawa on time for the Banyan merchants to expedite goods on vessels before the monsoon made it practically impossible to go beyond the Bāb al-Mandab. But they were sometimes withheld in the highlands due to a particularly long rainy season or due to continued periods of insecurity in northern Ethiopia. Nevertheless, there were many other medium-sized caravans carrying either regional products or merchandise that had been intercepted at inland markets and moved from the regions that lie beyond the Takkaze river – in Tigray and Hamasien – to Massawa all year around.[47] Markets such as Adigrat, Antalo, Maqale, Addi Qhualla, Abiy Addi engaged in a continuous flow of traffic with the port and small caravans circulated between them and Massawa all year long, but especially during the summer months, before vessels set out from Massawa overseas.[48]

At least until the 1850s and 1860s slaves, ivory and gold were the main 'luxury' commodities that long-distance caravan trade was organized around. A poem composed by Wad Keray in Hirgigo following the devastating events of 1848 noted that the girls of the village wear the gold of Sennar, which was of the best quality.[49] But slaves were by far the most lucrative export item and the most in demand overseas. The centrality of slave exportation to the economics of long distance caravan trade between the 1830s to the 1850s is doubtless; it would not be completely far-fetched to judge that at certain

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[46] Munzinger, "Les contrées limitrophes," 37; Rassam, *Narrative of the British Mission to Theodore, King of Abyssinia*, 12.
[47] For trade routes other than the main Gondar-Adwa-Massawa axis see Pankhurst, "The trade of northern Ethiopia," 86-7.
[48] Munzinger, "Les contrées limitrophes," 40.
[49] Abdu Ali Habib, "History of Massawa," footnotes section, ix (chapter 2, footnote 20). In Tigre: "*watar guhen dhahabt manken metsi'e min sinnar.*"

periods moving slaves for exportation was the motor behind its dynamics. In 1838 slaves were estimated as constituting 57% of Massawa's total exports, 21% in 1840, 37% in 1842, 15% in 1852 and 12% in 1861.[50]

The revival of Red Sea commerce led to a renewed demand for slaves captured mainly in the Oromo, Omotic and Nilotic regions of the west and the southwest and exported to Jiddah, Egypt and to other Middle Eastern destinations where they were exploited mostly as domestic servants. Other slaves found their way to the Yemeni coasts where they were used in all sorts of labor, not the least of which were related to marine activities. Even if inherently problematic, estimates for the exportation of slaves from Massawa put the figure at around 111,000 slaves for the entire century. Estimates put at roughly 1500 the number of slaves leaving Massawa every year between 1811 and 1875. As we shall see in a subsequent chapter, all estimates are problematic since much of this trade was carried out clandestinely at least from the 1850s when the British mounted their pressure on the Ottomans and Egyptians to suppress it.[51]

Ivory and gold were the two other most important commodities that caravans brought to the coast; they accounted for roughly 20% of Massawa's exportations in the 1840s and 1850s. Estimates vary between 15 and 30, 000 kilos of ivory with a value of 20 to 50, 000 Maria Theresa dollars exported from Massawa in different years in the 1840s and 1850s. Estimates for the exportation of gold put the figure at between 1000 and 2500 ounces with values ranging from 15, 000 to 40, 000 Maria Theresa dollars for

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[50] Estimates are made by Ruppell, Blondeel, Christopher, Plowden and Heuglin. See Pankhurst, "The Trade of Northern Ethiopia," 104.

[51] Ralph Austen, "The nineteenth century Islamic slave trade from East Africa (Swahili and Red Sea coasts): A tentative census," in William Gervase Clarence-Smith (ed.) *The Economics of the Indian Ocean Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century, Special issue of Slavery and Abolition*, 9 (3) 1988, 21-44. See also contributions by Abdussamad H. Ahmad, Timothy Fernyhough and Janet Ewald. See also Abir, *Ethiopia*, 53-70. See also Ehud Toledano, *The Ottoman Slave Trade and its Suppression* (Princeton, 1982).

the same period. Most ivory was exported to India and thus handled by the Banyan merchants almost exclusively, while gold was exported to both India and Egypt.[52]

Unlike in some locations in eastern Africa and the Somali region, it seems fairly clear that coastal urban merchants were not the initiators, organizers or financiers of the large caravan trade originating in the southwest and passing through highland Ethiopia to the coast. Caravan trade was almost exclusively in the hands of the *jeberti* traders who maintained their own networks on the highlands and who could navigate between one region and the other – in the highlands – with relative convenience. The centuries-long traditional role of the Muslim *jebertis* as merchants and traders among predominantly Christian societies and polities led to their organization in trade networks that monopolized and dominated markets, the movement of commodities and the organization of caravans across the highlands. The chiefs of trade (*Nägad Rases*) in Ayubai, Darita, Gondar, Saqota, Dabarq and Adwa were usually Muslim *jebertis* who served at the same time the interests of the administrations of their provinces and towns, and those of the merchants involved in the highland caravan trade. This *modus operandi* made it difficult, if not impossible to penetrate highland *jeberti* trading structures. Notwithstanding, this did not mean that Massawa merchants did not tie links with inland traders, even if discretely and with considerable prudence. In the 1840s Theophile Lefebvre noted that some of Massawa's rich merchants "extend their speculations as far as the most remote

[52] Lefebvre, *Voyage en Abyssinie*, II, 29; Consul Plowden to Earl of Malmesbury, Massowah, March 24, 1853 Inclosure 1 in No 132. 'Produce of Abyssinia exported from Massowah'. *Great Britain Parliamentary Papers. Correspondence Respecting Abyssinia, 1846-1868*, 73; Pankhurst, "The trade of northern Ethiopia," 105-108 and for all exported commodities: 102-131; Haar, 'Long Distance Trade', 20-31.

Galla [Oromo] lands, but they keep the secret of their commercial relationships in these areas with the utmost discretion."[53]

Massawa merchants operated as brokers and wholesale merchants in their commercial ventures connected with this route. Brokers and the institution of brokerage at Massawa were a way for coastal merchants to dominate trade in the port without being involved in the process of moving commodities from their sources in long distance trade. But the infrastructure of merchant capital was somewhat different on the route connecting Kassala and beyond it to Massawa. Coastal commercial structures connected to this route in a very different manner.

Caravan Networks and the Political Economy of the Massawa - Kassala Trade Route

The nature of caravan trade on Massawa's westerly route was structurally different from that of the highland Ethiopian route. From the early decades of the nineteenth century the effects of the commercial revival, Egyptian imperialism in the Sudan and what is known as the 'Islamic revival', had all contributed to the territorial integrity and continuity of the regions around the route connecting the Nile Valley with the Red Sea coast. Consequently, the Sudanese regions connected to coastal commercial structures in Massawa in particular ways involving discrete organizational and operational patterns.

The caravan trade network along the Kassala – Massawa route constituted the final stage of a far reaching and wide system of Trans-Saharan trading networks and caravan routes having their easterly Red Sea outlets at Sawakin and Massawa. Originating in northern and western Africa, Saharan and central African networks of

[53] Lefebvre, *Voyage en Abyssinie*, I, 39.

exchange crossed regions and towns such as Bornou, Baguirmi, Darfur, Kordofan, and Sennar – before reaching Kassala and the Red Sea ports. Pilgrimage to Mecca was closely associated with the movement of caravans in this direction.[54] Similarly to other large scale and long-distance exchange systems, Trans-Saharan commercial webs operated simultaneously on regional, cross-regional and trans-regional levels moving commodities and pilgrims across Africa and connecting to global economic structures.[55] On that scale, Kassala, the last commercial center of importance before the coast, connected to other Sudanese regional markets at Shendi, Khartoum, Sennar, Gedaref, Metemma - and then Gondar in the Ethiopian highlands, before expediting merchandise to the ports of Sawakin and Massawa.[56]

The westerly trade routes from Massawa to Kassala passed across the lowland regions of Semhar, the northern appendages of the plateau, inhabited by the Mensa, Habab, 'Ad Tamaryam, Meshalit, Bayt Juq, Bilen, Marya and again the lowlands of Barka where the Bani 'Amer live.[57] This route was much more convenient than the one crossing the Ethiopian highlands and could be carried out in a fortnight with camels

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[54] A historical reflection of this phenomenon are the communities of West Africans, called Tekruris, who stayed over time in the eastern Sudan and in Eritrea. See for example Giovanni Ellero, "I Tacruri in Eritrea," *RSE*, VI, 1947, 189-199; J. S. Birks, *Across the Savannas to Mecca: The Overland Pilgrimage Route from West Africa* (London, 1978); C. Bawa Yamba *Permanent Pilgrims: The Role of Pilgrimage in the lives of West African Muslims in Sudan* (Edinburgh, 1995); Shun'ya Hino, "Pilgrimage and Migration of the West African Muslims; A case study of the Fellata People in the Sudan," in Morimichi Tomikawa (ed.) *Sudan Sahel Studies II*, Tokyo: Institute for the Study of the Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa (ILCAA), 1986, 15-109; A. Robinson, "The Tekruri Sheikhs of Gallabat," *Journal of the Royal African Society*, 26 (1926), 47-54; Umar al-Naqar, "The Takarir of Gallabat," *Proceedings. of the 8th Intl. Conf. of Ethiopian Studies*, 1984/89, 67-71.

[55] Miège, "Le commerce trans-saharien," 93-119. See a useful map tracing the Trans-Saharan caravan routes on pages 94-95. The map was reproduced from François Renault, *Lavigerie, l'esclavage africain et l'Europe, 1863-1892* (Paris, 1971).

[56] On the history of Kassala see D. C. Cumming, "The History of Kassala and the province of Taka," *SNR*, vol XX, Part I, 1937, 1-45.

[57] The center of the northern appendages and a vital point on the Massawa – Kassala axis in the region called Bogos by Tigrinya speakers and Sanhit by Tigre speakers It is a mountainous region, that stands about 700 meters above the Barka and 800 meters below the Hamasen. Its average altitude is of

alone. Another advantage was that it surrounded and thus avoided the central and northern highlands where security was oftentimes precarious and where caravan passage fees were high. But different trade networks operated caravans reaching Kassala, either from Metemma, Gallabat, Gedaref or Sennar - particularly those of the Sudanese *jalāba*. In *La Colonia Eritrea e i suoi commerci* Ennio Alamanni provided detailed descriptions of the itineraries taken by caravans, merchants and travelers from Massawa to Kassala and vice versa. The average duration of the entire journey with camels took about 15 days.[58]

In the 1850s Munzinger reported that elements of the Ghengheren (Jangeren) living with the 'Ad Tamaryam provided commercial transportation services between Keren and Massawa.[59] The cameleers engaged by the Massawa/Hirgigo traders were almost exclusively of the Habab group who settled in greater numbers in Massawa's *umland* from the 1850s and 1860s onwards. They grew to dominate camel caravan transportation well into the twentieth century and often provided their services in this capacity to the Italian colonial authorities in Massawa.[60] Their camels were the best suited for the first part of the journey to Keren, crossing through the mountains and the Habab regions to the northwest of the port.[61] However, most caravans attempted to avoid as much as possible traveling through difficult mountainous terrain and preferred the

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approximately 1200 meters. It is split into two by the 'Ansäba valley. In the eastern side live the Habab and the Mensa, while on the western side live the Marya and the Bilen.

[58] Douin, *Histoire du règne*, III, a, 258.

[59] Munzinger, *Studi sull'Africa orientale*, 162.

[60] The Habab cameleers dominated caravan activities in Semhar and Sahel, to the west and north of Massawa. The Saho cameleers covered the southwestern regions of Semhar, principally from Hirgigo to the slopes of Akkälä Guzay. See also Victor Buchs, "Voyages en Abyssinie, 1889-1895," *Bulletin de la Société Neuchateloise de Géographie*, IX (1896-7), 40.

[61] Luigi Gatta, "Da Massaua a Cheren," *NASLA*, 81 (1885), 477-8. Gatta provides information on the various camel types of the region and their advantages and limitations. The camels of the Habab, according to him, were much better suited for the mountainous journey than the Semhar camels, and far better from

valley routes – even if longer - that were suited for camel transportation. From Massawa to Keren the caravan route was divided into three stages: a) from the coast through Semhar to 'Ain, b) from 'Ain through the Labka valley to Meshalit, and c) from there to Keren through the Anseba valley.[62] The journey took approximately seven days. Keren was an important regional market and center of redistribution where traders exchanged Barka and Bogos goods. Already in the 1850s Sapeto noted that it was the meeting place of traders from Gash, Saqala (?), Shendi, and Damer, capital of the ancient Meroe. They all came to Keren to sell cotton from Sinnar and Egypt. Traders from Massawa came there to exchange various Indian textiles for butter, ivory, hides, ostrich feathers, and other goods that were taken back to the port for exportation.[63] Keren was the Gash region's dhurra market for the entire 'Ansäba valley area. After arriving to Keren, according to Douin, the Habab camels were changed to Barka camels, more suited for dry lowland travel.[64] From Keren to Kassala the route was more straightforward through the flat lowlands and the journey could take some ten days to accomplish. [65]

Three principal factors accounted for the development of a regional territorial integrity and continuity along this route throughout the nineteenth century: the impact of Balaw *nā'ib* hegemony, the spread of Islam, and Egyptian expansionism. The human geography and modes of production of lowland nomadic pastoralist societies between

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the Afari camels. The quality of camels rose "as one advanced towards the Gash region and Sennar." His observations are mostly based on Munzinger's comments, *Studi sull'Africa orientale*, 121-2.

[62] A second, more difficult and therefore less utilized route by large caravans, passed through 'Ailat and 'Asus. A detailed description of the route is provided in Gatta, "Da Massaua a Cheren," 489-498.

[63] Sapeto, *Viaggio e missione*, 207-8.

[64] Douin, *Histoire du règne*, III, i, 258.

[65] Alamanni, *La Colonia Eritrea*. Description of itineraries: Massawa to Keren (Capt. Gascoigne 1861) 625; Kassala to Massawa (Colonel D. H. Stewart 1883) 626; Massawa to Khartum, 647-655; Massawa to Kassala via Keren (Pennazzi 1880 and Alamanni 1887) 655ff; Kassala to Massawa (Messedaglia and Alamanni) 662-667; Massawa to Keren (Munzinger 1861) 667-8; Massawa to Keren via Lebka valley (Alamanni) 668; Massawa to Keren (Issel 1872) 671ff. See also a description in the 1850s in Munzinger,

Massawa and the 'Anseba valley and Keren defined their relationship to and dependence on the rulers of the littoral and the coast – the Balaw *nā'ib*s and their associates. Tigre-speaking pastoralists moved seasonally with their flocks alternating between grazing in the littoral region in winter and on the slopes and hills to the west and northwest in the summer months. Access to grazing lands, therefore, subordinated them to those in control of the coast and littorals. As it has been demonstrated in the preceding chapter, these areas have been politically, economically and socially dominated by the Balaws who controlled the littorals and the slopes even prior to the nineteenth century.

Nā'ib hegemony went hand in hand with the spread of Islam among most societies in this region. This process catalyzed the vitality of the Kassala – Massawa trade network. Holy men and traders were able to circulate with greater ease and in greater numbers between the province of Taka and the coast and connect Sudanese and coastal trading networks and transportation arrangements. In contrast to the highland network where *jeberti* and Christian interlocutors dominated, the growing influence of the 'Ad Shaykh holy family and the Khatmiyya Sufi order facilitated and enhanced the consolidation of trading networks and commercial relations between the Nile and the Red Sea. Both movements settled in Massawa's surroundings in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, attracted followers and exercised their influence among societies as far as the Bani 'Amer in the west, the Barka and 'Anseba valley region and the Bet Asgede groups in the hills of Sahel.

Egyptian expansion in the Sudan since the second decade of the century had a significant impact on the development of the Massawa – Kassala trade route. Against a

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"Les contrées limitrophes," 53-55. See sparse details on camel routes criss-crossing the Habab region in d'Avray, A. (ed.) *The Nakfa Documents.*

background of Red Sea commercial revival and seeking to provide a sea outlet to their recently conquered rich Sudanese territories, the Egyptians took Kassala in 1840 with the aim of eventually linking it to Sawakin and Massawa. Egyptian activities and influence were also instrumental in converting Tigre-speaking groups such as the Marya and the Habab in the 1820s and 1830s. However, in the 1840s and 1850s their involvement in the region between Kassala and the sea was indirect and indecisive; their advance from the west was temporarily halted after the death of Muḥammad 'Alī in 1849 slowed down the Egyptian imperialist drive. Only with Khedive Ismā'īl's access to power in 1863 was Egyptian expansionism re-launched with increased vigor, culminating in the hand-over of Massawa to the Khedive in 1865 and the occupation of Keren in June 1872.[66] With the placing of 'Ailat under Egyptian protection and the new occupied territories around Keren, the Egyptians had succeeded in practically creating a bridge between Kassala and Massawa. However, subsequent struggles between Ethiopians, Egyptians and Italians, culminating in the middle years of the 1880s, promoted serious insecurity y and instability in that region, and undermined regular commercial operations.[67]

Caravan trade on Massawa's westerly route involved the circulation of large-scale caravans similarly to those of the Ethiopian caravan network, even if in smaller numbers. Merchants moved goods originating in the Sudan and beyond such as slaves, ivory, hippopotamus teeth, gold, wax, gum, honey, tamarinds dates and ostrich feathers from

[66] For a treatment of Egyptian influence, control and occupation of the Bilen in the Keren area, see Ghaber, *The Blin of Bogos*, chapters 2, 3 and 4 (pp. 12-44). On Egypt's politics and struggles in the area see also Talhami, *Suakin and Massawa*, Chapter s 3 and 4 (35-66 and 143 for Bogos/Keren occupation) and Rubenson, *The Survival of Ethiopian Independence*, 288ff.

[67] See more about these struggles of power in Rubenson, *The Survival of Ethiopian Independence* and in Haggai Erlich, *Ras Alula and the Scramble for Africa*.

Sennar and Kassala to Massawa.[68] D'Abbadie and Munzinger reported that caravans brought ostrich feathers, ivory and butter from the Hadendoa regions in the Sudan and butter and mats from the Barka region.[69] Banyan merchants much favored the vitality of this route since they could procure ivory directly at Massawa, which is much closer than Sawakin for eastbound shipping.[70] Numerous manumission acts recorded by Massawa's Islamic court between 1865 and 1885 attest the presence of a great number of Sudanese slaves in Massawa. The records often identified manumitted slaves with reference to their ethnic origin, for example al-Sūdāni, al-Shanqala or al-Dinkāwi.[71]

In the opposite direction, long-distance caravans from Massawa to Kassala carried mostly a variety of Indian cloths and manufactured products.[72] In contrast with the situation on the highland trade route, where *jeberti* networks dominated most highland trade and caravan movement, traders from Massawa and Hirgigo were able to penetrate deep in the western trade route and exercise their business operations on the ground at Kassala and in markets along it. Locally organized caravans laden with all types of imported cloth left Hirgigo towards Taka where they exchanged cloth for ivory. Munzinger noted that some of the Hirgigo traders could finish their business already in the Habab and Bogos areas.[73] He also observed that the "Taaura" ('Ad Tsaura), who

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[68] Gatta, L., "Da Massaua a Chartum per Keren e Cassala," *BSGI*, 1885, 405. But many other sources. See Alamanni and Pankhurst sources. See an article on the production, consumption and commercialization of honey and sugar in nineteenth-century northeast Africa. Colette Dubois, "Miel et sucre en Afrique orientale, 1830-1870, complémentarité ou concurrence?," *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 22 (3) 1989: 453-472.
[69] Munzinger, "Les contrées limitrophes," 52-3, 55; D'Abbadie, A., *Géographie de l'Ethiopie*, 33.
[70] Douin, *Histoire du règne*, III, 1, 253.
[71] To take but a few examples from two registers see: Massawa Islamic Court Record (henceforth MICR) 8/44b, 8/44c, 8/54a, 8/69b, 8/76a, 8/86a, 14/10d, 14/11a, 14/11b, 14/12c, 14/19b, 14/20a, 14/20e, 14/21a, 14/21c, 14/23a, 14/23b, 14/23f.
[72] Douin, *Histoire du règne*, III, I, 258; Augustus Wylde *'83 to '87 in the Soudan* (London, 1888), 84; Adhana Mengisteab, 'The Strategic Position of Karan in the Metsewa-Kassala Trade Route', unpublished paper submitted to the African History Conference, Nazareth, Ethiopia, 15-20 December 1982, 20.
[73] Munzinger, "Les contrées limitrophes," 55.

grazed with the 'Ad Tamaryam, provided the transportation of goods from Keren to Massawa.[74]

Since the political diminishing of the Balaw *nā'ib* dynasty and the growth of Egyptian hegemony, traders from Hirgigo were very active along the route, dominating the trade in ivory, wax and coffee brought from the Nile region and from Metemma.[75] The Hirgigo traders capitalized on the former power but ever-lasting prestige of the Balaw *nāi'b*s – paying but small gifts in return for passage fees - and were able to build their commercial enterprises on patronage relations and local alliances established over past decades.[76] Evidence suggests that throughout the 1860s and 1870s merchants from Massawa and Hirgigo settled in key towns and market villages along the route; most importantly in Keren, but also further to the west.[77] Munzinger reported that following the destruction of Hirgigo by the Turks, approximately eighty Hirgigo traders settled among the Marya.[78] In Keren, alongside the Massawa traders, several Greeks, French and Italians who had settled after the Egyptian takeover, attempted to develop agricultural and commercial enterprises.[79]

But Hirgigo merchants ventured considerably deeper, as far as Kassala and probably beyond.[80] In the early 1880s, *sayyid* Muḥammad al-Ṣāfi, one of Massawa's wealthier Hadhrami merchants, sent his son and a slave (Maḥbūb al-Ṣāfi), to Taka province and Kassala to establish business relations for the account of the Ṣāfi trading house. They carried on them a considerable sum of approximately 150, 000 Egyptian

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[74] Munzinger, *Studi sull'Africa orientale*, 110.
[75] Many comments made by nineteenth century observers mention that coastal merchants traveling far inland, to the Gash region and Kassala. See for example Lejean, *Voyage aux deux Nils*, 142
[76] Munzinger, *Studi sull'Africa orientale*, 140 and Douin, *Histoire du règne*, 255, 258.
[77] Munzinger, *Studi sull'Africa orientale*, 172-4.
[78] Ibid, 190.
[79] Adhana Mengisteab, 'The Strategic Position of Karan,' 18, 20.

piasters.[81] The establishment of a strong Muslim power, providing relative stability – even if intermittent - and seeking to develop trade relations between the Sudanese interior and the Red Sea ports was an opportunity for coastal traders to expand their activities in this direction.

But beyond its position in relation to long-distance caravan trade, the Kassala - Massawa route animated a regional trade and exchange system that grew to be active with the general trends of commercialization in the wider area. Commercial economic relations intensified along the caravan trade routes drawing to them producers, porters and small-scale traders. Pastoralists and agro-pastoralists traded hides, butter, milk, camels, cows and agricultural products in return for a wide variety of cloths and manufactured products imported at Massawa. Products for local consumption or for exportation were either brought to regional markets along the trade route, or brought to littoral market villages in small caravans, or, in the case of groups living in proximity to the port, brought directly to Massawa. The Habab brought camels, goat and cow hides, butter, animal fat (Ar. *shaḥm*) and other provisions required at Massawa; many of these goods – especially butter – were then exported to Arabia.[82] D'Abbadie noted as early as in the 1840s that the Bilen trade almost exclusively with Massawa: "all their [commercial] relations are with Massawa. They buy cloth, red drapes and rugs in exchange for oxen. They keep these items of value in their homes because they don't use them."[83]

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[80] Abdu Ali Habib, "History of Massawa,"16.
[81] ASDMAE, *AE*, pacco 21, ('Inchiesti su ricorsi contro il tribunale di Massaua, 1888'), 'Relazione sui ricorsi presentati da Said Omar El Nahari e da Ali Afandi Iahia', p.12.
[82] D'Abbadie, *Géographie de l'Ethiopie*, 46; Sapeto, *Viaggio e missione*, 159.
[83] D'Abbadie, *Géographie de l'Ethiopie*, 36.

Groups such as the Mensa, Bet Juk, the Bilen and the Marya practiced agriculture in the 'Ansäba valley region. They cultivated cereals and other agricultural produce which they marketed along the trade route in places such as the Meshalit region, the Shi'ib plain (Mensa), 'Ain (Habab), Wasentat (Bet Juk), and the larger regional market in Keren.[84] The Mensa were reported to produce excellent wheat and barley and the Bilen (Bogos) cultivated corn and tobacco.[85] The wealth of the region was clear and mid-century commercialization in the wider region had a significant impact on pastoralist and agro-pastoralist societies of the region who produced more for exportation and for provisioning growing urban centers such as Massawa and Keren. Referring to the region around Keren In the mid-1860s Werner Munzinger, acting as French consular agent at Massawa noted that

> Bogos is the centre of the large province of Ainseba. Possession of it is important if only for its fertility. But it is also the only camel route from Massawa to the Sudan. Possession of it means the control over the provinces of Barka, Marea, Bedjouk (Christians) whose resources are large and are capable of increasing a hundredfold in a short time. This province, if well administered, would be the flower of all the Egyptian Sudan.[86]

In large markets and market villages in Massawa's proximity, be it, for example, in Keren, 'Asus, 'Ailat, Desset, Zaga or Omkullo - transactions between regional caravaners and traders involved the mediation of traders, brokers or service suppliers connected with coastal commercial networks. In the 1850s Munzinger noted that "the Habab caravans have their brokers at Zaga, near Massawa."[87] According to Douin, the

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[84] Douin, *Histoire du règne*, III, I, 258. On the Shi'ib plain, 'Ain and Wasentat in the 1860s see Lejean, *Voyage aux Deux Nils*, 158-161. He noted that the Mensa' cultivated dhurra. (160). On the Mensa' see also Rodén, *Le tribù dei Mensa*.

[85] J. C. Hotten, *Abyssinia and its People, or, Life in the land of Prester John* (London, 1868), 216.

[86] Quoted in Zewde Gabre Sellasse, *Yohannes IV of Ethiopia: A Political Biography* (Oxford, 1975), 37 (M.A.E., Massawa 3, Munzinger to M.A.E., 22 December 1865).

[87] Munzinger, W., "Les contrées limitrophes," 51-2.

Beduin residents of Zaga provided traders with water, wood and the means of transportation.[88] Since mid-century the advent of Egyptian hegemony, increased commercialization and taxation, and the dwindling of the slave trade had all contributed towards making the regions along the Massawa - Keren route as increasingly important economic hinterlands in relation to the port. This process drew pastoralist and agro-pastoralist societies closer to Massawa's economic and social spheres through migration to the port and the consolidation of clientship relationships in the commercial and transportation structures of the region.

Regional Economic Fields: Coastlands and Islands

From a trade emporium serving almost exclusively distant inland centers of production and consumption Massawa became more closely integrated to the dynamically growing region in its closer environment. Long-distance trade, especially on the Ethiopian route, declined progressively from mid-century as a result of attempts to suppress the slave trade and because of the reigning state of political instability in northern Abyssinia and on its borders.

The specific structure of the Egyptian administration of Massawa also illuminates the changing geopolitics of Massawa's inlands and accounts for the port's increasing integration to its hinterlands. The erratic trajectories – between centralization and decentralization - of the administrative organization of the Egyptian Sudan in general and of Massawa in particular are thus revealing. Since the Egyptian takeover of Massawa and Sawakin in 1865-66, both ports and their surroundings were governed separately from the

[88] Douin, *Histoire du règne*, III, I, 255.

central Governorate of the Sudan in Khartum. Khedive Ismā'īl's grand plans for the development and modernization of the Red Sea ports placed them in a special position separating them from the usual slow bureaucracy and struggles for power among the high Egyptian officialdom that would accompany their administration had they been placed under Khartum.[89] In this way, Cairo could often rule the provinces directly. From 1866 to 1871 a *ḥukmdār* (governor of a town with its dependencies) governed Massawa. In 1871 the Egyptians created a new division including Massawa, Sawakin, Kassala and the Somali coast under a separate unit called the "Eastern Sudan and the Red Sea Littoral," once again, placing the ports in a distinct position and creating – after the occupation of Keren – territorial continuity between Massawa and Kassala. In 1872 Massawa was an autonomous governorate under Munzinger, before the Egyptian Army took over its administration in the middle of the decade. From 1877, under the overlordship of Gordon in Khartum, Sawakin and Massawa formed a single *muḥāfiẓa* (governorate)[90]

The Growth of Regional Production and Trade: Pastoralist Products, Regional Markets and Agriculture

Studies of the economy of preconquest East Africa have observed that trade occurred within two separate spheres of exchange: one involving luxury goods and another subsistence goods. Prestige goods were exchanged for goods in the same category and subsistence goods for other subsistence goods, thus constituting multicentric economies. With the expansion of trade in the nineteenth century the borders between the two spheres of exchange broke down and an increasing shift towards market trade took

[89] Ismā'īl's grand plans included, at some point, the construction of a railway line connecting Massawa to Kassala and beyond. I thank Fu'ād Makkī for providing this information.

place. This came about largely through the process of increased monetization and the appearance of new regional and local markets where subsistence goods could convert into prestige goods.[91] This model fits well the case of Massawa and its hinterlands. The gradual penetration of money relations from the port to the inland and the development of regional and local markets in its surroundings reflect the transition to a more market-oriented economy. They also marked the diversification and intensification of modes of production and they transformed social relations among the inhabitants of the region. Building on Marxist paradigms, another scholar of preconquest Tanzania argued that commercial expansion *commodified* the regional economy.

If in the first half of the century luxury items from southwestern Ethiopia and the Sudanese regions constituted Massawa's bulk of exports. Starting in the 1850s the commercial structure and political economy of Massawa and its region began a process of transformation with far reaching socioeconomic effects. Slaves, formerly Massawa's most important single export item and an important motor for long-distance trade, significantly decreased in number, principally as a result of British pressure on the Ottoman Empire to suppress the slave trade in the late 1850s and 1860s. Egyptian measures eventually culminated in the 1877 Anglo-Egyptian treaty for the suppression of the slave trade.[92] Three other 'prestige' items brought to the coast from afar and whose exports declined or remained stable after mid-century were ivory, gold and civet.

In terms of economic viability and productivity the lowlands between the coast and the mountains and the Massawa region have always been portrayed rather negatively

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[90] Talhami, *Suakin and Massawa*, 69-77.
[91] Juhani Koponen, J., *People and Production in Late Precolonial Tanzania: History and Structures*, (Helsinki, 1988), 109, 117.
[92] Toledano, *The Ottoman Slave Trade*, 203-212 and 219-223.

in the historical literature, not entirely unjustifiably. Compared to the rich distant inlands travelers, foreign consuls and Abyssinian highlanders perceived the mostly dry and excessively hot Semhar region as a barren area with little, if at all, economic potential, barely providing its poor nomadic inhabitants with the necessities of existence. However, in this sub-chapter I argue that in the second half of the nineteenth century, commercial expansion in the wider area led to the development, diversification, and intensification of economic activities and commercial enterprise in Semhar and thus transformed its political economy. The most spectacular change in the structure of Massawa's exports was the rise of regionally- and locally-produced pastoralist commodities such as hides, skins, butter (ghee) and marine products from the Dahlak archipelago. Even if more difficult to evaluate [quantify] with precision – due to the discrete nature of the transactions – high-value marine products such as pearls, mother-of-pearl and tortoise shells came to hold a most significant place in Massawa's exports, involving impressively large sums of money in transactions.[93] By the penultimate decade of the nineteenth century a table of twenty items exported from Massawa included eleven produced in Massawa's close hinterlands and in the islands off the coast, including gum, wax, ostrich feathers, tallow, hides, skins, pearls, mother-of-pearl, tortoise shells, butter and gold dust.[94] Added to these processes, increased Ottoman and Egyptian direct involvement in the administration and economy of Massawa and its region since mid-century translated into a more organized, 'modern' and direct system of tribute and tax collection and constituted a further factor in "monetizing" socioeconomic relations in the

[93] For more details on export estimates for the products mentioned see Pankhurst, "The trade of northern Ethiopia," 119-131.
[94] Alamanni, *La Colonia Eritrea*, 710.

region.[95] The expansion of Red Sea commerce made an impact on inland, littoral, coastal and insular societies by gradually integrating them into a market-oriented regional economy. Commercial expansion increasingly transformed trade relations from reciprocity and redistribution to market trade. The development of this new economic order changed the lives of pastoralists by diversifying their modes of production and intensifying them. New commercial relations translated into pressure on the region's inhabitants to supply products for exportation and consumption, labor and other services to new market places but especially to Massawa and its growing population. This process involved two important features: the development of regional and local market villages functioning as mediating links or centers for trade networks and the development of modest, but nevertheless dynamic, small- and medium-scale agricultural cultivation wherever land and climate permitted. The development and growth of intermediate Red Sea trading activities – for example between the Eritrean and Yemeni coasts – led to the growth of trans-regional exchange reflecting the growing function of Massawa as a regional port beyond its role as a transit point for international commerce. This meant that non-'prestige' pastoralist products, such as butter, gained new value as exportable goods for consumption in Massawa's forelands. Hence, butter exports were mostly oriented towards regional Red Sea emporia such as Sawakin, Hudayda, Luhaya and Jiddah.

Evidence from the middle decades of the century defines the basic economic patterns of port–hinterland exchanges: Saho- and Tigre-speaking pastoralists, principally

[95] On the evolution of tribute payment in the Semhar throughout the nineteenth century see *The Nakfa Documents*, Document 81, Capitano Boari to the Governatore Civile e Militare della Colonia Eritrea, Asmara, 11 marzo 1891, 'Tributi nel Semhar e paesi limitrofi'. Reproduced in D'Avray, A., (ed.) *The*

the wealthier and larger Assaorta and the Habab, came to regional markets or directly to Massawa to sell their products in the markets of the port and its outskirts. Observers noted that the 'Beduins' provided the port with meat, fish, watermelons and milk on a daily basis and that the 'Saho', especially rich in herds, sell goats, sheep, milk and butter in the Massawa market where they purchase tobacco, cloth and other imported objects.[96] The Habab, another observer noted, come to Omkullo, near Massawa, to sell their butter.[97] As early as in the 1850s Munzinger judged that the products produced in Semhar, namely gum, wax, fat (*shaḥm*), butter and hides are *important* items of commerce in the region.

> Commerce with the Beduins is considerable. Since all the Chohos [Sahos] and Beduins are shepherds who seldom practice agriculture and produce nothing else, the main objects of exportation and importation are [the pastoralist products] that they produce and extract.[98]

The Balaw *nā'ib*s and their associates - and later the Egyptians - encouraged pastoralists to produce more and exploit the region's resources. It was a response to the intensification of trade and the growing demands of the market economy beginning in the 1840s. Munzinger made a revealing observation by noting that brokers and traders from Hirgigo and Zula ordered specific products from the plain extending between these two villages - a process that modified, to some extent, the modes of production of Saho-speaking pastoralists.[99]

Nakfa Documents, 272-285. On Egyptian "modernization" of taxation see Talhami, *Suakin and Massawa*, 80, 91.

[96] Combes and Tamisier, *Voyage en Abyssinie*, I, 104 and IV, 203; Ferret and Galinier, *Voyage en Abyssinie*, II, 390.

[97] D'Abbadie, *Géographie de l'Ethiopie*, 46.

[98] Munzinger, "Les contrées limitrophes," 51.

[99] Zula was a village dominated by Saho-speaking groups. In 1840 it was reported to have 214 huts. D'Abbadie, *L'Abyssinie et le roi Théodore*, 8 and 14.

> The plain ... between Hirgigo and Zula ... produces only thorny gum (gommier épineux). Since this region is considered to be Choho [Saho] territory, they are those who have the exploitation rights that take place during the hottest months on the order of Hirgigo's and Zula's inhabitants. The product is taken to Massawa. Considering the large number of gum bushes (trees) in Semhar, the exploitation can be considerably augmented. Today it is done only in response to the orders.[100]

The 'Sahos' brought to Massawa cow hides worked in milk (*felem*), large and beautiful goat skins, and butter, while the "Beduins" and the Habab brought the same articles but especially cow and ox hides, much butter, fat, some dhurra, mats, nets and all the day-to-day provisions needed on the island for local consumption. An estimate from the 1880s put at 3,000 cow hides and 6,000 goat and sheep skins originating in the Habab areas and sold at Massawa annually. Merchants from Massawa maintained a lively commerce with the Habab and some of them traveled personally to their region where they exchanged locally produced products for imported manufactured objects and cloths.[101] Afar-speaking groups who inhabited the coast and littoral south of Massawa and practiced mostly herding and fishing, bred camels that were in great demand in Massawa where their prices rose in the 1860s. Some of the coastal Afaris, especially the Damoheita in the Buri peninsula area, exported butter and *jarīd* (Ar. palm branches stripped of their leaves) with their boats and returned with grain, dates and other goods for local consumption.[102] It is possible that this signified a change from the 1850s when

[100] Munzinger, "Les contrées limitrophes," 51.
[101] Ferruccio Roberti, "Gli Habab," *L'Esplorazione commerciale*, gennaio 1889, fasc. 1, 12.
[102] Ibidem and Werner Munzinger, "Narrative of a journey through the Afar country," *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*, 39 (1869), 217. On the Afar-speaking Damoheita see also Dante Odorizzi, "La Dancalia italiana del nord," *L'Esplorazione commerciale*, fasc. V, Maggio 1909, 171 and Odorizzi, *Il commissariato regionale di Massaua*, 222-228.

Plowden reported that neither camels nor sheep and goats appear on the Massawa market.[103]

The Egyptian takeover of Massawa in 1865 and their growing presence on the northern Afar coast catalyzed, more than before, its integration with the market economy gravitating to the port. But the process was not only economic in nature - it also had cultural and ideological overtones. Munzinger reported that coastal Afaris took pride in their links with Arabia and Massawa, wore coloured silk dress and practiced Islam more strictly.[104] In the southern parts of the coast, in places such as 'Edd, commerce with the Yemeni coast was done directly. There, Afaris exchanged butter, skins and straw for tobacco and maize coming from Hudaydah or Aden.[105]

One of the most significant developments that the changing regional economy entailed was the creation and growth of regional market villages that functioned as points of reception for goods, transit stations along regional and trans-regional trade routes and centers for regional trading and transportation networks. Such villages were closely connected with Massawa's commercial structures. The historian Jonathon Glassman termed the process by which wealth moved from villages to towns through commerce the "urbanization of the countryside."[106] Munzinger noted that settlements in Semhar owed their origins to the regional trade with Massawa and were originally established as camps for camels where water was available and grazing lands found nearby. With the

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[103] Consul Plowden to the Earl of Clarendon, Massowah, July 9, 1854. Inclosure in No.184. Report. *Great Britain Parliamentary Papers. Correspondence Respecting Abyssinia, 1846-1868*, 123

[104] Munzinger, "Narrative of a journey," 191, 219.

[105] 'Abdin Archives (Cairo), (henceforth A.A.), box 38, document 143, Report from Ismail Sadiq Pacha, 12 June 1866. In Douin, *Histoire du règne*, III, 1, 283.

[106] Glassman, *Feasts and Riot*, 52-4. For Glassman the urbanization of the countryside was not only an economic process but included a political and ideological dimension. I will return to this issue regarding Massawa when discussing the development of the conurbation. See also the volume edited by Jane I. Guyer (ed.), *Feeding African cities: studies in regional social history* (Bloomington, IN., 1987).

intensification of commercial relations with the port, camps became small villages. These included 'Ailat, Zaga, Gumhod, 'Asus, Desset, Embereme, Zula[107] – all sitting on regional trade routes conducting to and from Massawa, regionally important grazing lands, and all connected with coastal political, economic and social structures through the agency of the Balaws.[108] Captain Gatta, for example, noted that Zaga consisted of approximately one hundred huts "inhabited by many Massawans."[109] People who came from Hirgigo, Zula and Arabia inhabited the village of Gumhod while 'Asus's population included people from the 'Ad Mua'lim group who are believed to have founded the village, as well as from the Hirgigo Balaws, Bani 'Amer, 'Ad Tamaryam and groups from Arabia.[110] These villages constituted a set of strategically located settlements in Massawa's inlands – all connected to Massawa through the various elements of the conurbation: Hirgigo, Omkullo, Hitumlo.

The most important of the inland Semhar villages was 'Ailat, some 30 kilometers to the west of the port. Situated ideally on the first terrace of the highland slopes (alt. c. 250 m.) on the way to the rich Mensa lands, 'Ailat's position placed it at the center of a regional system of trade routes leading to and from these areas.[111] Already in the early 1850s Sapeto remarked that it was a "populous village"; it then became a somewhat important regional hub in the 1860s and 1870s.[112] Recognizing its strategic importance in

[107] See information about these villages in Salvadei, "Massaua," 1833-1840. According to Savadei both 'Asus and Zaga were founded in association with the arrival from Mecca of a certain Shaykh Mu'alim, founder of the 'Ad Mu'alim group.
[108] Munzinger, *Studi sull'Africa orientale*, 110-111.
[109] Gatta, "Massaua e le regioni circostanti," *NASLA*, 1885, 479. Zaga provided merchants with water, wood and the means of transportation. Douin, *Histoire du règne*, III, I, 255.
[110] Salvadei, "Massaua," 1835 and Muḥammad 'Uthmān Abū Bakr, *Ta'rīkh Iritriya*, 332.
[111] See the system of itineraries in D'Abbadie, *Géographie de l'Ethiopie*, 41.
[112] Sapeto, *Viaggio e missione*, 166.

1872 the Swedish Evangelical Mission opened a clinic and a small school in 'Ailat.[113] Parkyns noted that many 'Beduin' and 'Saho' petty merchants passed through 'Ailat with their goods to and from Massawa - often spending the night in the village. Furthermore, caravans coming from Massawa and intending to climb the plateau into Hamasien often changed their means of transportation from camels to oxen or mules in 'Ailat's surroundings.[114] Evidence suggests that the dwellers of 'Ailat developed, to some degree, "urban and mercantile ways" and were devout Muslims. Suggesting a departure from their former pastoralist lifestyle, Parkyns noted that they "appear to be very sociably inclined. In the evening, parties of the men might be seen congregated about the doors of each other's houses to chat."[115] The village was also situated near a valley where large numbers of camel herds grazed; it's hot springs, in addition, attracted people from the broader region. Parkyns noted that people "from the most distant parts of Abyssinia, from the islands about the Red Sea, even from Jiddah and other towns on the Arabian coast" visited these hot springs.[116]

Elements of the Balaw family and the *nā'ib*s founded, inhabited and controlled the important village of 'Ailat. Indeed, after Hirgigo was burned down in 1847, the acting *nā'ib* moved his residence – or was forced by the Egyptians to move - to 'Ailat where under the "protection" of an Egyptian garrison he continued in the conduct of his affairs.[117] On the basis of oral accounts, several patterns of regional migration are

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[113] Joseph Gabrawold, 'The origin and early development of the Evangelical Church of Eritrea', B.A. Thesis, Haile Selassie I University (Addis Ababa, May 1972), 17. The first mission of the Evangeliska Fosterlands Stiftelsen (EFS) arrived to Massawa on 15 March 1866.
[114] De Cosson, *The Cradle of the Blue Nile,* I, 31-2.
[115] Parkyns, *Life in Abyssinia*, 34-8.
[116] Parkyns, *Life in Abyssinia* 33.
[117] On the presence of the *nā'ib* at 'Ailat see Denis de Rivoire, *Mer Rouge et Abyssinie* (Paris, 1880), 277. De Rivoyre observed that 'Ailat resembled Zula in character, architecture and building materials. See also Pennazzi, "Massauah," *NASLA*, 1880, 329.

identified. Saho-speaking groups, especially from the Bayt Shaykh Maḥmūd, moved from the littoral plain south of Massawa to 'Ailat in the middle decades of the century. The grandfather of Ismā'īl and 'Uthmān Hājj Maḥmūd moved from Zula to 'Ailat where he joined other members of the family previously established there. There, he grew crops such as maize, grain, and owned camels, sheep and cows.[118] Observers in the 1880s estimated 'Ailat's population at 2000 with 500 huts.[119]

The development of agricultural cultivation also reflected the changing political economy of the Semhar and the diversification of its inhabitants' modes of production. Even if limited and initially principally confined to the surroundings of villages, some pastoralist societies cultivated during the winter months when sufficient precipitations enabled them to do so. In the early 1860s Munzinger noted that the most cultivated areas were at Ueddubo, Embereme, Hirgigo and the Motad plain.[120] Roughly in the same period a French traveler observed that the 'Beduins' plant dhurra between Omkullo and Desset and provided a detailed map showing all cultivated areas in Semhar between the coast and the mountains.[121]

Since the Egyptians took over the direct administration of Massawa in 1866 they constantly – under the direct orders of Khedive Ismā'īl – acted to encourage, develop and intensify agricultural enterprise in Massawa's hinterlands.[122] Werner Munzinger, who was appointed as Governor of Massawa for the Egyptians in 1871, made significant

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[118] Interviews with 'Usmān Hājj Maḥmūd, Massawa 25 April 2000 and Ismā'īl Hājj Maḥmūd, Asmara 2 May 2000.
[119] Gatta, "Da Massaua a Cheren," *NASLA* 1885, 494.
[120] Munzinger, *Studi sull'Africa orientale*, 108.
[121] Lejean, *Voyage aux Deux Nils*, 163 and map in the annexed 'Atlas'.
[122] A.A. (Cairo), Khedivial order to the Governor of Massawa, Daftar (Notebook) Ma'iya Turkish 558, Translation of document 3, page 3, section 2, 23 shawwāl 1283 (28 February 1867). Reproduced in Shawqī 'Attā'allāh al-Jamal, *al-Wathā'iq al-ta'rīkhiyya li siyāsat Miṣr fī-'l-baḥr al-aḥmar, 1863-1879* (Cairo, 1959), 87-9.

efforts in developing irrigation for cultivation in the Zula area.[123] Munzinger's superior, Aḥmad Mumtāz Pasha, who was appointed by khedive Ismā'īl as Governor of the eastern Sudan in 1870, made every effort to encourage the culture of cotton and agricultural enterprise in selected spots along the coast and in the two Red Sea ports' hinterlands. He toured the Red Sea littoral in 1871 and identified the most suitable spots for developing agriculture. In his report he noted that out of a total of 8700 square miles – the area of the Massawa *Muḥāfiẓa* (Province) – just over 1000 square miles were suitable for agriculture. He argued that if local pastoralist and agro-pastoralist groups would be encouraged to grow millet and cotton, the need to purchase millet would be eliminated and it would be possible to export cotton via Massawa.[124] Even if these plans and projects were over-ambitious and impossible to realize in the short period of Egyptian rule, agricultural activities expanded in the region. By the early years of Italian colonial rule Salvadei noted that during the rainy seasons cultivation in Semhar was intensive "near Shi'ib, in 'Ailat, on the Agametta and Agambussa terraces, in the plain of Sabarguma, near Saati, in the environs of Omkullo and Hirgigo and in the valley of Catra. Dhurra, maize, dagussa (finger millet), *teff*, panico, sesame and cotton are planted everywhere."[125]

Colonial surveys from the turn of the century on the possession and exploitation of land in the Samhar region further illuminate the intensification of cultivation. They noted that from December to April the inhabitants of Semhar returned from the escarpments and the highlands to the lowlands where many of them engaged in

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[123] A.A. (Cairo), Order to the *Muḥāfiẓa* of Massawa, Daftar no. 1936, v 2, p 21, order no. 142, 24 Rabi' al-thāni 1288 (12 July 1871). In al-Jamal, op. cit. 119. See also Talhami, *Suakin and Massawa*, 76

[124] Talhami, G., Suakin and Massawa, 101, Richard Hill, R., *A Biographical Dictionary of the Sudan* (London, 1967) [1st ed. 1952], 37-8.

cultivation. Land was more exploited than possessed and with the exception of land deriving from *hujja* (Ar. title deeds) or by regular concessions of land made by the colonial authorities. But land granted as private property or as perpetual concessions was almost exclusively land that colonial authorities designated for construction; the authorities seldom granted land for cultivation as property. Every year, in the first days of November, the *Commissariato Regionale* announced the opening of the cultivation season and invited prospective cultivators to present their requests for official permits. However, the authorities have recognized permanent rights on land in the vicinities of established settled centers where notable families claimed to cultivate land for more than three decades. Such places were near Hirgigo, Omkullo and Embereme.[126] The "notable families" referred to were usually Balaw or *nā'ib*-associated families who controlled land. As early as 1844, for example, the *nā'ib* allotted a small plot of land to the French Consul Degoutin in Omkullo.[127]

In the Sahel region the reports make special mention of the 'Ad Tamaryam and the Rashayda who both engaged in cultivation some time before the colonial period and had their special customs of land tenure. The Rashayda cultivated mostly millet, dhurra and watermelons on the coasts north of Massawa between the Waqiro and Lebka rivers for several decades. Even though they have been cultivators in their distant past (two-three centuries beforehand), the Habab pastoralists have lost all memory of customs of land tenure. The reports note that the Habab, 'Ad Shaykh, 'Ad Mu'alim, Bet Mala, 'Ad

[125] Salvadei, "Massaua," 1823; on the cultivation of dhurra in 'Ailat see Wylde, *'83 to '87 in the Soudan*, I, 101-2.
[126] ACS, *Carte Martini*, s.12, f. 59, "Massaua-possesso e godimento dei terreni," Copia di rapporto no.1760, diretto dal Commissariato regionale di Massaua (G. Salvadei) al Governo della Colonia, 5 gennaio 1905.
[127] Munzinger, "Les contrées limitrophes," 35.

Taura have all begun to cultivate lands in any organized manner in very recent times.[128] Towards Keren, as one climbed on higher terrain, cultivation was less recent and more established socially and legally among traditionally agro-pastoralist groups such as the Mensa', Maria, Bet Juk, 'Ad Takles and others.[129] The expansion of agriculture in the lowlands expanded significantly under Italian colonial rule. Around the turn of the century several agricultural enterprises and "experiments" were initiated in the Wekiro, Zula and Dog'ali regions by several of Massawa's leading merchant families - such as Bā Ṭūq, al-Ghūl, and Ṣāfī.

Diving for the 'Sky's Tears': Pearling in the Dahlak Archipelago[130]

The small-scale but lucrative economic system revolving around the extraction and commercialization of marine products in the Dahlak archipelago constituted another sphere of economic activities in Massawa's region. It involved a distinct infrastructure of financing, labor and commercialization that transformed as a result of broader patterns of economic change in the Red Sea and western Indian Ocean areas in the nineteenth century.

The Dahlak islands are an archipelago of approximately 125 islands, islets, rocks and reefs with deeply indented coasts off the Red Sea coasts opposite the port of Massawa. The most important islands are Dahlak al-Kabīr, Nukhra, Nura, Dohol, Raka (Baka), Daraka and Hawatib. The islands are flat and rainfall and vegetation are scanty,

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[128] ACS, *Carte Martini*, s.12, f. 59, "Sahel-Regime delle terre per le tribu' del Sahel," Copia di rapporto no. 38, diretto dal Residente del Sahel (Marazzani Visconti Terzi) al Governo della Colonia, 23 gennaio 1905.
[129] See more details for this region in ACS, *Carte Martini*, s.12, f. 59, "Cheren-Regime delle terre," Copia di rapporto no. 858, diretto dal Commissario Regionale di Cheren (V. Fioccardi) al Governo della Colonia, 5 maggio 1905.
[130] [In regards to the entire sub-chapter, Edward Rüppell's, *Reise in Abyssinien*, chapter 9 may provide additional useful information for the 1830s. It has not been consulted here].

making living conditions especially harsh for a small population of between 1500 and 2500, depending on historical periods. Occupied by the Muslims in the early eighth century, the Dahlak islands functioned initially as a prison and a place of refuge. In the twelfth and thirteen centuries the islands were the seat of an independent emirate ruled by a line of sultans and serving as an important transit station in the trade between Egypt and India, but also in cross Red Sea trade between Abyssinia and Yemen. Numerous tombstones with Arabic inscriptions dating between ca. the 9th to the 13th centuries are to this day found in the necropolis near the village Dahlak al-Kabīr on the island baring the same name.[131]

The economy of the Dahlak islands revolved principally around the extraction of lucrative marine products such as pearls (*Meleagrina muricata*, Ar. *bulbul*), mother of pearl (*Meleagrina margaritifera*, Ar. *ṣadof*), and tortoise shells (Ar. *dobel*, *baie*). As early as the twelfth century the historian 'Umāra al-Yamanī (d.1174) alluded to pearl-fishing activities in the islands and in the fifteenth century, further accounts made note of the vitality of the pearl trade in the area.[132] In the seventeenth century the Otttoman traveler Evliya Celebi noted that the village of Dahlak al-Kabīr contained 600 houses and 40-50 well-provisioned stores. He noted that taxes from pearl fishing constituted part of the

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[131] Emery Van Donzel and Ronald E. Kon, "Dahlak islands," *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica* [*EA*](forthcoming); Stephen H. Longrigg, "Dahlak," *EI2.* Of the numerous studies on the history of the Dahlak islands see especially: Madeleine Schneider , *Stèles funéraires musulmanes des îles Dahlak (Mer Rouge)*, (in 2 volumes), IFAO (Cairo, 1983); Tedeschi, S., "Note storiche sulle isole Dahlak," in *PICES 3*, Vol 1, Addis Ababa, 1969-70, 49-74; René Basset, "Les inscriptions des iles de Dahlak," *JA*, ser 9, vol. 1, 1893, 77-111 and works by Giovanni Oman. See a detailed overview of the islands of the archipelago in Odorizzi, *Il commissariato regionale di Massaua*, 252-263

[132] Van Donzel, "Dahlak," in *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica* (forthcoming) and R. H. Major, *India in the Fifteenth Century* (London, 1857). Cited in Richard Pankhurst, "The "Banyan" or Indian Presence at Massawa, the Dahlak Islands and the Horn of Africa," *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, XII, no. 1, Jan 1974, 197.

revenues of the Ottoman Pasha of Massawa.[133] But a century later, according to Bruce, the islands once again fell into a state of disrepair.

In the nineteenth century, the same international market forces and commercial dynamics that made their impact on the entire Red Sea region, governed the small but potentially lucrative economy of the Dahlak islands. Commercial revival catalyzed the chain of production, trade and consumption involving a wide range of Red Sea and Indian Ocean actors. Pearl divers of African slave origins or Arabs provided the labor, Hijazi, Yemeni, Dahlaki or Massawan boat owners managed fishing crews and provided for transportation,[134] and Indian and Arab merchants financed fishing enterprises and purchased the luxurious marine products that found their way – often via Bombay – to the capitals of Europe, especially London and Paris.[135]

Around mid-century, Munzinger observed that the two main islands in the archipelago were Dahlak and Nura - both having some vegetation and whose inhabitants possessed many goats, camels and mules. The division of labor among the inhabitants represented a system by which men devoted their time and energies as boat owners and captains, fishermen, and pearl divers while women and children bred animals and took care of the household. The main marine products were pearl, mother-of-pearl, and tortoise shells– all exportable items in high demand at markets between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean.[136] The big market for pearls was Dom'ollo (Deb'ullo?) on the eastern shores of Dahlak island and dominated by Banyan traders.

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[133] Bombaci, "Il viaggio in Abissinia,", 266, 268.
[134] Salvadei, "Massaua," 1841.
[135] See remarks on Indian financing of pearling activities in William Gervase Clarence-Smith, "Indian Business Communities in the Western Indian Ocean in the Nineteenth Century," *The Indian Ocean Review*, 2 (4) December 1989, 20.

There, an annual fair took place for sale of all marine products. Banyan traders connected directly with their own networks in Luhayya, Hudayda and Aden on the Yemeni coasts before expediting pearls to Bombay. Tortoise shells were available for purchase in all the ports of the Archipelago but also in 'Aqīq and Massawa on the Red Sea African coasts and in the Yemeni ports. Catching tortoise involved an elaborate technique and required a boat crew of approximately twenty men. The shells were made of thirteen pieces, of which the heaviest were the best-valued and thus sent to India. After the boat owner got his share, the fishermen divided the remaining pieces and the one who caught the tortoise usually received the hexagonal part in recompense. Fishing of mother of pearl took place between Suez and Berbera; the fishing was carried out with 5-10 ton vessels (Ar. *sanbūq*) and small rowing canoes (Ar. *hūrī*). In mid-century the principal market for mother of pearl was in Jiddah.

Politically, Munzinger noted that every village had a hereditary chief, dependent of the Ottoman Pasha of Massawa, who paid an annual tribute of approximately 1000 thalers collected yearly by the Pasha's soldiers. [137] Following the Egyptian occupation in 1866 the office of *shaykh al-mashā'ikh* - a supreme chief for all the Dahlak chiefs – was established and based at Deb'ullo.[138]

The Italian geologist and mineralogist Arturo Issel provided valuable information on economic aspects of the Dahlak archipelago in his book *Viaggio nel Mar Rosso e tra i Bogos* published in 1872. [139] Issel described in great detail his tour in the Dahlak islands

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[136] On pearls see the handsome book by G. F. Kunz, and C.H. Stevenson, *The Book of the Pearl: The History, Art, Science and Industry of the Queen of Gems* (London, 1908). On the Red Sea area, 139-144. See also G. R. Millward, "Oysters, Pearls and Pearling in Sudan Waters," *SNR*, 27 (1946), 203-212

[137] Munzinger, *Studi sull'Africa orientale*, 79-82.

[138] Odorizzi, *Il Commissariato regionale di Massaua*, 253.

[139] See a detailed biographical note on Arturo Issel in Giuseppe Puglisi, *Chi e? dell'Eritrea* (Asmara, 1952), 172.

conducted in 1870. He noted that in Gum'eleh, on the main island of Dahlak, there were approximately twenty rectangular huts whose walls were made of stone and roof in straw. The chief of Gum'eleh was of Albanian origin, a fact that may associate the past settlement of Ottoman soldiers in key locations in the islands, just as some had mixed with the coastal population, notably in Hirgigo. Issel's account reveals that the Egyptians - administering Massawa since 1865 - attempted to exercise increasing power and control over the islands. In fact, accompanying Issel on his Dahlak tour was the port of Massawa's sanitary agent, a certain *signor* Alissafi (al-Ṣāfī?), who came to the Dahlak in order to study the prospects of establishing there a quarantine station. He informed the chief of Gum'eleh on the object of his visit and questioned him about the inhabitants of the island and their economic and commercial conditions. But the chief was vague and ambiguous in his answers, clearly unwilling to disclose much information and showing little enthusiasm at the prospects of government interference, regulation and control.

The coastal populations and the islanders, according to Issel, opposed the establishment of quarantine stations since they had a negative effect on the traffic of pilgrims to the Hijaz and on commercial activities at large, and were often the object of partial and capricious measures taken by omnipotent government officials.[140] Similarly to Massawa's close inlands, as Ottoman and Egyptian control over the town and its region became more direct and intense since mid-century, the economic integration of the islands with the town and the coast grew to some extent. A tax of 8% on all transactions – including the lucrative marine-product trade – contributed to the increase in government

[140] Arturo Issel, *Viaggio nel Mar Rosso e tra i Bogos* (Milano, 1872), 69-70; Kunz and Stevenson, *The Book of the Pearl*, 142.

control but also to the development of informal trade.[141] Even if limited in scale, the economy of the Dahlak islands gravitated increasingly towards Massawa. Issel noted that near Gum'eleh there were palm trees, plantations of dhurra, and that local people often exported small goats to Massawa.[142] The construction boom in Massawa in the late 1860s and early 1870s also intensified the relationship with the islands since much coral stone with which houses and shops were built was brought to Massawa. In 1885 Gatta reported that marine products arrived to Massawa from the islands on a daily basis.[143]

The *sanbūq* on which Issel moved from island to island in search of the pearl divers had a typically heterogeneous crew: the *nakhūda* (captain) was a native of Hijaz, three sailors were Yemeni, and two "Abyssinians" were at Issel's service.[144] Best conditions of clear and calm waters facilitating pearl diving prevailed twice a year between April and May and between September and November. Diving operations usually began after the rains; local traditions attributed the formation of the pearly secretion to the mixing of fresh with salt water and thus suggest why pearls were often called "the sky's tears."[145] After several days Issel and his *nakhūda* finally found some pearl diving activities near the island of Sarato. Issel noted that there were thirteen boats of many types; one was from the Farasan islands with a crew of about forty of which two-thirds were divers. Pearl divers, predominantly Muslim, came from various Red Sea islands from places such as Farasan, Nukhra, Dahlak, Camaran and some from the Danakil (Afar) coast: "they wear a special square turban with yellowish metallic threads,"

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[141] Issel, *Viaggio*, 79.
[142] Issel, *Viaggio*, 68.
[143] Gatta, L., "Da Massaua a Chartum per Cheren e Kassala," *BSGI*, 1885, 405.
[144] Issel, *Viaggio*, 70.
[145] Reclus, E., *The Earth and its Inhabitants: Africa*, New York 1892, 180 and Munzinger, *Studi sull'Africa orientale*, 80. Given in its Italian version: "Le lacrime del cielo."

a Swiss traveler noted at the end of the 1880s.[146] A diver's working day started at nine or ten in the morning until three in the afternoon. They dived into depths of 5-7 meters and collected the oysters that they put in a straw bag (*zambīl*) on small boats (*hūrī*). After the day's diving, on the boat's way back from the diving waters, the divers [crew] opened the oyster shells and searched for pearls. In average, a pearl was found in every 40-50 oyster shells. According to Issel, the daily production of a well-equipped boat may have been of approximately 3,500 pearl oysters and 500 mother of pearl.

Boats operating in the Dahlak archipelago either belonged to merchants from Jiddah or Massawa or belonged to the *nakhūda* who organized and commanded fishing trips. In the case of *nakhūda*-owned boats there existed a distinct and elaborate system of labor, the division of gains from production and the advancing of credit. The divers worked alternately four days for their own profit and one day for the owner. But the owner usually purchased the divers' catch relatively cheaply. Higher up the ladder, *nakhūda*s themselves received advance payments – or alternatively dhurra and rice - from Banyan merchants for financing diving trips. The merchants thus secured that the catch would be sold exclusively to them.[147] In the 1880s Alamanni noted that most divers were liberated slaves.[148] The ever-passionate Italian journalist Vico Mantegazza writing from Massawa noted that "one should see how these blacks are embarked on the *sanābīq* (Ar. sing. *sanbūq*) going out for pearl-fishing, not far from here. They are slaves in the strict sense of the word, receiving from their owner, who is the master of the boat, barely enough to keep them from dying of hunger. And they are forced to work like

[146] Buchs, "Voyages en Abyssinie," 37.
[147] A. Parazzoli, "La pesca nel Mar Rosso," *L'Esplorazione Commerciale*, vol XIII, Fasc. VI, 1898, 187 and Alamanni, *La Colonia Eritrea*, 266.
[148] Alamanni, Ibid, 267.

animals/beasts."[149] Divers were usually paid in nature with the products that they caught. Normally, the owner of the boat took one third of the catch and divided the remaining two-thirds with the sailors and divers less the cost of food consumed by them.[150] The annual fair for regional marine products took place in Debu'llo where Massawan, Banyan, Arab and Persian merchants purchased pearls. The yellowish and finely formed pearls were sent to Bombay, the white ones went to Baghdad and the imperfect pearls could find a market in other Arab [Red Sea] ports.[151] Debu'llo was conveniently situated beyond the direct reach of governments and permitted merchants to carry out lucrative transactions without being taxed and controlled.

The dynamics and volume of the marine industry and trade around the Dahlak archipelago intensified in the 1880s. One estimate put the number of boats engaged in fishing activities at 350 employing the seemingly generous estimate of 10 000 men as fishermen and divers.[152] Alamanni gave the larger figure of 450 boats of which only a minority was from Massawa. More detailed estimates put at 32 Dahlaki boats employing 600-700 fishermen and 70-80 Yemeni boats employing approximately 65 men on each (totaling roughly 5000 men). Added to these were about 200 boats belonging to the Hijazi Beduin tribe of Zobeid (Zibed) who inhabit the coast between Yanbo and Jiddah and who have their port at Rabigh. Almost all Zibeidis, the Italian report added, were mother of pearl divers.[153] Figures for the exportation of pearls are unreliable due to the

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[149] Vico Mantegazza, *Da Massaua a Saati* (Milano, 1888), 29.
[150] Alamanni, *La Colonia Eritrea*, 267.
[151] Issel, *Viaggio*, 76-81.
[152] Pippo Vigoni, "Massaua e il nord dell'Abissinia," Supplemento al Bolletino di Gennaio 1888 della Societa d'Esplorazione Commerciale in Africa, *EC*, 1888, 1; n.a., "La pesca delle perle e della madreperla nel Mar Rosso," *Bolletino della Sezione Fiorentina della Societa Africana d'Italia*, vol IV, 1888, 179. This last reference also put the number of boats at 350.
[153] ASDMAE, *AE*, pacco 16, 'Promemoria rimesso al Sig. Ammiraglio Noce (da Ferdinando Filosa)', 26 Giugno 1885.'

semi-clandestine nature of transactions. Fascinated by the 'mysterious' pearl trade at Massawa, the Swiss traveler Victor Buchs noted that one could spend months in Massawa without suspecting its existence since local fishermen carried it out secretly, away from the eyes of customs officials. He evaluated the annual exportation at 1,500,000 thalers.[154]

Comments of the same spirit came from the Italian Parazzoli who reported having seen in Bombay an impressive amount of sealed boxes coming from Massawa containing pearls of a value of 20,000 to 100,000 lire each. The Italian Consul in Bombay told Parazzoli that he was aware of great quantities of pearls coming from Eritrea to Bombay and in response to his astonishment he was mockingly told by a local trader or agent "you do not even know the products of your own country!"[155] At the beginning of the twentieth century Giovanni Salvadei gave a much higher figure of 4,000, 000 lire.[156] Estimates for mother of pearl exports are much more reliable since they passed through the regular channels of trade and were taxed. Figures between 1887 and 1892 put at roughly 500 000 kgs of mother of pearl exported annually from Massawa. Seeking to control more closely the evasive marine products and divert the Dahlak trade towards Massawa, the Italian colonial authorities abolished the 8% customs tax on mother of pearl in May 1892. This measure caused exportations to double to nearly one million kilograms in 1893. It placed Massawa as the principal market for mother of pearl in the Red Sea, providing merchants with better conditions than in Sawakin, Hudaydah or Luhayya

[154] Buchs, "Voyages en Abyssinie," 37.
[155] Parazzoli, "La pesca nel Mar Rosso," 186.
[156] Salvadei, "Massaua," 1841.

where taxes remained put, and attracted an increasing volume of transactions at the port. From Massawa mother of pearl was shipped to Trieste and London.[157]

Throughout the 1890s Italian attempts to systematize and control the remunerative marine industry were constant but not always coherent. More and more voices in commercial circles in Italy expressed the absurdity of allowing the profitable marine-product trade to be out of the reach of the colonial authorities, constituting a semi-clandestine and informal sector placed outside (beyond) the colony's economy. Instead of making profits for Italy and promoting its economic interests, these voices called, the situation allowed the foreign, Banyan merchants – who were also British subjects – to carry on their trade for their own benefit by making huge profits from the colony's natural riches. But commercial entrepreneurs did not always fall on open ears in government and colonial offices. Pippo Vigoni, the President of the *Società d'Esplorazione Commerciale in Africa* and Mayor of Milan had already attempted to promote studies of the marine economy in the Dahlak archipelago in the late 1880s but the little enthusiasm of the official colonial authorities made progress relatively slow. Things somewhat changed with the appointment of Oreste Baratieri as Governor of Eritrea in February 1892 and the subsequent abolition of the customs tax in May 1892. Baratieri had even made some steps towards the promotion of a collaboration with the Venetian society for fishing and aquiculture in making Venice a center where the mother of pearl industry could flourish.[158]

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[157] Oreste Baratieri, "Il commercio della madreperla," *L'Esplorazione Commerciale*, 1894, 372-373; P. Stefanelli, "Madreperla," *Bolletino della Sezione Fiorentina della Societa Africana d'Italia*, vol V, 1889, 158-159.

[158] Baratieri, "Il commercio della madreperla." A reproduction of Baratieri's letter to the *Società veneta per la pesca e l'acquicoltura.*

From 1894 A. Parazzoli pursued studies of the potential of the Dahlak economy with the backing and cooperation of the Chamber of Commerce in Milan. In 1898 Parazzoli published an article presenting his proposed project of establishing a company having exclusive rights – for a period of thirty years – to fish pearls and mother of pearl in Italian waters. The company would maintain a special relationship with the colonial authorities and would direct all marine products to Massawa en route for exportation to Europe. It will also exclusively employ divers and laborers who were Italian subjects and it will initiate and establish a laboratory-school for at least 50 students for developing an industry for mother of pearl products. [159]

The colonial authorities accepted Parazzoli's proposal and a monopoly on fishing was established in 1899. An agreement between the Governor of the colony and the Società A. Parazzoli gave the company a thirty-year concession for pearl fishing and the cultivation of oysters in Eritrea's waters.[160] Odorizzi noted that the new economic order had a negative and disruptive effect on the fishermen, pearl divers and sailors inhabiting the islands. In addition, in 1901 the colonial authorities abolished the function of *shaykh al-mashā'ikh* and began appointing village chiefs directly. Since the 1890s the islands have witnessed a spectacular demographic decline caused by illnesses, a very limited birth rate and migration to Massawa. On the other hand, Odorizzi had identified several groups – originally from the coastal areas of 'Aqīq, the Afar littoral (Dankalia) and Arabia – who had settled in various locations in the islands since the 1880s and 1890s.

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[159] Parazzoli, "La pesca nel Mar Rosso," 177-181, 187-190 and see comments by Vigoni, "Massaua e il nord dell'Abissinia," 1.

[160] Ferdinando Martini, *Relazione sulla Colonia Eritrea (anni 1898-1899)*, Atti parlamentari, legislatura XXI – prima sessione 1900, Camera dei Deputati (Roma, 1900). See the 20-article agreement: Doc. VII, Allegato I, 69-72. See also Odorizzi, *Il commissariato regionale di Massaua*, 253.

It is interesting and revealing to note a change in the settlement pattern on the island. While in the middle decades of the century observers recognized the village of Debullo on the eastern, sea-facing, shores of Dahlak island as the largest market and settlement in the archipelago, in the first years of the century of the 100 stone houses only half were inhabited. The shift in importance turned to settlements on the western shores, facing Massawa. While Salait and Dassoho close to the eastern shores recorded a trend of depopulation, Dahlak Kebir, Giumhelle, Kumebah, on the western shores either remained stable or received new groups of pastoralist migrants from the Eritrean coasts.

Several entrepreneurs originally from the Yemeni coasts established themselves in the Dahlak islands at the peak period of the flourishing pearl trade around the 1860s and 1870s. In the closing decades of the century they came to dominate the trade there while working within the framework of the colonial order. Many moved the base of their operations to Massawa. The most notable example, described in more detail below, was that of 'Abd al-Raḥīm al-Nahārī who began a far reaching family business in the pearl trade and whose descendants made great fortunes in Massawa and the islands. In 1910, Odorizzi noted that "a large majority" of the houses in the villages of Salait and Gium'ele were the private property of 'Alī al-Nahārī, grandson of 'Abd al-Raḥīm and one of the richest merchants in the port.[161]

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the political economy of the Dahlak archipelago had been transformed. From an economy that was largely dominated by a host of Red Sea actors predominantly from the Arabian coasts and adjacent islands in terms of labor, organization and capital, Egyptian and Italian control, regulation and systematization of its political economy gradually drew it closer to the port and the

Eritrean coasts. Neverteheless, informal commercial patterns continued to exist alongside the new order. At the end of the century, more than ever before, the Dahlak archipelago came to constitute an important of Massawa's economic 'hinterlands'.

Concluding remarks

The conjuncture of commercial intensification and tighter political and economic control by Egyptians and Italians also contributed to the expansion of informal and illegal commercial activities on and off the Massawa coasts. Contraband and the illegal smuggling of slaves were phenomena that reveal the intensity of external pressures by international market forces and imperialist powers. The sites for illegal activities were usually north and south of the coasts and around the islands, where smugglers found an ideal – even if dangerous - terrain for escaping the reach of the authorities. Already in the 1860s Egyptian reports associated Embereme, some fifteen kilometers north of Massawa, with contraband and illegal slaving activities.[162] The French traveler Denis De Rivoyre also pointed to the phenomenon of slave caravans reaching the coast north of Massawa where small boats waited for them to transport slaves to Arabia.[163] South of Massawa, around Zula, the Buri peninsula and on the northern Afar littoral, the situation was even more acute. Profit-tempted merchants in Massawa participated such activities. They were in a tight position, on the one hand cooperating with the authorities which legitimized their dominant status, but on the other, tempted by the lucrative profits that trade – of any kind – offered in this period.

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[161] Odorizzi, *Il commissariato regionale di Massaua*, 253-7. See also the census on page 258.
[162] Douin, *Histoire du règne*, 255. On illegal activities around Harat island, opposite the coastal plain between the Labka and Wekiro rivers, see Wylde, *'83 to '87 in the Sudan.*
[163] De Rivoyre, *Aux pays du Soudan*, 22.

Commercial transformation had drastic ramifications on the urban geography, spatial layout and political economy of the port and its close surroundings. Due to the spatial limitations of the island of Massawa proper, incoming migrants, entrepreneurs, peddlars, porters, laborers and brokers settled on the mainland opposite the port, in several villages that formed part of a larger urban complex, or a conurbation. The elements of the conurbation were the sites of multi-layered economic and social processes and interactions where countryside and town linked to each other.

Chapter 4
CONNECTING SEA AND LAND: MERCHANTS, MIDDLEMEN, AND ENTREPRENEURS IN A RED SEA PORT TOWN, MID-CENTURY TO THE 1890s

Trade and commercial brokerage have always been the driving force and the *raison d'être* behind the existence and operation of Massawa as a port town. Their practice influenced and shaped the organization of its society and urban spaces. Massawa was first and foremost shaped by its traders' roles as commercial middlemen and intermediaries between peoples in the African interior and the Red Sea and Indian Ocean world in long distance intercontinental commerce. This chapter explores and analyzes the distinctive composition of Massawa's mercantile communities; it examines the ways by which commercial expansion transformed it and exposes the multiple levels of mediating and brokering relationships that animated its operation, both in long-distance relationships and regional-local networks. Commercial intensification and diversification coupled with the establishment of Egyptian direct administration from the mid-1860s prompted the transformation of the port in terms of its population structure, the roles of its brokering and trading communities, and the development of its urban spaces. The result of these processes was the formation of a mercantile ecology modeled on the new commercial structures and functions of the port town.

Throughout the century, the commercial boom and the reconfiguration of port hierarchies, trading networks and the new opportunities for economic enterprise and labor in the Red Sea area, led several waves of merchants and entrepreneurs from the wider Red

Sea and Indian Ocean worlds to settle and establish themselves in Massawa.[1] Some were able to launch lucrative commercial enterprises, accumulate considerable wealth and become leading townsmen. Similarly, as a result of the changing structural relationships between Massawa and its hinterlands, a growing number of Saho, Tigre, Afar, and some Tigrinya-speaking peoples migrated into Massawa's expanded urban spaces and provided it with a variety of brokering, peddling, and labor services required by a burgeoning port town. This category of urban migrants undoubtedly constituted the majority of Massawa's population at the climax of the process of the town's growth.[2] The modernization of Massawa's urban landscape by the Egyptians in the 1870s drew to it different people from the mainland who attempted to make a living from new economic opportunities offered in the town and its *umland.* Principally pastoralists, herdsmen, small scale cultivators and fishermen were drawn to the urban conglomeration where they became petty traders, cameleers, water sellers, fruit and vegetable growers among other occupations. Many were drawn to Massawa's markets, port docks and construction sites where their labor and goods could earn them cash.

The most significant result of economic change, urban migration and growth, was the development of a number of villages on the mainland, opposite the island of Massawa. This process marked the formation of a wider economic and social urban space that may be termed as a conurbation, with Massawa as the key urban unit around which commercial life organized itself. The expansion of Massawa's urban spaces to the mainland settlements also had social ramifications. The markets, caravan stations and

[1] The term 'entrepreneur' is referred to in the Schumpeterian sense. Entrepreneur as innovator in terms of introducing new commodities, new methods of production, new markets, and a new type of commercial organization. Joseph A. Schumpeter, *The Theory of Economic Development* (Cambridge, MA, 1961), 65-6 [1st Ed. 1934].

residence spaces of the conurbation were the locus of multi-layered socioeconomic interactions between locally established traders and brokers, Arab and Banyan merchants and commercial entrepreneurs from abroad, a floating population of nomads and pastoralists who constantly drifted between town and countryside. The cyclical arrival of large parties with the caravans from the interior was also a reality that had a pivotal impact on the town's life. Earlier in the nineteenth century the arrival of particularly large caravans could double Massawa's population. These spaces were where overland and seaborne networks connected. In the outer elements of the conurbation and on its fringes, in the markets of Hirgigo, Omkullo, and Hitumlo, the social, economic and cultural dynamics involved in the process of the integration into urban-dominated commercial networks took place and could at times offer the key to "become urban" and construct one's own circle of business networks.

In demographic terms observers estimated the population of the island-port at around 1500 in the first decade of the century, 5000 in the 1850s, 8000 in the 1880s and about 16 000 for the entire Massawa conurbation at the same period. But estimates are but illustrative and difficult to determine with precision. The fragmented nature of the conurbation in geographically separate units, the presence of a floating population coming to the town's markets on a daily basis, and the seasonal arrival of large caravans render the evaluations of Massawa's population in this period tentative at best.[3]

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[2] De Cosson even qualified Massawa as the "Harbour of the shepherds" in the title of chapter 2 of his book *The Cradle of the Blue Nile*, 17.

[3] Sources for these estimates are: Henry Salt, *A Voyage to Abyssinia* (London, 1814), lxx; Munzinger, "Les contrées limitrophes," 31; Mantegazza, *Da Massaua a Saati*, 20; Ferdinando Martini, *Nell'Affrica*

Rise and Fall of the *nazīl* and *adār*: Brokers and Brokerage Institutions

The need to facilitate trade relations and mediate between peoples inhabiting different geographical and commercial spheres, practicing different cultures and religions, and speaking diverse languages, has prompted various types of brokerage institutions in world history. This was even more so in polities such as city-states or in settings where government was weak; brokers thus took on themselves some of the state's roles and functions in facilitating commercial relationships. The existence of different institutions of brokers and brokerage in the Ethiopian and Somali regions in the first half of the nineteenth century – both in ports and in inland market centers, such as Harar –has been signaled in a brief study published by Mordechai Abir in 1965.[4]

As a trade emporium situated between the northeast African interior and the worlds of the Red Sea and the western Indian Ocean Massawa owed its existence to its role in mediating between multiple commercial spheres. It has thus been at the center of several layers of brokerage relations and mechanisms: on a macro level, between the world of the sea and the port and between the port and the inlands. But owing to its particular geographic position and on a micro level, also between port and *umland*, or the outer units of the conurbation, and between these satellite villages and the specific inlands to which they were related. But brokerage was also organized along ethnic or cultural lines. Thus, for example, the Banyans served as correspondents for Indian financiers in India or in Aden while a broker of Habab origins in Hitumlo could serve as a broker to producers in the Habab region.

Italiana, (Milano, 1891), 12. For more 19th century estimates of Massawa's population see Richard Pankhurst, "Notes on the demographic history of Ethiopian towns and villages," *EO*, IX (1) 1965, 66-67.

[4] Mordechai Abir, "Brokerage and brokers in Ethiopia in the first half of the nineteenth century," *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, 3 (1) 1965, 1-5. On the Somali institutions of *abbaan* (host, patron, protector) and *dillaal*

In the middle decades of the nineteenth century, the brokerage institutions of *nazīl*[5] and/or *adār* epitomized the role and function of Massawa's mercantile community in long distance cross-regional and cross-cultural trade. It seems that the institution of *adārī* – undoubtedly a Tigre word - was commonplace in the African interior and originated there. Lejean noted that *adārīs* were used among the pastoral tribes between the Red Sea and the Nile - the Bani Amer, the Hadendoa, Bogos, and the Habab. He advised any European who was planning to come to the Barka for elephant hunting to take an *adārī* who will provide guides, accommodation and all the hunter's needs.[6]

Between the 1830s and the early 1860s several accounts describe the institutions of *nazīl* and *adār* in Massawa; institutions that were often identified by contemporary observers with the pre-eminent occupation of the Massawan traders. These traders served as agents, correspondents or brokers to Indian merchants operating in the Red Sea, to the Arab merchants of Jiddah, Cairo and the Yemeni ports, and to the Abyssinian merchants who came with their caravans to the port.[7] Merchants arriving to Massawa were required to have a broker who took care of all their practical and business affairs and activities during their stay in the port. The *nazīl* was also responsible for the safety of his guest and for negotiating between him and the *nā'ib* on the *fassas*, the passage fees, that was to be paid to *nā'ib* on his way back to the highlands.[8] Typically, a caravan merchant arrived to the jetty on Gherar peninsula, crossed to Massawa with his merchandise, reached his *nazīl*'s compound consisting of a residential area and some storing shops, and unloaded

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(commercial broker) see Lee Cassanelli, *The Shaping of Somali Society*, 156-9 and Scott Reese, 'Patricians of the Benaadir,' 90-4.

[5] *Nazīl* (pl. *nuzalā*) means in Arabic 'guest,' 'stranger,' 'lodger,' boarder,' 'tenant'. *Nāzil* means 'resident.'

[6] Lejean, *Théodore II*, 283.

[7] Abir, "Brokerage and brokers in Ethiopia," 1; Nott, "Report from acting Commander Nott of the Indian Navy, on the traffic in slaves, etc. carried on at Massowah" (1838), 32; Lefebvre, *Voyage sur la côte orientale de la mer Rouge,* 39; Munzinger, "Les contrées limitrophes," 30.

his goods in the courtyard.[9] The merchant stayed with his *nazīl* and all transactions on the island were carried through the broker, who bought part of the merchant's goods for a reduced price. It was also noted that the relationship between a merchant and his *nazīl* could sometimes last for a lifetime.[10]

> Every Abyssinian merchant (*näggade*) has in Massawa a correspondent (*nazīl*) who is his guarantor (Abyssinia having no official relationship with Turkey [sic]). He provides him with accommodation, fire, water and takes care of all his business during his stay. In return the *nazīl* receives a fee which is quite considerable on all sales and purchases. This commission, coming to 5-10% [on the value of the merchandise] is so profoundly rooted in the customs that it would be foolish to try to evade it. This is even more valid since the *nazīl*s have all the business in their hands and conduct affairs as they wish, favoring their friends.[11]

The *adarit*, or brokerage fees, varied from 5% to 20%, and was collected by both buyer and seller according to the type of merchandise.[12] Munzinger also noted that following their arrival at Massawa Abyssinian merchants hesitated before selling their goods, fearing to inundate the market and bring prices down. But after a wealthy merchant made the first sale, all the provisions of the same merchandise were sold very rapidly. Barter, according to Munzinger, was not beneficial. It was much better to have cash (in Maria-Theresa dollars) to make purchases on good terms. Only after they had sold all their goods, did the Abyssinian merchants begin buying with some of their money merchandise in the port's markets. But they took at least half of their cash gains with them on their return inland: "If the Abyssinians bring merchandise valued at 200,000 MTD, they take back with them 130,000. With the remaining 70,000 they pay for their

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[8] Abir, "Brokerage and brokers in Ethiopia," 2.
[9] D'Abbadie, *Douze ans dans la Haute-Ethiopie*, I, 7.
[10] Abir, "Brokerage and brokers in Ethiopia," 1.
[11] Munzinger, "Les contrées limitrophes," 38-9 and 44. See also Munzinger, *Studi sull'Africa orientale*, 96-7.
[12] Abir, "Brokerage and brokers in Ethiopia," 2.

purchases. About 60,000 are paid for Indian goods and about 10,000 remains for European goods." [13]

Massawan brokers were first and foremost related to one another by their common commercial goals and interests. They worked closely with the authorities, controlled the port's markets and manipulated prices, usually by creating artificial demand. Lejean wrote about the Massawan merchants as forming a very compact corpus and a "curious corporation" who conducted all their business through exchange and credit. The *adari* was also the representative of his guest to the authorities and the "corporation" [sic]. Lejean added that he "would not advise any European to attempt avoiding the broker since he would be put in quarantine by the corporation."[14]

From the mid-1860s onwards the institutions of *nazīl* and *adār* seem to have disappeared altogether from the accounts of observers, with the exception of those who – while writing their narratives – had relied on the earlier accounts of d'Abbadie, Munzinger, or Lejean. The lack of historical documentation leaves us with a void as to the precise evolution of this type of brokerage after 1865, when khedivial Egypt took control over the port. But reading subsequent documentation – from the 1870s through the end of the century – it seems almost certain that they ceased to exist under this particular form. But brokers and brokerage in other forms were certainly reformulated, especially with the emerging dominant role of the mainland villages, principally Hitumlo.

The appearance of an assertive modern-type administration in Massawa, regulating duties, fees and customs, restructuring the port's administrative bodies and

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[13] Munzinger, "Les contrées limitrophes," 39. The same principle of exchange was also reported in the mid-1880s. Gabriel Simon, *L'Ethiopie, ses moeurs, ses traditions. Voyage en Abyssinie et chez les Galla-Raias*, (Paris, 1885), 15.
[14] Lejean, *Théodore II*, 282-3.

reforming its legal institutions, removed large portions of the *nazil*'s "informal" role – significantly essential in the previous era of commercial vitality but Ottoman administrative passivity and neglect. The creation of a local council (*majlis maḥali*), the reinvigoration of the *sharī'a* court, the appointment of heads of professional guilds such as the *sarrtujjār*, or chief of merchants, transformed the relations between commercial activities and the state in Massawa from the mid-1860s onwards.[15] Furthermore, Egyptian building enterprise and the urban transformation of the Massawa conglomeration also had a profound effect on how the port connected to the mainland, and the inlands. The physical linking of Massawa-island to the mainland by two causeways and the development of its satellite villages transformed its urban geography.

The existence of these particular brokerage institutions in the first half of the century is significant in terms of the development of a corporate identity among Massawa's merchant community. These institutions were at the core of Massawa's distinctive urban experience; they exemplified the original role of its mercantile population and hold the key to understanding the foundations of their corporate identity or what Max Weber called a *zusammengehörigkeitsgefühl*, a feeling of belonging together or a sense of solidarity.[16]

Inlanders and Outlanders: an Urban Population of Composite Origins

Both the lack of detailed historical sources and the socio-cultural functions of traditions of origin make it difficult to elucidate the tortuous history of the settlement and

[15] For the various stages and measures regarding administrative and judicial change in the Egyptian period see Talhami, *Suakin and Massawa*, Chapter 5 (67-96). The *majlis maḥali* was a local court of first instance with a president and eight members. In the Egyptian Sudan it had competences in financial matters where the sum did not exceed 15 pounds. Richard Hill, *Egypt in the Sudan, 1820-1881* (London, 1959), 42-3.

population structure of Hirgigo and Massawa in earlier centuries. Over the centuries these two sites have been settled by peoples coming intermittently from both, what are today the Ethio-Eritrean and Sudanese inlands and from overseas. The analysis that follows is important in refuting any sense of alien nature attributed to Massawa. Instead, it establishes how the port's inception was deeply rooted in its particular environment on the African shores of the Red Sea.

Saho-speaking groups, originally from the Zula plain, capitalized on the proximity to the highlands and founded Hirgigo. Subsequently the village became the seat of the Balaw *nā'ib*s who established their supremacy on the coast around the fifteenth century. The composition of its population was shaped by its position and function in regional politics and trans-regional commerce. As the dominant port on the coast up to the nineteenth century and the coastal seat of the potent *nā'ib*s, it constantly absorbed newcomers from abroad and from the inland, who settled on the coast and served principally as commercial middlemen mediating between overseas and inland trading partners.

Two twentieth-century clan/family lists - one compiled by Dante Odorizzi around 1910 and the other published by a Hirgigo-born Eritrean scholar in 1994 – provide useful clues as to the structures of the heterogeneous populations in Hirgigo and Massawa.[17] As for Hirgigo, both lists confirm the numeric and sociopolitical dominance of several clusters of cognatic kin such as the Balaw 'Amir, Balaw Yūsuf Ḥasab Allāh, the Bayt Shaykh Maḥmūd and other 'Ad Zubayr-descended Saho-speaking clans as well as the

[16] See illuminating theoretical insights on 'commonality', 'connectedness', 'groupness' in Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, "Beyond 'Identity'," *Theory and Society*, 29 (2000), 19-21.
[17] See Odorizzi, *Il commissariato regionale di Massaua*, 112-115 and 159-160; Muḥammad 'Uthmān Abū Bakr, *Ta'rīkh Iritriya*, 304-311.

Bayt Tawwakal. To these are added other Saho, Tigre and Afar-speaking groups such as the presumed founders of the settlement the 'Idda, the Bayt Khalīfa, 'Ad Shaykh, Iddefir, Ankala, Minifere, Assaorta, Taora, Taro'a, 'Ad Mu'alim, Halanqa, Hazo, Meshalit, Bet Asgede, Irob, Debri Mela, among others.

To these groups - all originating in the relatively close African interior - the lists add several categories of groups claiming foreign origins: *ashrāf* families, several Tekruri and Sudanese families, as well as individual families originating in Egypt, India and the Arabian Peninsula.[18] Several families claimed descent from soldiers of the Ottoman garrison who married in the country and remained there after the end of their service. It is however possible that such as the examples provided by the Kekiya (Tur. Kāhya), Sardal, and Askar families, they too have adopted names associated with their function in the capacity of the *nā'ib*'s militias. The existence of the following family names and their associated claims of origin make clear the point: Bascnac' (from Bosnia), Kurdī (Kurdish), Shawish Berhatu (Albanian), Salòo (Turkish), Sharafay (Turkish), among others.[19]

The lists provide a similarly detailed breakdown for Massawa's population structure. Of the eighty-three families that Odorizzi lists, forty-nine claim exogenous descent from various parts of the Arabian Peninsula, Egypt, Turkey, Iran and India. The remaining thirty four trace their origins to the Ethio-Eritrean region from places such as Tambien, the Oromo-speaking areas of Ethiopia, Hamasien, the Dahlak islands, Dankalia ('Afar) and from Tigre, Afar and Saho-speaking groups such as the Mensa', the Balaw,

[18] Another example which is not included in the mentioned list is Bayt Hāshim Ramaḍān who claim that they came to Massawa/Hirgigo from Jordan. Letter from Fu'ād Makkī, 30 July 2004.
[19] Odorizzi, *Il commissariato regionale di Massaua*, 135, 159-160 and Muḥammad 'Uthmān Abū Bakr, *Ta'rīkh Iritriya*, 308.

the Assaorta, and the Hadendoa to mention but a few examples. Migrations often correlated with periods of commercial vitality in the area or responded to the need for security. The politicization of Islam in the Horn of Africa in the sixteenth century, culminating with the *jihād* of Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm al-Ghāzī (nicknamed Grañ, the 'left-handed') was a period of heightened turbulence prompting the migration of people from both inland and overseas to the port.

One of the processes that accompanied the establishment of Ottoman rule in Massawa in the sixteenth century was the arrival and settlement of officials associated with the Ottoman administration. One example is the appointment by the Ottomans of Muḥammad Aḥmad al-'Abbāsī of the Bin 'Abbās *qabīla* from Medina as the port's official *qāḍī* sometimes between the end of the sixteenth century and the early seventeenth. The 'Abāssīs have been prominent in the communal and religious affairs of the port ever since.[20]

Another process that resulted from the establishment of a Muslim power on the western littoral of the Red Sea involved an enhanced wave of migration of *sayyids* and *ashrāf* from Hadhramawt to Massawa from the sixteenth century onwards.[21] The genealogical tree of the Ḥayūtī family, known prior to the mid-nineteenth century as the al-Ḥibshī family and originally from Tarīm in Hadhramawt, points to the migration of

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[20] Interviews with Muḥammad Aḥmad 'Umar Aḥmad 'Abbāsī and Ḥāmid 'Abd al-Bāqī 'Abbāsī, Massawa, 20 March 2000. See also Ibrāhīm al-Mukhtār Aḥmad 'Umar, *al-Jāmi' li akhbār jazīrat Bāḍi'* (MS) (Asmara, 1958), 77.

[21] On Hadhrami and Yemeni migrations to the Horn of Africa see Alain Rouaud, "L'émigration yéménite," In Joseph Chelhod (ed.), *L'Arabie du Sud. Histoire et Civilisation*, Tome II (Paris, 1984), 227-237. On Hadhrami migration in general see also Robert Bertram Serjeant, "The Hadhrami Network," in Denys Lombard and Jean Aubin (eds.) *Marchands et hommes d'affaires asiatiques dans l'océan indien et la mer de Chine 13e-20e siècles* (Paris, 1988), 145-153. See also Michael N. Pearson, "The Indian Ocean and the Red Sea," in Nehemia Levtzion and Randall L. Pouwels (eds.) *The History of Islam in Africa* (London and Athens, OH., 2000), 37-59. On migrations in that period in the broader western Indian Ocean region see B. G. Martin, "Arab Migrations to East Africa in Medieval Times," *IJAHS*, 5 (1974), 367-390 and Randall Pouwels, "East Africa and the Indian Ocean to 1800," *IJAHS*, 35, No. 2-3 (2002), 385-425.

Shaykhān b. Ḥusayn b. 'Alī b. Aḥmad al-Ḥibshī from Zayla' in the Gulf of Aden to Massawa in c. 1562 (970H).[22] A third example of sixteenth-century presence on the island refers to Shaykh Adam b. Muḥammad Barkui (Burkui) (died ca. 1573), originally from the province of Tambien in Tigray and according to some sources, a descendant of one of the Prophet's companions (the *ṣaḥāba*), exiled to Abyssinia in the early seventh century. But according to other sources he was the son of a Turkish *'alīm* (scholar). All three examples refer to prominent Massawa families who, among others, have historically played a leading role in the town's economic, religious, political and communal history well into the twentieth century.

Information on traders in Massawa in the early nineteenth century - before the beginning of the commercial revival - is scanty and insubstantial. But starting in the 1830s, with the increasing number of European official and non-official travelers to the region, we have more details. In the late 1830s Combes and Tamisier attested to the mixed nature of Massawa's population being a mixture of Beduins from the Hijaz or Yemen, some Sahos from the African continent, Abyssinian Muslims and Galla (Oromo) slaves.[23] In 1841 the traveler Théophile Lefebvre noted that the population of Massawa was divided into three separate castes: the merchants, the Arnaoutes (irregular Ottoman soldiers, mostly from the Balkans) and the Sahos, who principally live on the mainland. He further added that some of the merchants were quite wealthy and had extended "their speculations up to the furthest regions of the Galla."[24] According to the Swiss Werner Munzinger, the oldest families in Massawa were those owning buildings on the island. He

[22] Pedigree (*shajarat nisb al-ashrāf*) of the Ḥayūtī family and interview with Ḥasan Muḥammad 'Uthmān Ḥayūtī and Aḥmad Muḥammad 'Uthmān Ḥayūtī, Asmara, 31 July 2001. More scattered information on the Ḥibshis is found in the Hadhrami massive genealogies by al-Mashhūr and by Bā Maṭraf (see exact references in Bibliography).

added that he could "not find families who no longer remember their immigration." The family names mentioned by him all refer to the places of their origin: 'Adulai,' 'Dankali,' 'Yemeni,' 'Hindi,' 'Mogrebi,' 'Bungasi,' 'Geddani,' 'Habeschi.'[25]

The records of the sharī'a court dating from the mid-1860s also show how family names that refer to places or ethnic origins were commonplace. The law court registers are filled with names and appellations such as Dankalī, 'Adūlāy, Diḥlī, Qashmīr, Yamanī, Jiddāwī, al-Maghribī, Ṭurkī, Sūmālī[26], al-Izmīrī, 'Irāqī and others.[27] Some evidence also attests to the presence of North African traders active in the area in the 1830s. Combes and Tamisier, two French observers in Massawa claim that they were often visited in the port by a trader named Muḥammad originally from the "côtes barbaresques."[28] As noted above, Munzinger too mentioned the 'Bungasi' and 'Mogrebi' families as old settlers in the port.[29] These pieces of information coincide with family and mosque lists that assert the presence in Hirgigo of the North African ashraf family, the 'Ad Sayyid Bruj, and a private straw hut mosque bearing the same name.[30] In Massawa, the Abū 'Ilāma family which had been associated with the office of *qāḍī* and *muftī* since the Ottoman era is also noted in several sources as being of North African origins.

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[23] Combes and Tamisier, *Voyage en Abyssinie*, I, 102.
[24] Lefebvre, *Voyage sur la côte orientale de la mer Rouge*, 38-9.
[25] Munzinger, "Les contrées limitrophes," 28.
[26] There was a community of Somalis in Baca Island, south of Massawa. In the town itself, Aḥmad Muḥammad Abū Bakr al-Sūmālī, who died in 1867 was the head of a family of some importance and wealth. See cases involving family members in regards to the division of his inheritance among his heirs, legal guardianship, slave manumission, and real estate transactions in the late 1860s and 1870s. Massawa Islamic Court Records (henceforth MICR) 11/6a (1867), 11/7a (1867), 11/7b (1867), 11/8a (1867), 11/22a (1870), 14/11c (1872), 14/11d (1872), 16/10a (1867), 16/10b (1867), 16/40b (1868), 16/108b (1875).
[27] For example MICR 16 (1866-1877): Dankalī (case 16/5a), Diḥlī (16/7a), Sūmālī (16/10b), Yamanī (16/11b, 16/65b)[According to Odorizzi's list this family is from Zabid in Yemen], Qashmīr (16/13b), 'Irāqī (16/13c), Jiddāwī (16/36c), Ṭurki (16/38c, 16/59b, 16/74a), al-Maghribī (16/57a,b), Kurdī (16/79c), al-Izmīrī (16/115a).
[28] Combes and Tamisier, *Voyage en Abyssinie*, 105.
[29] Munzinger, "Les contrées limitrophes," 28.

Evidence and local traditions point to families coming from the Eritrean inland and the islands facing the littoral as the earliest inhabitants of the island. It seems likely that this corresponds to several distinct waves of settlement in the port – between the fifteenth and early nineteenth centuries - prompted by conflict and periods of commercial revival. Several accounts about the foundation of Massawa have been recorded, some of which have little solid foundations. One theory found both in nineteenth century literary sources and oral traditions collected in the 1970s, argues that the Masawa family, *sayyids* originally from Hadramawt, has been the first on the island, giving the town its name. According to this tradition *qāḍī* Muḥammad Masāwa b. Aḥmad al-'Alawī, in office in the early nineteenth century, became so famous that people coming from the entire region related that "they had gone to Masāwa."[31]

According to other traditions collected in the early twentieth century, a certain Shaykh Adam was the first to move his house from the Dahlak islands to Massawa. He was followed by a family from the island of Doḥul, the ancestors of the Bayt Doḥul family. Subsequently, other families emigrated from the Arabian coast (Bayt 'Abbāsī, Bayt Bā 'Alawī, Bayt Khīrī) and from Semhar (Bayt Ḥilū), from Hirgigo (Bayt Ḥāmdūy), from the 'Ad Tsaura group (Bayt al-Nātī), from the Afar coast, or Dankalia (Bayt 'Adūlāy), and from the Balaw groups (Bayt Mantay and Bayt Shīnītī [also 'Shineti']).[32]

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[30] Muḥammad 'Uthmān Abū Bakr, *Ta'rīkh Iritriya*, 307 and Odorizzi, *Il commissariato regionale di Massaua*, 161.

[31] Pennazzi, "Massauah," 325. Also Abdu Ali Habib, "History of Massawa," ii. This thesis is, undoubtedly, imprecise since the town was referred to by different variants of the name 'Massawa' (Maçua, Massowah, Massouah, Maṣawwa', etc.) much earlier. It must be noted that the *qāḍī*'s name is spelt differently, with an Arabic 'sīn' and not with a 'ṣād'; the second alīf is a long vowel. The Masāwa family is well known in Massawa. One of the town's old mosques (not in function at present) is called *masjad* Masāwa. It is located behind the Ḥanafī mosque. See other theories on the origin of the name Massawa in Emery Van Donzel, "Maṣawwa'," *Encyclopedia of Islam* (EI2), Vol VI: 641.

[32] Salvadei, "Massaua," 1817. See also Odorizzi, *Il commissariato regionale di Massaua*, 112.

These traditions concur, to some extent, with family traditions. The Mantay and 'Adūlāy families consider their own ancestors as the first inhabitants of Massawa. The Mantays claim to be originally of the Hedareb in western Eritrea and the 'Adūlāys are from the Zula region, or in its ancient appellation, Adulis. The 'Adūlāys were indeed part of the town elite already in the eighteenth century.[33] The example of the Mantays and Adulais as prominent urban families in Massawa is significant to the broader argument of this work. It demonstrates how throughout the port's history people originally from the interior were among the port's most prominent citizens. This runs counter to the perception of Massawa as an 'alien' and 'foreign' outpost' anomalously located at its place.

The Mantays were linked in marriage to the Balaw Bayt Ḥassab Allāh (known also as Balaw Yūsuf) since at least the mid-nineteenth century.[34] In the 1830s and 1840s the Mantay family seems to have held some particular prominence in trade. In 1838 Commander Nott of the Indian Navy remarked that Moosa Maffairah [Mantay] was the principal banker and merchant at Massawa, taking in 15,000 dollars worth of gum every year, which was more than half of what was on the market.[35] He was wealthy to the point that when the dues collected at Massawa were insufficient to cover the administration's expenses, it would borrow money from him.[36] In the 1860s, Sa'īd Muffaraḥ Mantay and

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[33] In September 1769 James Bruce sought the services of a certain Mahomet Adulai who was, according to the Scottish traveler "a person kept by Ras Michael as a spy upon the Naybe, and in the same character by Metical Aga." James Bruce, *Travels to discover the source of the Nile*, (selected and edited with an introd. by C. F. Beckingham) (Edinburgh, 1964 [1st ed. 1790]), 23-4.

[34] Interview with Ibrāhīm Ḥusayn Mantay, Massawa, 7 May 2000. Odorizzi's family list associates the Mantays with 'Hadendoa' origins.

[35] From data drawn from the records it seems almost positive to conclude that 'Moosa Maffarah' was of the Mantay family. In MICR 9/25a (23 Jumāda I 1296/1879) Ḥalīl b. Mūsa b. Muffaraḥ Mantay is mentioned as the seller of a water cistern to shaykh Muḥammad b. al-*Ḥājj* 'Abdu b. Aḥmad Ḥammūda.

[36] Nott, "Report from acting Commander Nott," 34. Around 1840 Antoine D'Abbadie too mentioned the Mantays as dominant in trade. The same 'Moosa Maffarah' was said to be one of the four principal boat

'Abd Allāh Ḥalīl Mantay were both noted as prominent notables of Massawa, the first served as the chief of merchants while the second was an advisor to the law court.[37] Members of the Mantay family appear abundantly in the records of Massawa's Islamic court, both as parties in cases and as *wakīl*s (legal representant) or witnesses. In a register covering real estate transactions in the port between 1866 and 1877 the Mantays appear in 29 cases, outnumbered only by the wealthy Hadhrami, *Sayyid* 'Abd Allāh b. 'Umar b. Sa'id Bā Junayd.[38]

Notwithstanding the complexity of their social realities, the populations of Hirgigo and Massawa were composed of families and clans originating both in the interior and from across the seas, emigrating intermittently in periods of commercial opportunities and security. Throughout the Ottoman period merchants, entrepreneurs and brokers from abroad and from the inland settled in Massawa and in Hirgigo, primarily from abroad in the former while in greater numbers from the land in the latter. The centuries-long dominance of the Balaw *nā'ib*s and their associates – for example the Bayt Shaykh Maḥmūd – placed them in a position of prominence in these two settlements. Balaw families connected in kinship ties with the *nā'ib*s and Bayt Shaykh Maḥmūd families were among the leading families in Hirgigo and on the island (eg. Shīnītī, Danbar, Ḥassab Allāh and Faras, Sirāj and Khaydara families). Together with other Tigre, Afar and Saho-speaking families of prominence, wealth and prestige, they constituted what may be termed as the coastal urban patricians and were often interconnected in marriage ties.

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owners in Massawa and Aḥmad 'Anja 'Umar Mantay was considered as one of the town's wealthiest merchants. D'Abbadie, *Les causes actuelles de l'esclavage en Ethiopie*, 19-20.

[37] Odorizzi, *Il commissariato regionale di Massaua*, 145.

[38] MICR Vol. 16 (1866-1877). 16/1a, 16/5b, 16/6a, 16/7a, 16/7b, 16/8b, 16/12c, 16/13a, 16/18a, 16/33c, 16/43a, 16/45a, 16/61c, 16/67a, 16/71a, 16/73a, 16/73b, 16/76a, 16/77b, 16/78a, 16/78b, 16/78c, 16/83a, 16/84b, 16/98a, 16/100b, 16/112b, 16/113a, 16/116c. The Bā Junayd family was originally from Daw'an.

To Massawa from Across the Seas: Hadhrami, Yemeni and Egyptian Commercial Entrepreneurs, 1850s-1890s

One of the outcomes of the commercial revival in the area, the introduction of the steamer, the rearrangement of port hierarchies and commercial spheres, and the Egyptian takeover was the reconfiguration of Red Sea networks. In Massawa this process involved the settlement of mostly Hadhrami, Egyptian, Yemeni and Banyan merchants and entrepreneurs who joined an existing structure of networks and had to adjust to a new, modern Red Sea commercial system.

In regional terms the advent of Egyptian hegemony transformed and reshaped the Red Sea area as a socioeconomic space. During this period Egypt was itself drawn into the European economic system, a process that deeply marked the expanding economic and commercial dynamics in the territories and waterways under its control. As a result, from the 1830s onwards an enhanced process of progressive linkage of the Red Sea with the Indian Ocean world was taking place and, following the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, with the Mediterranean region. Merchants, financiers, sailors, laborers, career officers, pilgrims, slaves, and a variety of commodities crossed the seas from port to port and from coast to coast more dynamically in an expansive commercial system. Commercial entrepreneurs settled in the developing Red Sea ports and established systems of family-business networks - mainly serving as some type of middlemen - ranging from the Indian sub-continent to the eastern Mediterranean. These socio-commercial webs facilitated the movement of people and commodities.

They left Eritrea in the colonial period and settled in Aden. See also Serjeant, "The Hadhrami Network," 151.

The 'new wave' of entrepreneurs and merchants settling in Massawa reflected the changing structure of Red Sea commerce. Notable examples of commercial entrepreneurs include the settlement of Muḥammad Sālim Bā Ṭūq (c.1843-1935) and 'Abd Allāh *Bey* al-Ghūl. Both became Massawa's wealthiest and leading merchants by the end of the century and both headed lineages that were among the top half-dozen most prominent families in Massawa from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century. They were examples of merchants and entrepreneurs who were succesful in adjusting to new political and economic configurations under Egyptians and Italians (c.1860s-1940s). They ventured in trade, they provided transportation (owning and operating boats across the Red Sea), and in the early twentieth-century they launched agricultural enterprises from Zula, to Dog'ali, to Weqiro in the coastal strip. All in all, the most successful of these merchant-entrepreneurs contributed significantly to the economic development of the region between the 1860s-1870s and throughout the Italian colonial period in Eritrea.[39]

Muḥammad Sālim was born in Jiddah to a Hadhrami father and an Egyptian mother. In Jiddah they were known as Bā Ṭūq al-'Amūdī. He settled in Massawa in the mid-1850s and traded in textiles and cloth from a very young age. In Massawa he married Zaynab, the daughter of 'Abd al-Nabī al-Qābūlī, who came from the Persian or Afghani region and settled in Massawa with his father in the 1860s. The Qābūlis were themselves merchants in coffee, butter and other commodities and 'Abd al-Nabī was able to accumulate much wealth from his business and become one of the town's notables. At

[39] See a recent article revealing patterns among prominent Middle-Eastern *tujjār* (merchants). Gad Gilbar, 'The Muslim Big Merchant-Entrepreneurs of the Middle East, 1860-1914', University of Haifa, 2001, 38p. (Published in *Welt des Islams*, 43 (1) 2003, 1-36).

the end of the century he was noted as an important importer of glass beads, pottery and chinaware.[40]

With time, Muḥammad Sālim made a fortune as a textile merchant and became one of Massawa's most influential and respected notables. He also traded in coffee and cereals with Ethiopia, and in 1908 he obtained an agricultural concession of 906 hectares near Weqiro. In 1915 he purchased twenty *sanābīq* and provided an organized and regularized transportation service for pilgrims crossing from Massawa to Jiddah on their way to Mecca. The service was reccommended by the Italian and Hijazi authorities; it operated until 1935. Muḥammad Sālim also constructed approximately forty buildings in Massawa and sixty in Asmara. The Italians awarded him several honorific titles. From 1908 he was the president of the *waqf* committee for Eritrea. He died in Massawa October 2, 1935.[41]

The other example was that of 'Abd Allāh *Bey* al-Ghūl ('Abd Allāh b. Aḥmad. b. Yūsuf al-Ghūl), an Egyptian who came to Massawa, probably in the late 1850s or early 1860s.[42] The al-Ghūls were originally peasants in Minsha'at al-Bakr (Baḥr?) in the Egyptian Delta, before moving to Port Said. From there, 'Abd Allāh al-Ghūl moved, via Jiddah, to Massawa where he served the Egyptian army and received the title of *Bey*.[43] From 1867, when service to Massawa began, he became the Khedivial 'Azīzīyeh shipping company's (est. 1863) agent in the port. Following the withdrawal of the Egyptians in 1885, 'Abd Allāh stayed in Massawa and became one of the richest

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[40] Ferdinando Martini, *Il diario eritreo* (Firenze, 1947), I, 51 (Massaua, 7 February 1898)

[41] ASDMAE, *AE*, b. 178, 'Notabili e Capi Indigeni Dipendenti dal Commissariato Regionale di Massaua' (1903), 3, 5; Interview with Muḥammad Yāsīn Bā Tūq, Massawa, 17 March 2000. Giuseppe Puglisi, *Chi e? dell'Eritrea* (Asmara, 1952), 210.

[42] A certain 'Abd Allāh *Afāndi* is mentionned as an important trader in Massawa in c. 1864-5. Lejean, *Théodore II*, 284. It is very probable that he is the very well known 'Abd Allāh *Afandī* al-Ghūl.

merchants in the port, trading in a wide variety of lucrative commodities (especially textiles), owning boats, constructing and owning residential buildings, shops and land. Together with Muḥammad Sālim Bā Ṭūq, he supplied the Italian troops in Massawa with imported bovine and colonial products. 'Abd Allāh served as the president of the *majlis maḥali* ('Local Council') and was an influential urban notable who was regularly consulted by the colonial authorities on local affairs.[44] In 1887 the Italian journalist Vico Mantegazza qualified him as the "Torlonia of this country" owning the largest and most luxurious house in town. 'Abd Allāh even proposed to Mantegazza to establish and fund a bi-lingual Arabic-Italian newspaper in the port town - a project that never saw the light of day.[45]

Muḥammad Sālim Bā Ṭūq (also spelt 'Batok' or 'Batoc' in Italian sources) and 'Abd Allāh *Bey* al-Ghūl were examples of entrepreneurs who came to Massawa with relatively modest means and were both able to, first and foremost, capitalize on the commercial boom that Massawa was living through from the 1850s onwards, but also on connections with the Egyptian authorities. Through their accumulated wealth and a cultivated religious prestige they were able to join the upper echelons of the town's social structures and become leading and influential members of the community and its institutions. They contributed to the recomposition of the mercantile community and strongly influenced its socio-cultural dynamics and configuration. Their eldest sons, Maḥmūd Muḥammad Bā Ṭūq and Aḥmad *Afandī* al-Ghūl (b. 1854 in Jiddah (?), d. 1919)

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[43] *Bey* (Tur.), *Bik* (Ar.) is a civili and military title immediately below that of *Pasha*. Hill, *A Biographical Dictionary*, x.
[44] Interview with 'Alī Yūsuf al-Ghūl, Massawa, 26 February 2000; Puglisi, *Chi e?*, 2.
[45] Mantegazza, *Da Massaua a Saati*, 92-93. Mantegazza estimated 'Abd Allāh al-Ghūl's age at seventy in 1887. He also reported that 'Abd Allāh had lived several years in Cairo.

accumulated more wealth than they did and were able to adapt to Italian rule and profit from their positions of influence and commercial networks. They owned much property in buildings, shops and boats and were influential members of the town's secular and religious institutions. Muḥammad Sālim was noted as a "very pious" man in town.[46]

Following the Egyptian occupation of Sawakin and Massawa in 1865 and the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 maritime traffic had increased spectacularly – a process that led to the reconfiguration of Red Sea ports.[47] The Egyptian authorities in Massawa made considerable efforts to improve its harbor, modernize the town and encourage commerce.[48] From the 1860s through the 1880s a wave of Egyptian and Hadhrami commercial entrepreneurs settled in the port. Just as 'Abd Allāh *Bey* al-Ghūl's life and business trajectory was identified with the Egyptian enterprise at Massawa, other Egyptians too settled in the port. As others who were initially at the service of the Egyptian administration, Ibrāhīm Hilāl, was the chief scribe for contracts in Massawa before deciding to remain and settle in the port to devote himself to commerce.[49] Other families of Egyptian origins, some related in kinship ties, are Bayt Ḥanbūlī, Bayt Saqīra,

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In the second half of the eighteenth century Giovanni Raimondo Torlonia, son of a French cloth merchant, founded his bank, which during the French occupation of Rome at the beginning of the nineteenth century grew in importance and made the Torlonia one of the wealthiest families of Rome.

[46] Martini, *Il diario eritreo*, I, 51 (7 February 1898). Ḥamīda, one of Muḥammad Sālim Bā Ṭūq's daughters, was also known for her piety. She was the first to endow some of her properties in real-estate to the *ma'had al-dīni al-islāmi* (the Islamic religious institute) of Massawa in 1948. Ibrāhīm al-Mukhtār Aḥmad 'Umar, *al-Jāmi' li akhbār jazīrat Bāḍi'*, 55-6. The *ma'had* was built by Aḥmad 'Abd al-Raḥmān Hilāl.

[47] Colette Dubois, "Changements dans la continuite ou dans la rupture. Les implantations portuaires egyptiennes et europeenes en mer Rouge, dans la deuxieme moitie di XIXe siècle," In Abdeljelil Temimi (ed.), *Les Villes Arabes, la Démographie Historique et la Mer Rouge à l'Epoque Ottomane, Actes du Ve symposium Interational d'Etudes Ottomanes*, Ceromdi - Zaghouan (Tunisia) 1994, 43-65 [also published in the *Arab Historical Review for Ottoman Studies*, 9-10 (1994)] and Dubois, "The Red Sea Ports During the Revolution in Transportation, 1800-1914," 58-74.

[48] On Egyptian efforts at the development of Massawa under Khedive Ismā'īl (1863-1879), see Talhami, *Suakin amd Massawa*, Especially chapter 6 (97-124); Talhami, "Massawa under Khedive Ismail, 1865-1879," In Robert Hess (ed.) *Proceedings of the Fifth Int. Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, (Chicago, 1979), 481-493. See also Pankhurst, *History of Ethiopian Towns. From the Mid- Nineteenth Century to 1935*, 135-138.

Bayt 'Antablī, Bayt Sanūsi and possibly one of probably two Ḥamdān households in Massawa.[50]

Hadhramis have been in Massawa for centuries. But their numbers increased throughout the nineteenth century. In 1858 an India Office report noted that there were 23 Hadhrami merchants established in Massawa.[51] In 1865, an Egyptian report remarked that the wholesale (retail) trade was in the hands of several Hadhrami and Banyan traders.[52] One court register recording real estate transactions between 1866 and 1877 mentions the presence of several Hadramis in the port, many of whom claimed *ashrāf* descent: Bā 'Alawī, Ṣāfī, Hāshim, Bā Ḥamdūn, Bā Mushmūsh, Bā Zar'a, 'Aydarūs.[53]

During the 1880s and even more so after 1885 and the Italian occupation, many Yemeni laborers and entrepreneurs came to Massawa.[54] Examples of Hadhrami migrants who stayed and suceeded include 'Ubayd Bā Zaḥam who arrived to Massawa from Hadhramaut in 1870.[55] Another example was shaykh Ḥasan Bā Mushmūsh, in Massawa

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[49] ASDMAE, *AE*, b.16, 'Stato degli impiegati esistenti negli uffici del Governo Egiziano in Massaua' (1885).

[50] Muḥammad 'Uthmān Abū Bakr, *Ta'rīkh Iritriya*, 296. Interview with 'Alī Yūsuf al-Ghūl, Massawa, 26 February 2000. According to this informant the Bayt Sanūsi [al-Ghūl] and Bayt Sakīra were in fact sections of the al-Ghūl family.

[51] Janet Ewald and William Gervase Clarence-Smith, "The Economic Role of the Hadhrami Diaspora in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, 1820s to 1930s," in Freitag and Clarence-Smith (eds.) *Hadhrami Traders, Scholars and Statesmen*, 284.

[52] Douin, *Histoire du règne*, III (1), 257.

[53] MICR Vol. 16 (1866-1877) 'Aydarūs: 16/21b, Bā 'Alawī: 16/20a, 16/20b, 16/21b, 16/21c, 16/22a, 16/47b, 16/79a, Bā Ḥamdūn: 16/12b, 16/110a, 16/116b, Bā Junayd: 16/40b, 16/41a, 16/41b, 16/42a, 16/42b, 16/43a, 16/43b, 16/43c, 16/53b, 16/58a, 16/58b, 16/64a, 16/67b, 16/69c, 16/70a, 16/70b, 16/70c, 16/71b, 16/77a, 16/80a, 16/82b, 16/85b, 16/95a, 16/100a, 16/103a, 16/103b, 16/107a, 16/107c, 16/109b, 16/117b, Bā Mushmūsh: 16/5a, 16/11b, 16/36a, Bā Zar'a: 16/34a, 16/59c, Hāshim: 16/4b, 16/12a, 16/25b, 16/30c, 16/82a, 16/104a, Ṣāfī: 16/51b, 16/52a, 16/53a, 16/62b, 16/73c, 16/82b, 16/83a, 16/89b, 16/93a, 16/99a, 16/106b, 16/111b. The Bā 'Alawī and 'Aydarūs lineages, for example, attained prominent political and/or economic status in other regions of the Indian Ocean. See both names in the index of Ulrike Freitag and W. G. Clarence-Smith (eds.) *Hadhrami Traders, Scholars and Statesmen*, 368-370. I might be mistaken in considering the Hāshims as Haḍramis. Some sources assert that they are from the Hijaz (Mecca and environs). Letter from Fu'ād Makki, 30 July 2004.

[54] ASDMAE, *AE*, b. 210, 'From Gov. Civile e Militare della Col. Eritrea (Dogana, Massaua) to Sig. Capo dell'Ufficio affari Civili (Massaua), 'Gestione facchinaggio durante l'anno 1894', 15 Gennaio 1895.

[55] Puglisi, *Chi e?*, 223.

at least since the 1860s. Real estate transactions recorded in the Islamic court show that shaykh Ḥasan Bā Mushmūsh bought a parcel of land, a shop and a residential house in 1867-68.[56] His son 'Abd Allāh Ḥasan Bā Mushmūsh arranged for his family to join him in Massawa in 1889.[57] 'Abd Allāh Ḥasan's son, Ḥusayn 'Abd Allāh, born in al-Qarn in Hadhramaut, crossed to Massawa with his ten brothers when he was thirteen years old.[58] This example suggests that some Hadhrami traders moved to Massawa on their own and maintained close social and kinship links – and certainly commercial interests - in Hadhramawt. Some, after reaching a certain degree of security in their business, may have decided to move permanently to Massawa and bring with them their family from Hadhramawt.[59]

Others Hadhramis, on the other hand, arrived alone at a very early age as 'Ubayd Aḥmad Bā Ḥubayshī (1871-1934) who was born in Daw'an in Hadramaut and arrived to Massawa on a *sanbūq* in 1886 at the age of fifteen. 'Ubayd Aḥmad started his business in 'Edaqa Ba'rai, on the mainland opposite Massawa, as a modest vendor of tobacco for chewing and spices. He dug a water well near Amatere, on the way to Gurgusum, which stands there to this day and is called *jat* 'Ubayd (Ar. "'Ubayd's well"). He married a Christian woman named Nebiyat from Mendefera in the highlands, who converted to Islam and was renamed Fāṭma Adam.[60] 'Ubayd Aḥmad accumulated much wealth and

[56] MICR 16/5a (1284), 16/11b (14 Rabī' I 1285) and 16/36a (13 Jumāda II 1285).
[57] MICR 8/72a (15 Ṣafar 1301). This case, from 1884, records the purchase of a shop in Massawa by 'Abd Allāh and Muḥammad, sons of shaykh Ḥasan Bā Mushmūsh.
[58] Puglisi, *Chi e?* 165. On page 162 Puglisi includes an entry of another member of the family, Ḥasan 'Abd Allāh Bā Mushmūsh (spelt here by Puglisi as 'Bamismus'), who was born in Daw'an in 1874 and came to Massawa in 1890.
[59] On various patterns of Hadhrami migration to East Africa see Françoise Le Guennec-Coppens, " Changing Patterns of Hadhrami Migration and Social Integration in East Africa," in Freitag and Clarence-Smith (eds.), *Hadhrami Traders, Scholars, and Statesmen,* 157-174.
[60] They had eight children together: five boys and three girls. According to the family tree of the Bā Ḥubayshis, the eight children engendered not less than 82 children!

invested in real-estate property. Informants in Massawa discussed his business career as the epitome of one who made it 'from rags to riches', from peddlar to real estate magnate and one of Massawa's most prominent citizens. 'Ubayd Aḥmad's first born son, Aḥmad 'Ubayd, was born in 1900 and had 21 children from six different wives. [61]

Commercial, navigational and labor arrangements in the southern Red Sea region also led to the movement of entrepreneurs, agents, boat captains (Ar. *nakhūda*), boat-builders, sailors and slaves from one shore to another and to the islands between them. In this way, regional economic spheres could overlap through patterns of economic exploitation and labor exchange.[62] In the nineteenth century this process involved many Yemenis and other entrepreneurs from the Peninsula crossing to the African coast and its islands in search of economic opportunities – in this period, mainly in the pearl, mother-of-pearl and fishing sectors.[63] Many stayed only for the fishing season in the Dahlak waters and then returned. But family histories and early colonial data confirm the establishment of several such entrepreneurs from Luhayya and Hudaydah in Massawa in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. The ancestors of Bayt *Sayyid* Aḥmad Sharīf, Bayt Muḥajjab, Bayt Miḥrī and Bayt 'Abd Allāh Ridèni are all originally from Luhayya. The Bayt Bānibālla, Bayt Khaydara, Bayt Kḥayl, Bayt 'Izzī Aḥmad and the

[61] After Asmara became the colonial capital at the turn of the century, Aḥmad 'Ubayd and some of his brothers moved to Asmara to expand their trade and opened import/export offices. He was a wealthy merchant and owner of property in real estate in Massawa and Asmara who funded schools in Eritrea during the 1940s, most notably the Arabic Community School (*al-madrasa al-jālīyya*) in Asmara. He served from 1951 until his death in 1959 as President of the Arab community in Asmara. Interviews with Anīs 'Ubayd Bā Ḥubayshī and Aḥmad Muḥammad Bā Ḥubayshī, Asmara, 10 March 2000; Puglisi, Op. Cit., 8, 223, 290; Jonathan Miran, "Aḥmad 'Ubayd Bā Ḥubayshī," *EA*, Vol. 1, 161. Today the Bā Ḥubayshīs claim that the family ("a real *qabīla*," in their words) consists of several hundred members (c. 500-700) scattered around the globe in Germany, New York City, Cairo, Jiddah, Yemen, Eritrea and other places.

[62] A conceptually fascinating treatment of labor in the wider region is offered in Janet Ewald, "Crossers of the Sea: Slaves, Freedmen, and Other Migrants in the Northwestern Indian Ocean, c. 1750-1914," *American Historical Review*, 105 (2000), 69-91.

[63] But the movement included also sailors and fishermen from the African coasts, mainly Afaris, working on the Yemeni littorals. See for example Odorizzi, "La Dancalia italiana del nord," 171.

Bayt Nahārī came to Massawa from Hudaydah.[64] In the case of the Sharīf, Nahārī and Khayl families the ancestors who moved to Massawa were mainly involved in marine activities often owning one or more *sanbūqs* and making their wealth in Massawa.[65] They capitalized on connections with the Yemeni coasts and built new ties and networks in Massawa and the Dahlak islands, through marriage with locally powerful families, business relationships and religious prestige.

The most notable example was 'Abd al-Raḥīm al-Nahārī who settled in the small village of Gim'ille on Daḥlak al-Kabīr island around mid-century and was able to accumulate some wealth in the mother-of-pearl and pearl business before moving to Massawa where he became a *qāḍī* and one of the town's most respected notables (See family tree in Appendix 12). He married Fāṭima 'Umar Danbar, who was of the Balaw Yūsuf group and whose family was known to be pious and respected thanks to its high religious status. 'Abd al-Raḥīm al-Nahārī's son, 'Abd al-Raḥmān (d. 1870), left an estate of pearls, money, boats, animals, and various goods, valued at a total of not less than 120,000 Maria Theresa Thalers.[66] 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Nahārī's son 'Alī, had attained even greater wealth. He owned a large number of *sanbūqs*, was a landlord and continued, as his father and grandfather, to prosper in the pearl business trading directly with Europe and making a particularly large fortune under Italian colonial rule. In 1906 Governor Martini noted in his diary that ['Alī] Nahārī was, together with him, on board the "Vespucci" ship heading towards Europe accompanying an agent of the Paris-based Rosenthal trading house who had spent three months in Massawa, buying pearls for

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[64] Odorizzi, *Il commissariato regionale di Massaua*, 115. See also a very similar, but not exactly, list in Muḥammad 'Uthmān Abū Bakr, *Ta'rīkh Iritriya*, 294-297.
[65] Interview with *Sayyid* Ibrāhīm 'Abd Allāh Sharīf, Massawa, 2 March 2000.

hundreds of thousand Italian Lire. Whether Nahārī headed to Europe or had disembarked in one of the Arab ports on the way is unknown.[67]

Also connected to the lucrative marine commercial activities of the Dahlak islands, members of the Ṣurī family claim origins from the Omani town of Ṣūr where they belonged to the al-Ṭāhirī *qabīla*. 'Alī Sa'īd (d.1943 at ca. 80 years of age) came with his *sanbūq* to the Dahlak around the 1880s, settled in Deb'ullo and sailed from the islands to Oman and back, trading pearls and a variety of sea shells, throughout his life. With the years after he permanently settled in Deb'ullo, married 'Aisha, the daughter of the Yemeni 'Abdu Kḥayl, he added Ṣūrī, a reference to his town of origin, to his name, becoming his family name. Following 'Alī Sa'īd's death in 1943 the entire family moved to Massawa.[68]

Descendants of the Wahhāb al-Bārrī family in Massawa relate the fascinating story of their family reflecting the tortuous political, religious and social history of the second half of the nineteenth century in the wider region. It also illustrates and suggests aspects of the process of "becoming Massawan" (see Chapter 5). The family traces its origins to a Saho-speaking Irob clan from the region of Sen'afe in Akkälä Guzay. Originally Muslim, their great grandfather 'Abd Allāh was forced to convert to Christianity in the period of Emperor Yohannes (1872-1889).[69] 'Abd Allāh's son, 'Abdu

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[66] Massawa Council Records (henceforth MCR), Register of Sentences/Judgements. [*daftar li qayd al mudhābiṭ al muḥarrara min majlis Maṣawa' (1882)*], p 1. Sentence given on 25 Shawwāl 1299 (14 June 1882).

[67] Martini, *Il diario eritreo*, IV, 585, (on board the "Vespucci," 11 September 1906). Another source notes that the Italian authorities borrowed funds from 'Alī al-Nahārī (apparently in 1928) and on payment of the debt, the family invested it in Paris in real-estate property and placed it in banks. Puglisi, *Chi e?*, 11. Interview with Maryam 'Umar al-Nahāri, Asmara, 26 March 2000 and additional details by *Sayyid* Ḥasan Muḥammad 'Uthmān Hayūtī from Asmara.

[68] Interviews with 'Ādil Muḥammad Sa'īd Ṣūrī al-Ṭāhirī, Massawa, 22 March 2000 and 'Abdu 'Alī Sa'īd Ṣūrī al-Ṭāhirī, Massawa, 27 April 2000.

[69] On religion and society in Ethiopia in the era of emperor Yohannes IV see Richard Caulk, "Religion and State in nineteenth century Ethiopia," *JES*, 10 (1) 1972, 23-42.

Qismo Shum Aranish also converted to Christianity and was rebaptised Mesghenna Wolde Maryam. Attempting to escape from the state of disorder and oppression in northern Ethiopia, the father and his son migrated to the Dahlak islands, settled in Dum'ulo where the father worked for a Yemeni named 'Abdu Khayl in the lucrative extraction and trade of marine products. Both soon reconverted to Islam and the son appropriated the name of his father's employer, 'Abdu Khayl.[70] Later, he became a pious and learned Muslim, a qur'ānic teacher and moved to Massawa to become *imām* of the Shaykh Ḥammāl al-Anṣāri mosque and a respected Muslim notable in the community.[71]

Hindus and Muslims from Gujarat: Merchants, Agents, and Artisans.

> In this country the Banyan is the ant; the European is often the cicada [grasshopper]. (Saint-Yves, 1899)[72]

Trade and other connections and forms of exchange between the northwestern littoral of the Indian subcontinent – on the present coasts of India and Pakistan - and the Horn of Africa has been recorded since earliest times, attesting to the historical unity of the Indian Ocean as an economic space. Evidence to the pivotal position of both Muslim and Hindu merchants – primarily from Gujarat- in the economic and commercial history of Massawa, extends back to the sixteenth-century, at least. The historian Richard Pankhurst has written detailed studies, based on the tapping of an extensive range of

[70] The phenomenon of name appropriation is signalled, for example, in 18th century Nablus (Palestine). See Beshara Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine: Merchants and Peasants in Jabal Nablus, 1700-1900*, (Berkeley, 1995), 64.
[71] Interviews with Jamal Wahhāb al-Bārrī, Asmara, 11 March 2000 and 'Umar Wahhāb al-Bārrī, Massawa, 17 March 2000.
[72] G. Saint-Yves, "A travers l'Erythrée italienne," *BSGM*, v. 23 (1899), 142.

travelers' accounts and archival sources, on the history of Indian trade with the Horn of Africa and on Indian mercantile communities in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden ports.[73]

This section aims to reappraise critically and contextualize some of the information presented by Pankhurst - in addition to limited new historical evidence – as viewed from the specific angle of inquiry central to the broader framework of this study on Massawa's nineteenth-century social history. My underlying suggestion is that even though the role and position of Indian traders in the large-scale international commerce of the port was paramount, their graphically 'exotic' depiction in nineteenth-century literature and their quasi identification with the totality of the port's economic activities has been somewhat overstated. As a small but culturally and socially distinct trade diaspora the Banyans attracted much attention.[74] In addition, the absence of any distinction between Hindu and Muslim traders also overshadows the very different social realities of individuals, families and communities from the Indian subcontinent and the ways by which they connected to Massawa.

As far back as the end of the sixteenth century, Jesuit missionaries reported the existence of a commercially preeminent, even if numerically small, mercantile community of Indians at Massawa. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries these merchants traded Indian goods, mainly a wide variety of Indian textiles, for ivory, civet, gold, pearls, tortoise shells, myrrh, frankincense and a host of other products from the

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[73] Pankhurst, "The 'Banyan' or Indian presence at Massawa," 185-212; Pankhurst, "Indian Trade with Ethiopia, the Gulf of Aden and the Horn of Africa in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth centuries," *CEA*, 14 (55) 1974, 453-497; idem, "La presenza e il declino dei Baniani a Massaua e Dahlac," *Sestante* 8 (1) 1972, 13-36. See also by the same author *The History of Ethiopia's Relations with India prior to the Nineteenth Century* (Rome, 1974). For an important study of the commercial links between India and East Africa see Edward A. Alpers, "Gujerat and the Trade of East Africa, 1500-1800," *IJAHS*, 9 (1) 1976, 22-44.

African interior and the Dahlak archipelago. But they were also wealthy money-lenders, and thus provided the first 'primitive' banking services in the area. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century Gujarati Kapol Bania merchants from the port of Diu in Kathiawar dominated the trade of the northwestern Indian Ocean, including the Abyssinian maritime region.[75] But the fortunes of these traders fluctuated in accordance with the commercial vitality of the entire western Indian Ocean and Red Sea region and the increased competition posed by Europeans, especially the English. In the second half of the eighteenth century the role and position of the Gujaratis in the region declined considerably.[76] However, the commercial revival of the nineteenth-century and increased British involvement in the region placed them back solidly in a dominant position in Red Sea trade.[77] British supremacy in the region extending from India to the Red Sea, especially following the occupation of Aden in 1839, secured and enhanced the position of the Banyan traders and their networks who mediated between local producers and merchants and British trade firms. An elaborate Indian trading network emerged throughout the Red Sea region and Indian traders were reported as monopolizing the exportation of gold, musk, ivory, pearls, shark fins and skins and other lucrative African products in the most important ports of Aden, Jiddah, Massawa, Berbera and others.[78] Ivory, pearls, musk and other products arrived from Massawa to Hudaydah, also to

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[74] Originating in the Gujarati word vâniyo, 'Banyan', 'Banias', 'banians', 'bâniyâns' means 'trader' or 'shopkeeper'. The term seems to have developed to refer to all traders, brokers and middlemen regardless of religious origin or social stance. See also Richard Pankhurst, "Banyan," *EA*, Vol. I, 467.
[75] Claude Markovits, *The Global World of Indian Merchants, 1750-1947: Traders of Sind from Bukhara to Panama* (Cambridge, 2000), 11.
[76] Pankhurst, "The 'Banyan' or Indian presence," 188-9.
[77] For an illuminating article on Indian entrepreneurs in the Western Indian Ocean in this period see William Gervase Clarence-Smith, "Indian Business Communities in the Western Indian Ocean in the Nineteenth Century," *The Indian Ocean Review*, 2 (4) December 1989, 18-21.
[78] Ibid. 190, 198.

Luhaya, on the Yemeni littoral, before their expedition to India.[79] In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries most Indians in Massawa came from the Gujarati region of Saurashtra in the Kathiawad peninsula, from ports such as Diu, Mangrel and Porbandar.[80]

The Banyans appear in historical sources as a highly organized tight-knit and skilled community of traders and merchants. Their rigorous devotion to commerce and their distinct religious and cultural identity in a predominantly Muslim arena were part and parcel of their success as a trade diaspora. In the early 1860s Guillaume Lejean reported that they dominated the Red Sea, from Jiddah to the Bāb al-Mandab without rivalry and that their headquarters was at Massawa.[81] The supremacy of Indian networks in the Red Sea in the nineteenth century rested on their ability to adjust their commercial organization on the new economic realities and modes of exchange that developed throughout the period. The existence of wealthy mercantile houses in Bombay enabled them to purchase large quantities and sail directly to and from India. In contrast with the Arab networks that used little financial means in their transactions, the Indians, who used money, played on the differences in the exchange rates of the Maria Theresa Dollar and the Indian rupee between ports in western India and the Red Sea to maximize profits.[82]

Banyan paramouncy in finance and commerce in Massawa was mostly founded on their access to cheap and ample credit and their domination of money-lending and banking services that called on credit networks extending back to big Gujarati banks.[83] As the representatives of English and Indian firms in Aden and Bombay, the Banyans were able to purchase bulk goods that reached Massawa's markets, extend credit to local

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[79] Paul Bonnenfant, "La marque de l'Inde à Zebid," *Chroniques yéménites*, 2000 (http://cy.revues.org)
[80] See examples of individuals in Puglisi, *Chi e?* 160-1, 217, 221.
[81] Lejean, *Théodore II*, 282.
[82] Miège, "Djeddah: port d'entrepôt," 100-102.

producers, who in turn extracted goods uniquely for their creditors, and loaned money to European, Levantine and Arab merchants who needed capital to finance their commercial operations in the port. Paraphrasing Alamanni's detailed description of the complex role of the Banyans as intermediaries between Indian and European trading firms in international commerce in the 1880s, Pankhurst wrote:

> The role of the Banyans and Indian trading houses...was as follows: A European trading concern desirous of obtaining capital to finance its operations at Massawa would request a corresponding firm in London which had relations with a trading house in Bombay, to authorise the latter to open a credit for a certain amount with an agent or correspondent at Massawa. The London house would request this credit in Sterling and the Bombay house would grant the equivalent in rupees by supplying the agent at Massawa with a book of cheques or assignat for the amount of credit allowed. The dealer at Massawa when in need of money had only to detach the cheques and hand them, or the *assignat*, over to the local Banyans who would pay him in Maria Theresa Dollars, the money current at the port. The Banyans would then send the cheques or *assignat* to Bombay where they would be refunded, in rupees, by the house which had originally issued them. Meanwhile with the object of repaying the amount which had thus been made available for him the agent at Massawa woukld make out a bill of exchange payable by the London house which had originally acted as surety for the credit, in favour of the Bombay house which had actually furnished it. When this bill was honoured by the London house the latter would inform the European house which had originally asked for the credit, and would debit its account accordingly. In thjis way, with the assistance of three intermediaries, and with the balancing of three different currencies, the credit operation was completed, the Banyans and the Indian trading houses having played a vitally important role in the financing of European commercial enterprise.[84]

Clearly, in its capacity as an international entrepot, a large bulk of Massawa's trade was for long periods in the hands of the Banyans. But as argued in the previous chapter, from mid-century Massawa played a distinctive role as a regional entrepot in regional commerce, mostly with the Yemeni and Hijazi ports. The dominant networks in those

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[83] Clarence-Smith, "Indian Business Communities,"19.
[84] Pankhurst, "The 'Banyan' or Indian presence," 210-211. Based on Alamanni, *La colonia Eritrea*, 284-5.

commercial spheres were operated by Hijazi, Yemeni, and Hadhrami, merchants and entrepreneurs.

The two decades of Egyptian occupation (1865-1885) had a paradoxical effect on the Banyan community in Massawa. On the one hand they were able to prosper from the general commercial boom in the Red Sea area in the 1860s and 1870s, but on the other, they now had to operate under an administration that regulated closely all the port's affairs and levied duties and landing fees on commercial activities. Their worries were voiced to the Egyptian governors. A year before the Italian occupation the number of Banyans in the port was estimated at 50 to 60. Two years later, in 1886, an estimate put them at between 70 and 80. Seeking to maximize the commercial potential of their new colony, the Italians too were wary of the growing Indian community who operated for its own narrow benefit and whose profits were sent back to India. In October 1887 the town's leading Indian merchants presented a petition to the Government, outlining their grievances and demanding the presence of a British Consul who would protect their interests. The Indian merchants stressed that under Ottoman and Egyptian rule their conditions were good and that those governments often offered assistance to the Banyans in their commercial endeavours. However, since the Italian takeover, things had deteriorated. [85]

Notwithstanding these worries, Banyan merchants continued to thrive in their businesses, mostly in the wholesale and retail trades and in extending credit to local and international entrepreneurs. In 1892 a list of the creditors of the Egyptian merchant Ḥasan Mūssa al-'Akkād – recently condemned for 'treason' and imprisoned -showed that out of

forty-five creditors who presented themselves to the court to claim their parts, twenty-eight were Indian merchants.[86] The total sum of their funds in Italian Lire comprised just over 50% of the total claims (ca. 325,000 Lit), while one Italian creditor claimed 34% of the total claims. The list gives the full names of the creditors, the name of the business firms represented by them, their age and their place of birth. More than half were in their twenties or very early thirties, all were noted as born in Bombay – a doubtful claim - and only two were Muslims.[87]

One of the two was a particularly prominent Indian Muslim in Massawa named 'Alī 'Abd Allāh Dossal (b. 1862), who might have been a *boḥra* of Gujarat.[88] He was the son of 'Abd Allāh Dossal whom Lejean had listed as one of the wealthiest and most enterprising merchants in the port already in the early 1860s. 'Alī 'Abd Allāh is mentioned as an "Indian merchant," the protector and representative of the Banyan community vis-à-vis the Italian authorities and an agent for several Anglo-Indian shipping companies. Unlike the more numerous Hindu Banyan agents and representatives of the Bombay and Aden houses, 'Alī 'Abd Allāh owned his independent firm and traded especially in textiles, dhurra, and marine products, especially mother-of-pearl. Together with Minahim Missa, he presented the Italian authorities with the above-mentioned petition of October 1887. In his well-known account of the recently established colony,

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[85] Ibid. 203-9. FO 403/90 "Petition." Inclosure in No. 96: Sir E. Baring to the Marquis of Salisbury, Cairo, October 20, 1887. (Thanks to Wolbert Smidt from Hamburg University for providing me with a copy of this document).

[86] Ḥasan Mūsa al-'Akkād was a member of a well-known Egyptian trading family that played an important role in commerce in the Sudan under the Turkiyya. He was a man of considerable wealth. He was banished to the Sudan twice. He supported the 'Urābī revolt of 1882, was tried and banished to Massawa. There the Italians sentenced him to death on account of his alleged "conspiratory" activities together with [Ḥasan Ḥāmid] Kantibay in favor of the Mahdists. Hill, *A biographical dictionary*, 158. G. M., "I traditori di Massaua," *BSAI*, 9 (1890), 21-4.

[87] ASDMAE, *AE*, Pacco 153, 'Repertorio No. 210 – No. 843 Registro Atti Notabili' (1892).

[88] 'Boḥra' (also 'bohora', signifying 'trader', 'merchant', in Gujarati) refers to a community of Muslim merchants established in western India, principally in Gujarat, Sind and Kutch.

the future governor of Eritrea, Ferdinando Martini, qualified 'Alī 'Abd Allāh Dossal as the "Muslim Rothschild of Massawa."[89] In 1892 he received a concession by the governor of the colony and the Massawa customs for the exportation of 3000 tons of salt to India. The salt, extracted in the island of Ghabbi-hu was to be first moved to 'Abd al-Qādir peninsula near Massawa before its shipment across the sea to the sub-continent.[90]

During the Egyptian and the Italian periods Hindu Banyans presented themselves to the Islamic court in the port to buy and sell real estate. Between 1868 and 1889 the court registers record real estate transactions in which Banyans bought or sold water cisterns, land and shops in the main market area, the *sūq al-Sulṭān*. In most cases transactions took place between Indians and local folk but two cases record transactions made between two Indians and in one case a Banyan bought a water cistern from the French Catholic bishop in the port. In some cases the Banyan appears in the record as *al-khawāja min ahalī Bombay al-tājjir al'ān bi-maṣawwa'* (Ar. "the foreigner from Bombay who is at present a merchant in Massawa"); in other cases *al-Banyānī* (Ar. "the Banyan") was simply added to the name. In one case from 1883 two merchants who bought a shop in the market, added their signatures in Gujarati at the bottom of the manuscript detailing the case in the *qāḍī*'s register.[91]

Socially and culturally the Hindu Banyans seem to have been strangers to Massawa's domestic life. In the 1870s they were described as coming for three years or so as agents of foreign merchant houses; they were all very young and they never came with

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[89] Martini, *Nell'Affrica italiana*, 31.
[90] ASDMAE, *AE*, Pacco 154, 'Letter from Aly Dossal to the Governor of the Colony (16 January 1892); 'Circa la concessione al Sig. Aly Dossal (29 gennaio 1892)'; 'Concession contract between Aly Dossal and Giacomo Console, director of the Massawa customs (10 February 1892)'.
[91] See a sample of cases involving non-Muslim Indians (in chronological order). MICR 16/14c (1868), 16/65a (1870), 16/67a (1871), 16/74c (1871), 16/76c (1872), 16/118b (1877), 9/1c (1877), 9/12a (1878), 8/1d (1881), 8/63a (1883), 12/1a (1885), 12/3b (1885), 12/60b (1889).

wives. Matteucci noted that "the Abyssinians who came with their products [to Massawa], went directly to the Banyans since they had much cash."[92] They were devout Hindus, strict vegetarians eating neither fish nor meat; they adored cows and were great friends of the island's animal life.[93] They mostly kept to themselves in their domestic and social life and lived and operated in a special quarter near the bazaar in Massawa.[94] Two maps of Massawa from 1863-4 and 1880 clearly indicate the '*fariq al-Banyan*' and the *Quartiere Baniano*, or the Banyan quarter/neighborhood in the northern part of the island-port.[95] There they occupied a street with distinctly red-door shops where they sold ivory, hides, ivory boxes and drawers, Persian rugs, fans, lamps, gold dust and silver bracelets.

In the early 1970s Abdu Ali Habib noted that in Massawa there was still a place referred to as *sūq Banyān*, or the Banyan market. I have also heard references to the *sūq al-Hunūd*, located in the street where one still finds today the jewellers and goldsmiths of Massawa[96] Towards the end of March the Hindu Banyans celebrated the holy festival (or festival of colors, or "Holy Day of the Sun") with great ceremonies, involving special dances.[97] In the 1890s Victor Buchs noted that they celebrated the beginning of their New Year in the month of September, decorated lavishly their shops and organized celebrations to which Europeans were also invited.[98]

But the great visibility of the Hindu Banyan community as a socio-culturally distinct group, its prominence in finance, and its reflection in nineteenth-century travel

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[92] Pellegrino Matteucci, *In Abissinia* (Milano, 1880), 35.
[93] Pankhurst, "The 'Banyan' or Indian presence," 206-7.
[94] Gatta, "Massaua e le regioni circostanti," 474.
[95] Lejean, *Voyage aux deux Nils*, Paris 1865 (or *Voyage en Abyssinie*, Paris 1868), Atlas. And "Pianta dell'isola e città di Massauah ridotta dal. Luogo Tenente G.A. Bessone," In Pennazzi, *Dal Po ai due Nili.*
[96] Abdu Ali Habib, "History of Massawa", footnote section, xii (Chapter 2 footnote 56). Interview with Muḥammad Aḥmad 'Abāssī, Massawa, 15 May 2000.
[97] Alberto Pascale, *Massaua: Usi e costumi de'suoi indigeni* (Napoli, 1887), 50 and Mantegazza, *Da Massaua a Saati*, 236.

literature has overshadowed the existence of other families in Massawa that settled at some point in the early to mid-nineteenth century in the port. Indian Muslim *boḥra* merchants and artisans from Kutch had migrated to settlements all along the eastern coasts of Africa.[99] For Massawa we are unable to identify with any precision the origin of such families and individuals. However, several Muslim families such as the Bayt Hindī, the Bayt Mīyā the Bayt Khayyr ad-Dīn, one of the several Bayt Sāi'ghs in the Massawa region and possibly Bayt Ḥijjī, claim - or are designated by others – to be the descendants of ancestors who came from the Indian region in the first half of the nineteenth century.[100]

Descendants of the Khayr ad-Dīn family, connected in kin to the Mīyā family, relate that their ancestors came to Massawa from India some two-hundred years ago. They were always goldsmiths and jewellers.[101] Members of the Hindī and Ḥijjī families, who have always been carpenters, claim origin from the Pakistani region. Muḥammad Hindī, undoubtedly the head of the household in the early 1880s referred in court as the *Shaykh al-najjār*, or the head of the carpenters' corporation.[102] The Hindis relate that their ancestor, 'Abd al-Qādir Hindī al-Jiddāwī came to Massawa from Jiddah, suggesting that some Indians had moved to the port from other Red Sea locations and not directly from India.[103]

Unlike Hindu Indians, some Muslims originating in the Indian region made Massawa their home, integrated into the port's Muslim urban community, assimilated its

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[98] Buchs, "Voyages en Abyssinie," 38.
[99] Bonnenfant, "La marque de l'Inde à Zebid".
[100] See also Abdu Ali Habib, "History of Massawa", footnote section xiii (chapter 2 footnote 61). He includes the Habīb family in this group.
[101] In 1912 'Uthmān Khayyr ad-Dīn and 'Uthmān Ṣā'igh are both mentioned as goldsmiths in Hitumlo. *Elenco dei commercianti, etc.*, 45-6.
[102] MICR 8/27a (21 Rajab 1299).

defining cultural and identitary traits and intermarried with non-Indian families of local coastal patrician origins or even Hadramis, as the kinship link between the Mīyā and Hayūtī families illustrates.[104] The records of Massawa's Islamic court register several marriages between families such as Mīyā and Hindī with high status families such as Faqīh, Makka'alī, Ṣaḥai and others in the mid to late 1860s.[105] They joined the urban-mercantile families in the port and some rose to some degree of prominence in urban communal and religious affairs in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, serving, for example as court-appointed witnesses in the *sharī'a* tribunal. But according to the court records, they were never among the families who accumulated the greatest amount of wealth, for example in real estate or moveable property. Perhaps their traditionally artisanal professions account for their absence in the real estate entrepreneurship that has enriched some of the port's merchants.

The records also show how beween the 1860s and late 1880s these families were involved, albeit on a small scale, in transactions of property, primarily shops and parcels of land. Women were also active in these transactions. In 1873 Khadīja b. Mīyā Khayr ad-Dīn bought a parcel of land for residential purposes in the port from *Sayyid* 'Abd Allāh al-Nimr for 40 Riyals. Some three years later Amna b. Ṣāliḥ b. Muḥammad 'Abd al-Wasī' Mīya, represented in court by her *wakīl* (legal agent) 'Abd Allāh 'Umar 'Alī 'Adūlāy, sold a shop in the port's main bazaar area, the *sūq al-Sulṭān*, for two-hundred Riyals to shaykh Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh Aḥmad 'Abbāsī.[106] At the beginning of the twentieth

[103] Interviews with Muḥammad Zubūy Ṣālih Mīyā Khayr ad-Dīn, 'Abd al-Qādir Hindī and 'Abd al-Laṭīf Aḥmad Hindī, Massawa, 20 March 2000 and interview with Sulaymān 'Abdu Hindi and Muḥammad 'Abdu Bakri Ḥijjī, Massawa, 16 May 2000.
[104] Interview with Ḥasan Muḥammad 'Uthmān Hayūtī, Asmara, 27 November 1999.
[105] MICR 14/3i (1866) Hindī with Faqīh; 14/4b (1867) Mīyā with Sayyid Bakri; 14/6a (1868) Mīyā with Hindī; 14/6b (1868) Ṣaḥay with Hindī; 14/7a (1868) Hindī with Sa'īd; 14/9d (1868) Mīyā with Makka'alī.
[106] MICR 16/63c (Muḥarram 1290/1873) and 16/109a (5 Muḥarram 1293/1876).

century Hindu Banyan agents for Indian trading firms were still prominent in Massawa. Even if somewhat paradoxical, since the Italian colonial authorities saw Indians as competitors to Italian commercial activities and the agents of Britain, Indian businessmen - much as other traders in the port – continued to thrive under colonial rule.

Straw to Stone, Offshore Island to Coastal Town: the Transformation of Massawa's Urban Landscape in the Egyptian and Early Italian Eras, 1860s-1890s

> When there were palaces in Massawa, Asmara was just a bunch of *tukuls*.
> (*Sayyid* Ibrāhīm Muḥammad Ibrāhīm *al-Sayyid*, April 2000)[107]
>
> The built-up area of Massawa resembles an Arab quarter of Alexandria or Cairo.
> (G. Salvadei 1907)[108]
>
> One would say a small town in southern Italy, blended (fused) with an Arab town.
> (I. Stanga 1913)[109]

In the early decades of the nineteenth century the built-up and residential area of Massawa was mainly concentrated on the western half of the island. The other half was covered with old water cisterns and the Muslim cemetery.[110] Already in the eighteenth century the Scottish explorer James Bruce had remarked that "one third [of the island] is occupied by houses, one by cisterns, and the last is reserved for burying the dead."[111] In the 1840s Ferret and Galinier, members of the French scientific mission exploring the region, had famously concluded that "half the island belonged to the dead, and the other

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[107] Interview with *Sayyid* Ibrāhīm Muḥammad Ibrāhīm *al-Sayyid*, Massawa, 26 April 2000.
[108] Salvadei, "Massaua," p. 1818.
[109] Idelfonso Stanga, *Una gita in Eritrea* (Milano, 1913), 36.
[110] Another burial place was located on Shaykh Sa'īd island. Shawqī 'Attā' Allāh al-Jamal, *Siyāsat Miṣr fī 'l-baḥr al-aḥmar*, 79.
[111] Bruce, *Travels to discover the source of the Nile*, Edinburgh, 1790, III, 2.

half to the living."[112] The built-up area was densely crowded with rectangular and circular thatched huts placed irregularly, spilling over the town's narrow alleys. Most houses were constructed of straw, reeds and matting from date palm stretched on poles made of wood. Usually serving a single or an extended family, they were enclosed by reed fencing and included a small courtyard. Several two-storey stone buildings were reported in the late 1830s: the house of the Turkish governor, his harem, and the house of the chief scribe.[113]

By the early 1850s, Osgood had noted that "many two-storey houses made of coral, with flat roofs" were scattered around town.[114] In between the thatched straw huts there were single-storey stone houses which belonged to the wealthier merchants of the port town and its oldest families.[115] These houses often had large courtyards where caravan traders unloaded and loaded goods. The courtyard contained one or two small stone buildings serving as a warehouse for storing the merchandise.[116] Stores in the bazaar were mostly constructed in coral stone – reducing the risk of potential losses caused by the frequent fires that ravaged the island.[117] Mosques, foreign consulates and warehouses were also among the stone edifices on the island.

The basic pattern that characterized the decades of the Red Sea commercial boom was one of a gradual transition from straw huts to coral stone houses. At the end of the Ottoman period, between the 1840s and the 1860s new stone houses, shops and other

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[112] Ferret and Galinier, *Voyage en Abyssinie*, 369.
[113] Combes and Tamisier, *Voyage en Abyssinie*, I, 101. Parkyns provides a description of the house of Husayn *Afändi*, the chief scribe. Parkyns, *Life in Abyssinia*, 20.
[114] J. B. F. Osgood, *Notes of Travel or Recollections of Majunga, Zanzibar, Muscat, Aden, Mocha, and other Eastern Ports* (Salem, 1854), 246.
[115] Munzinger, "Les contrées limitrophes" 28.
[116] D'Abbadie, *Douze ans dans la Haute Ethiopie*, I, 7-8.
[117] See decsriptions of the Massawa bazar in Combes and Tamisier, *Voyage en Abyssinie*, I, 99; Lefebvre, *Voyage en Abyssinie*, I, 39; Negri, *Massaua e dintorni*, 9; Gatta, "Da Massaua a Chartum," 400; Gatta, "Massaua e regioni circostanti," 473-4; Vigoni, "Massaua e il nord dell'Abissinia," 20-1; Pascale, *Massaua*, 75-6.

public buildings were constantly built on the island. Suggesting a gradual change from the earlier descriptions of the 1830s, Lejean noted in the early 1860s that from afar Massawa seemed white; the white of the houses masked and hid the poor huts of the "proletarian" classes that were still present in town.[118]

Massawa's urban landscape was already somewhat developed by the mid-1860s. Immediately following their occupation, the Egyptians found approximately one hundred stone houses, two hundred wood huts, twenty mosques and *zāwiyas* (sufi centers), two hundred shops and warehouses, and one church on the island of Massawa, with a population of about two thousand. In Hitumlo, on the mainland the Egyptian report counted five hundred and seven stone and wood hut constructions (including religious edifices), four water wells and thirty *faddān* (ca. 120 sq. kms) of agricultural land. In Hirgigo there were twenty stone houses, five hundred huts, twenty-four mosques and *zāwiyas*, a fortress, and twenty *faddān* (ca. 85 sq. kms) of agricultural land.[119]

In demographic terms growth reflected migratory waves from abroad, as discussed above, but also from among the Tigre and Saho-speaking pastoralists or nomads of Semhar, Sahel, the 'Afar coast and further inland, who settled principally in the mainland settlements of the conurbation.[120] In the second half of the 1860s observers had estimated the population of the entire conurbation at between ten and fifteen thousand people.[121]

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[118] Lejean, *Voyage aux deux Nils*, 164.
[119] Douin, *Histoire du règne*, III (I), 281 (A.A. Ma'iya Saniyah, box 38, piece 143, report by Ismā'īl Ṣādiq Pacha, 5 June 1866). One *faddān* equals 4200.833 square meters. Wehr, *Arabic-English Dictionary*, 700.
[120] See eight useful maps [but quite imprecise, for the earlier period] demonstrating Massawa's urban development from the pre-1870 period to 1962. There is also a population chart from 1885 to 1961. A. Ferronato, "La città di Massaua," Tesi di Laurea, Istituto Universitario Maria SS. Assunta, Roma, 1961-62, annexes.
[121] Estimates made by Pousson, Blanc and Lejean. See source details in Pankhurst, "Notes on the demographic history," 66.

Under the Egyptians a significant transformation in Massawa's urban landscape took place. Highly determined to boost up the port's commercial operation, the Egyptians carried out massive projects of public works and urban development changing the town's skyline. A few years after the Egyptian takeover observers noted the gradually reversing proportion between the limited number of stone houses and the dominant straw huts as more stone edifices replaced huts.[122] Coral stone houses, observers noted, were built in a "more or less corrupted Arab style." The most elegant, modern and luxurious belonged to the rich merchants, boasting beautifully carved wooden doors, covered balconies, ornate with carved wood that were sometimes painted in vivid colors.[123]

Massawa boasted beautifully wood-worked casement-windows, known as *rawshāns* in Jiddah, Sawakin and Massawa, or *mashrabiyyas* in Egypt, whose function was principally to catch the slightest passing breeze while protecting from the sun.[124] One observer remarked that Massawa's merchants build attractive houses that surpassed in elegance those of Aden.[125] Red Sea architecture was indeed one of the most important cultural markers reflecting regional continuity and cohesiveness. If the style and design of stone houses came from abroad, the materials in which they were constructed and the labor employed in extraction and construction were local. Stone edifices were usually constructed with sub-fossil polyps extracted from the island itself and in the opposite

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[122] See also Talhami, *Suakin and Massawa*, 100

[123] See examples of such doors in Gino Cerbella, *Aspetti etnografici della casa in Etiopia* (Roma, 1963), 13, 21, 41. See also Issel, *Viaggio nel Mar Rosso* (1872), 46, 50; Issel, *Viaggio nel Mar Rosso* (1885) 63; Pietro Porro, "Notizie da Massaua," *EC*, Fasc. IV, April 1886, 97. Porro was greatly impressed by the carved doors and remarked that in Paris or Milan they would have immense value. For doors in Sawakin – some strongly resembling the style of Massawa's doors, - see Jean Pierre Greenlaw, *The Coral Buildings of Suakin: Islamic Architecture, Planning, Design and Domestic Arrangements in a Red Sea Port* (London, 1995) (Fist Pub. 1976), 112-5.

[124] Greenlaw, *The Coral Buildings of Suakin*, 21. As its title clearly suggests, the book provides a detailed study on building styles and architecture in Sawakin during the Ottoman and Egyptian periods. For remarks on the distinctive features of the Red Sea style see also D. H. Matthews, "The Red Sea Style," *Kush*, I, 1953, 60-86.

peninsula of Ras Gherar.[126] But the need for a massive amount of materials in the Egyptian building boom era required more supplies. These were extracted and brought from the bay of Nukhra in the largest island ('Dahlak Kabīr') in the Dahlak archipelago.[127] At the height of the building boom around 1880, observers wrote that almost all houses were in stone; their style being "Moorish."[128]

But straw huts were not entirely eradicated from the island, at least not until the early Italian colonial period. In the mid-1880s the extremely poor living conditions of the hut dwellers were reported by writers and were the source of concern to the Italian authorities.[129] Filth, fires, and the rapid spreading of illnesses due to unhygienic conditions were commonplace and increasingly a preoccupation of local residents. The turning point occurred following the cholera outbreak of 1889-90 and a major fire that erupted in the square opposite the Ḥanafī mosque, thereafter named by the Italians as *Piazza degli Incendi* (It. 'Square of the Fires'). These two events led the Italian colonial authorities to transfer a large part of the hut-dweller population to the mainland areas known to this day as *Edaga Be'rai* (Lit. 'ox market' in Tigre), 'Ad Afflanda, and 'Ad Habab.[130]

The rapid rise in the price of land also reflects the effects of the building boom.[131] A report written by Aḥmad Mumtāz Pasha, Governor of the eastern Sudan since 1870, following an inspection tour in the Red Sea in 1871 recommended that land be granted

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[125] Douin, *Histoire du règne*, III, 2, 530.
[126] The word Gherar means "rocky madreporic blocs" due to the nature of the peninsula's land. Odorizzi, *Il commissariato regionale di Massaua*, 108
[127] Issel, *Viaggio nel Mar Rosso* (1885), 63.
[128] Matteucci, *In Abissinia*, 31-2. Negri, *Massaua e dintorni*, 8.
[129] Mantegazza, *Da Massaua a Saati*, 21-3; Pascale, *Massaua*, 59-61; Vigoni,"Massaua e il nord," 2.
[130] Buchs, "Voyages en Abyssinie," 33; Odorizzi, *Il commissariato regionale di Massaua*, 121; Ferronato, "La città di Massaua," 197-8.
[131] Blanc, *A Narrative of Captivity*, 59.

free of charge by the administration to those entrepreneurs who wished to engage in construction.[132] The results of these recommendations are however unclear. Nevertheless, the recording of land sales in the *sharī'a* court throughout the 1860s, 1870s and 1880s, gives a certain sense of the realities of the building and real estate boom during the period.

Of the 187 cases that I have identified in the court records between 1865 and 1888 involving either the sale or lease of land and the issuance of title deeds, several patterns appear.[133] The records confirm and identify those Massawa patrician families owning land and real estate in this period. Most transactions were carried out among Massawans, especially in the first half of the period. A notable proportion were transactions involving the heirs of a recently deceased family head selling part of the inherited estate.[134] Another pattern that may be pointed out is the purchase of parcels of land by entrepreneurs – mostly Hadramis and Egyptian – of relatively recent establishment at Massawa. Bā Junayd, Bā Zar'a and al-Ghūl bought much land on which they consequently constructed shops and residential houses.[135]

From around 1875 there were also some foreign merchants and entrepreneurs – mostly Greek and Levantine – who bought parcels of land. Banyans too were involved in both buying and selling land.[136] The purchase of land by mostly non-Muslim foreigners accelerated and intensified from 1885, coinciding with the Italian occupation of

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[132] Talhami, *Suakin and Massawa*, 100.
[133] There are undoubtedly more cases. The poor quality of some registers make it impossible to examine with clarity all recorded cases.
[134] MICR 16/1b, 6/38b, 16/41c, 16/53b, 16/56a, 16/59b, 16/61c, 16/72b, 16/74a, 16/102b, 16/103c and many other examples.
[135] Real-estate transactions of 'Abd Allāh and Aḥmad *Bey* al-Ghūl. Land: MICR 16/83b (1290), 16/85a (1290), 16/101b (1291), 9/27b (1296), 9/41a (1297), 9/42a (1297), 9/43a (1297), 9/44a [water-well and land in Hitumlo] (1297), 8/36a (1299), 8/100a (1301), 10/35b (1303), 12/53b (1305), 12/59a (1306). Shops: 16/76a (1289), 16/85a (1290), 9/15a (1295), 9/26a (1296), 9/27a (1296), 9/40a (1297), 8/5b (1298), 8/10d (1298), 8/75b (1301), 12/4b (1303), 12/5a (1303), 12/6a (1303). Residential houses: 9/45a (1297), 8/10d (1298), 12/44b (1306).
[136] MICR 16/14c, 16/74c, 12/66a.

Massawa.[137] At that stage Italian business firms such as Tagliabue purchased parcels of land.[138]

From the early 1870s the Egyptian authorities in Massawa, as well as Egyptian officers and officials, appear to have been involved in a considerable number of transactions, both as buyers and sellers. Entrepreneurs such as 'Abd Allāh Bey al-Ghūl were sold several parcels of land and a water well by the government. Beyond transactions of land the real estate and building boom the Egyptian period involved a great amount of transactions involving shops and residential houses. A full analysis might not be required since patterns resembled those in transactions over land. However, it is useful to note that some transactions also involved women, especially from among Massawa's elite families.

Egyptian public works in the 1860s and 1870s transformed Massawa's urban geography and its spatial organization. Major projects improving health conditions, extending and modernizing communications, ameliorating the harbor facilities and constructing and renovating public buildings were carried out during these two decades. They all aimed at modernizing the port town's infrastructures in accordance with Khedive Ismā'īl's grandiose – albeit ultimately unsuccessful - economic ambitions for his Red Sea possessions. Both Egyptian and European engineers were sent to Massawa to plan, supervise and implement these major projects.[139]

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[137] MICR 16/105c, 8/34c, 8/101a, 8/106b, 8/113a, 10/14a, 10/18a, 10/21a, 10/25b, 10/26a, 10/26b, 10/27b, 10/33a, 12/40a, 12/56a, 12/58a, 12/62a, 12/64a, 12/66a.

[138] MICR 12/1b (1303), 12/38b (1303). The following two texts were published by the Italian businessman Enrico Tagliabue: "Massaua e i suoi abitanti," *L'Esploratore*, anno IV, Milano 1880, 55-8 and *Dieci anni a Massaua. Considerazioni politico-coloniali*, (Milano, 1888), 31 p.

[139] Talhami, "Massawa under Khedive Isma'il, 1865-1879," 482; Pankhurst, "Some notes on the historical and economic geography," 112-6; Shawqī 'Attā' Allāh al-Jamal, *al-Wathā'iq al-ta'rīkhiyya*, 119, (also Douin, *Histoire du règne*, III, 2, 508ff).

But the most far-reaching project on the port town's structure was undoubtedly the construction of the two causeways linking the island of Massawa to the small island of Tewalet (also 'Tawlud,' and 'Ṭawālūd') and from there to the mainland in the early 1870s. It ended Massawa's centuries-old position as a naturally protected offshore island and it physically connected the harbor part of the conurbation with its lesser units on the mainland. Both processes prompted the spatial and functional reconfiguration of the conurbation and led to the more dynamic movement of peoples and commodities across the conurbation. Crossing over to Massawa island was no longer exclusively conducted with boats; camels laden with goods could gain access to Massawa town by way of the causeways.[140] Among other consequences, it opened up the space on the island of Tewalet for residential, administrative and commercial purposes (including the spectacular government palace constructed under 'Arākil Bey's governorship and an Egyptian prison).

From 1874 the Egyptian government began selling parcels of land in Tewalet to Egyptian officials and wealthy Massawan entrepreneurs.[141] Urban expansion to Tewalet accompanied projects to modernize the port town, undoubtedly much welcomed by the Muslim population who was not prepared to build on the old Arab/Islamic sacred cemeteries.[142] Closely related to the construction of the causeways – and almost equally

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[140] Saint-Yves, "A travers l'Erythrée italienne," 139.

[141] The Islamic court recorded the selling and purchasing of land on Tewalet. The land belonged to the government and individual parcels were sold by Governor Arākil Bey. See examples in MICR 16/99b (1874. Sold to Fayrūz *Afāndi* [Egy. Off.]); 16/100b (1874. Sold to Shaykh 'Abd Allāh Ḥalīl Mantay); 16/100c (1874. Sold to Shaykh Ḥusayn Muḥammad Khaṭīb), 16/100d (1874. Sold to Tāhā Ibrāhīm [Egy. Off.].), 16/100e (1874. Sold to Kafal Bey [Egy. Off.]); 16/101a (1874. Sold to Shaykh Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh 'Abbāsī); 16/101b (1874. Sold to Shaykh 'Abd Allāh b. Aḥmad al-Ghūl); 16/102a (1875. Sold to 'Irāqi *Afāndi* Muḥammad [Egy. Off.]); 16/103a (1875. Sold to Shaykh 'Abd Allāh b. 'Umar b. Sa'īd Bā Junayd) and other cases in the same register.

[142] See similar comments in the early Italian era in "Presidi e domini dell'Italia nel Mar Rosso" (Notizie estratte dalla memoria presentata alla Camera dei Deputati da S. E. Di Robilant), *BSGI*, serie II, Vol. XII, 1887, 15

revolutionary – was the piping of water from Omkullo to Tewalet, the small island, by now linked by causeways both to Massawa and the mainland.[143]

As chief town, then capital, of the Italian colony between 1885 and 1899, when Governor Ferdinando Martini transferred the capital to Asmara, further works and projects of urban development were carried out, some building on, or improving, projects initiated by the Egyptians. In 1888 several decrees were issued aiming at modernizing the town including the development of a European quarter; the regularization of urban sanitary services; the demolition of any type of irregular construction not in stone; the reconstruction of the two Egyptian causeways and the improvement of the roads on them; the casting in pipes of the brick aqueducts that brought water from Hitumlo to the *Piazza degli Incendi* near the bazaar; the covering of the bazaar street with a wooden roof, and a project for the construction of a port dock in the northern part of Massawa island. In addition, the authorities built edifices for all government offices, the military and civil law court, the port office, a hospital, the colonial treasury, customs warehouses, and various shipping and business firms.[144]

Two panoramic views of Massawa from the 1890s – a photograph and an illustration – attest quite neatly how the town was densely packed with Turkish and Egyptian-era stone buildings and edifices - several of notable elegance – as well as newer colonial constructions dating from the early years of Italian rule.[145] Unfortunately, many

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[143] Both projects were undertaken under Werner Munzinger's (Munzinger Pasha, a Swiss) governorship, beginning in 1871. See details on the causeways (Mainland- Tewalet, 480 meters and Tewalet -Massawa, 150 m) and the water pipes in Richard Pankhurst, "Some notes on the historical and economic geography of the Meṣewa area (1520-1885)," *JES*, 13 (1) 1975, 112-114.

[144] For more details see Ferronato, "La città di Massaua," 200-208.

[145] Photographer Luigi Naretti's panorama of Massawa (1895) is reproduced in Silvana Palma, *L'Italia coloniale* (Roma, 1999), 10-11. The illustration is printed in Achille Bizzoni, *L'Eritrea nel passato e nel presente* (Milano, 1897), 4-5.

of the town's old buildings were destroyed during the devastating wave of earthquakes that hit the port beginning in August 1921.[146]

Porters, Peddlars, and Prostitutes: Urbanization and Proletarianization, 1860s-1890s

The modernization of the port, the general demographic growth of the urban conglomerate, and the enhancement of commercial activities, reshaped the conurbation and redefined its features. Urban transformation was characterized by the emergence of a class of laborers and service providers who settled mainly in new mainland suburbs and on Tewalet, and came to Massawa on a daily basis to earn their living. Massawa's climate has always been rather unwelcoming; living conditions have been harsh in the port town, keeping its population relatively low. But in periods of economic growth and urban development the town tended to attract peoples from the inland who came to work and earn cash. In the 1890s Yemeni laborers came to work as porters and dockworkers in the early colonial period. The same is true a century later in post-Independence Eritrea, where Yemeni fishermen were brought to Eritrea to boost up the nascent fishing industry in the late 1990s.

Following the Italian occupation of Massawa in 1885 the satellite villages procured an even wider array of labor, brokerage, peddling and porterage services

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[146] The most damaged area was the old commercial center – the bazaar and the alleys around it. But it also ruined the Shaf'i mosque – believed to have been the oldest in town and one of the first mosques on the continent. Following the earthquake the Italians launched a massive project of reconstruction whose results may be seen up to this day (less those edifices destroyed by Ethiopian air strikes in 1990). Interestingly, Italians architects and construction engineers repaired, designed and built by maintaining and improvising on features of the traditional Turkish and Egyptian styles and using local coral stone. Paolo Reviglio, "Ricordi e riflessioni sui terremoti di Massaua," *Sestante*, Vol. I, No. 2, July-Dec. 1965, 87-91. Paolo Reviglio was chief engineer in the Department of Public Works of the *Governorato Generale* of Eritrea in the colonial period. He was among several engineers participating in the reconstruction of Massawa following the earthquakes. See also a 'visitor's guide' with numerous post-reconstruction photographs. Mario Moretto, *Guida della città di Massaua* (Asmara, 1939). See also Ferronato, "La città di Massaua," 212-6.

required by a burgeoning port-town and its bustling harbor. In 1886, shortly after Italian colonial imposition, one Italian observer noted the occupational-ethnic divide in the population of Massawa. One segment was composed of "those merchants in commodities that were exchanged between the African and Arabian coasts or with Syria and Egypt, where they have their correspondents. They also own the houses of Massawa ...[.] The men of black race are involved in manual labor; they are servants or peddlars selling goods in the interior."[147] Laborers were engaged in a myriad of activities around the port and the markets of the town.

Reports from the early colonial period noted that labor was abundant and that labor wages have doubled and even tripled in a short time.[148] Many of those who had insufficient capital to open shops or launch modest businesses worked as porters, sometimes on a daily basis depending on the departure/arrival of boats and caravans. Porters carried large bales of animal hides, cotton, tobacco, ivory, materials and goods that came on board boats in the port, jugs (amphoras) full of water and dried vegetables. Those who did not work as porters served as laborers in shops, servants in the coffee shops, restaurants, clerks in offices and sandal-makers.[149] Others were fishermen and sailors. Many were also employed by the Italian authorities, as rowers, domestic servants, nurses, day laborers, masons and last but not least, colonial soldiers.[150]

In the early twentieth century sources describe the inhabitants of Hirgigo as principally cattle merchants, wood and forage (fodder) traders, but also porters, caulkers,

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[147] R. Porro, "Notizie da Massaua," *EC*, fascicolo IV, Aprile 1886, 134.
[148] "Presidi e domini dell'Italia nel Mar Rosso" (Notizie estratte dalla memoria presentata alla Camera dei Deputati da S. E. Di Robilant), *BSGI*, serie II, Vol. XII, 1887, 15.
[149] According to Munzinger sandal-making was a much valued and elaborate profession in town. *Studi sull'Africa orientale*, 121.
[150] Pascale, *Massaua*, 76-7 and Mantegazza, *Da Massaua a Saati*, 24 and 230.

boatmen, fishermen, and water carriers.[151] Colonial officials distinguished between the well off and those who were of more modest means. In the first category were the merchants, the transportation brokers, those who sold imported products and were engaged in the exportation of goods out of Massawa. In the second category they found those who engaged in small-scale commerce, boatmen, laborers and sailors on steamships, laborers in the nascent local industries and public works and those employed by the wealthier boat owners in the pearl and mother-of-pearl fishing industries.[152] But workers and laborers were not only from the Massawa mainland, there were also Sudanese, Abyssinians and Yemenis who came to the port for menial jobs.[153]

Another group about which little is known were the liberated slaves. The court records include a large number of manumission acts from the second decade of Egyptian rule. I have counted over two-hundred manumission acts between 1873 and 1885 (see Appendix 21). The manumission of slaves was a result of Werner Munzinger's appointment as Governor of Massawa in 1871, and the Anglo-Egyptian convention for the suppression of the slave trade of 1877.[154] Many slaves came from the Oromo-speaking southwestern Abyssinian region. Many were identified as *al-qallawī* (Ar. "the Galla"), but there were also slaves identified as 'Shanqala', 'Dinka', 'Abyssinian', 'Sudanese', or from specific locations such as Sibu, Liqqa, Jimma, Walata, Gomma, Limmu and other places.

From the two-hundred acts identified, 65% were of young girls while 35% of the manumitted were males. Our knowledge about the activities and whereabouts of freed

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[151] Salvadei, "Massaua", 1832.
[152] Odorizzi, *Il commissariato regionale di Massaua*, 94.

slaves following liberation is at present quite limited although according to some evidence it appears that many of these children (many were in their teens) were taken to mission schools and stations after manumission. Thus, Munzinger asked the Swedish Evangelical school mission of Omkullo to take care of recently manumitted slaves in the 1870s. The request resulted in the opening of a girls' school that took in freed slaves, Abyssinian prostitutes and other girls in need of help.[155] In the 1880s Catholic schools in Massawa also accommodationed freed slaves.[156]

Massawa's Italian *Commissario* in the early 1900s, Giovanni Salvadei, noted how the conurbation's space was divided along ethnic, social and occupational lines. In Massawa island lived the Europeans, the local notables and merchants "dressed in Arab clothes," and the Banyan community. In the bazaar one found numerous caravaneers, Beduins and local residents. On Tewalet, on the other hand, the "low indigenous population" is concentrated, composed of porters from Hadhramawt, Beduin fishermen, Sudanese sailors, and Abyssinian laborers or caravaneers.[157]

One of the results of the colonial measures and urban transformations that Massawa island went through in the 1880s, was the removal of the lower classes and the poor and their resettlement in Tewalet and Edaga Be'rai. The inhabitants of Tewalet included many Abyssinians who came to Massawa in search of work or seeking food, especially following the great drought and famine (Amh. *Kifu Qan*, 'the cruel days') in

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[153] For a report on Yemeni porters see ASDMAE, *AE*, b. 210, 'From Gov. Civile e Militare della Col. Eritrea (Dogana, Massaua) to Sig. Capo dell'Ufficio affari Civili (Massaua), 'Gestione facchinaggio durante l'anno 1894', 15 Gennaio 1895.

[154] Toledano, *The Ottoman Slave Trade*, 224-7; Gabrawold, "The origin and early development," 15-21.

[155] *Missions-Tidning*, Letters from Lundahl, 23 March 1873 and 4 July 1873. Cited in Gabrawold, "The origin and early development," 21-2. See also A. Tron and J. Jwarson, *Notizie storiche e varie sulla missione evangelica svedese in Eritrea, 1866-1916* (Asmara, 1918) and Gustav Arens, *Evangelical Pioneers in Ethiopia: Origin of the Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus* (Uppsala, 1978).

[156] Gabrawold, "The origin and early development", 22.

1888-1892. But there were also *askaris* (colonial soldiers), sailors, water porters and laborers (some of whom were Yemeni) who worked in Massawa.

But the most original group was the prostitutes, concentrated in approximately a hundred huts arranged in a large semi-circle in the northwestern part of Tewalet. Their presence on Tewalet was reported as early as 1886 suggesting that it dated back to pre-Italian times.[158] Prior to the construction of the causeways and the water pipelines between Massawa and the mainland in the early 1870s, supplying the island with water was a common occupation in the conurbation. Young 'Saho' girls were employed in this harsh labor, carrying once or twice daily large goatskins full of water form Omkullo to Massawa. They sold it for very little (about one piaster, in the early 1860s) either in the market or directly to the houses of the town dwellers.[159]

Contemporary European observers did not spare their readers from the physical description of these "beautiful and charming" girls who appeared quite lax in their clothing. Some alluded to the girls giving themselves to prostitution.[160] One elaborate anecdotical account from the late 1860s suggests quite bluntly the "cultural" clash between town and countryside customs and practices in a rapidly transforming town:

> When I arrived [to Massawa] I found this town in revolution. The caste of pretty water carriers of Monkullo [Omkullo] was suppressed following the Governor's decision. It appears that several brawls have occurred regarding them and some rows have resulted. There were complaints. Morality and religion have been offended. Some have said that their [young] age prohibited any rowdy pleasures. The *qaimaqan* decided to stop the evil-doing by destroying its cause. He sent to his divan all the sinners, from first to last....Hola, what do I hear? All Massawa is talking about the scandal that your disordered behavior has caused! Your behaviour, is both an offense to the Prophet's religion and to the laws of the

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[157] Salvadei, "Massaua," 1817.
[158] Porro, "Notizie da Massaua," 102; Buchs, "Voyages en Abyssinie," 36; Saint-Yves, "A travers l'Erythrée italienne," 139-141, 147. In 1908 there were 322 straw and wood huts in Tewalet. Odorizzi, *Il commissariato regionale di Massaua*, 121.
[159] Lejean, *Voyage aux deux Nils*, 164.
[160] Blanc, op cit 67-8, Issel, *Viaggio nel Mar Rosso*, 59, 62; Negri, *Massaua e dintorni*, 13.

> Sublime Porte, of which I am here the keeper. I order this to end ... I will therefore marry you! ...The Governor turned towards his soldiers: You, Sa'id Effendi, he said, you will take Madina to be your wife; you Ibrahim, you'll take Fatma and Abdallah, you'll take Maryam...."[161]

Even after water was regularly piped from the mainland, the water-porters did not disappear from the landscape of the conurbation. An account from the late 1890s noted that now instead of going all the way to Omkullo, the girls went to fetch water from the water reservoir in Tewalet, before carrying it from there to Massawa.[162]

Other mainland neighborhoods developed as a result of urban transformation in the early Italian period. Urban space was increasingly divided on the basis of ethnicity and economic occupation. Edaga Be'rai, established in 1889 as noted above, was located around the area where the causeway from Tewalet reached the mainland. The southern part of Edaga was called Khatmiyya (or Khutmiyya) since a group of Sudanese families from Kassala settled there in the 1890s under the protection of *Sayyid* Hāshim al-Mīrghanī (1849/50-1901), son of the founder of the Khatmiyya *ṭarīqa* based in Hitumlo.

Together with the suburb's other inhabitants Edaga had a population of roughly one thousand. To the west of Edaga inland one came across some one hundred other huts with an approximate population of six-hundred in a suburb called Ela Ghūl. Many there were Arabs, probably from among the Rashayda Beduins. It was named after the well-known Egyptian 'Abd Allāh *Bey* al-Ghūl who had bought there a water-well ('Ela,' in Tigre) in February 1880, putting it at the disposition of the local population.[163] Several well-to-do merchant families had a well dug for a particular community as an act of *zakāt*

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[161] De Rivoyre, *Mer Rouge et Abyssinie*, 268-9. See also M. E. Guillot, "La mer Rouge et l'Abyssinie," *BSGL*, 1889, 10e année, Tome 12, 197.
[162] Saint-Yves, "A travers l'Erythrée italienne," 147.

(almsgiving). Another example is the Ela Hāshim built by the 'Ad Hāshim in Omkullo.[164] Finally, a suburb known as 'Ad Aflanda, (or 'Ad Habab), commemorating by its name the origins of its first settlers, was located between Edaga and Gherar. It consisted of about one-hundred huts with three-hundred and fifty people from Habab, Aflanda and from the northern coastal port of Aqiq who provided Massawa with milk and worked either in the port or in the salt fields in Gherar.[165]

The growth of the port throughout the nineteenth century - both through the migration of foreign entrepreneurs and by drawing into it Tigre- and Saho-speaking peoples who settled in the port and on its outskirts – prompted the 'urbanization' of pastoralists and semi-pastoralists from what would later become the eastern Eritrean region. As early as the 1860s Guillaume Lejean, the French consul at Massawa, had identified a certain process of urbanization among the Semhar pastoralist and semi-pastoralist groups who gradually settled in the conurbation. He wrote that Omkullo was inhabited by Beduins "that the proximity of a mercantile town has made them abandon their nomadic practices in favor of the thousands of small industries from which the suburbs live."[166] Plowden too pointed to this same phenomenon, albeit with some factual errors. He wrote that "the people of Dohona ('Dohono', or Hirgigo) on the mainland, style themselves the tribe of Hirgigo, and are by origins Hababs, though they now mixed with all the other tribes, having abandoned in a great degree their wandering and nomadic habits for the sweets of commerce and the profits of a town life."[167]

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[163] The real estate transaction recorded in the court registers includes the purchasing of a parcel of land. MICR 9/44a (23 Ṣafar 1297).
[164] I thank Fu'ād Makkī for providing these details. Letter of 30 July 2004.
[165] Odorizzi, *Il commissariato regionale di Massaua*, 120-2; Ferronato, "La città di Massaua," 198.
[166] Lejean, *Voyage aux deux Nils*, 163
[167] Plowden, *Travels in Abyssinia*, 3.

Several decades later, Dante Odorizzi, an Italian colonial official, further described this change in Massawa's urban sphere. In a typically colonialist fashion he dated it to the establishment of the Italians in Massawa, and described aspects of the process of how non-settled peoples were liberated from their nomadic social groupings by "becoming urban:"[168]

> As to the transformation of the nomadic population to a settled one it must be noted that Massawa, Hirgigo, Hitumlo and Omkullo, even though they are not large settlements, constituted for the pastoralists significant centers where a process of *urbanization* took place. A pastoralist of the region north of the Lebka or of the lower Assaorta who, as a result of the loss of his cattle (animals) or following litigations with the chiefs of his tribe, went to Massawa and found there work as a servant for the Europeans or the wealthy (powerful) locals or as a manual laborer. He often does not wish to return to his native tribe and live there under the authority of the ruling classes, if his tribe follows an aristocratic regime such as those of the Sahel, or under the authority of the elders in case his tribe is under a patriarchal or democratic regime, such as the Saho. Therefore, he ends up remaining in Semhar where he lives in the centers of settled populations.[169]

Odorizzi continued by observing that other "nomads" who had served as *ascari* (colonial soldiers) or laborers also became "urbanized." He suggested that these experiences had changed these individuals, who had no interest in going back to their previous ways of life. To these Odorizzi added the slaves who stayed in the urban region following their manumission.[170]

Indeed, the urbanization of Massawa's *umland* made the very sharp break between town and countryside fade into a blurred state of contestation and struggles over citizenship. It also signalled the port's transition into "modernity" with the shift from a town-countryside paradigm to one of a more stratified urban society within the confines

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[168] Even though the Italian takeover certainly catalyzed and accelerated this process, it began quite earlier. Quite typically, colonial officials tended to think that most significant processes had their origins in the beginning of the colonial era.

[169] See Odorizzi, *Il commissariato regionale di Massaua,* 92-93.

of the conurbation. Indeed, new forms of poverty emerged in this setting. One Italian report of 1891 observed that in contrast with some improvement of economic conditions in the Semhar countryside, "around Massawa a mob of unhappy people deprived of the means of subsistence has gathered."[171] Alberto Pascale wrote with empathy about the desolate and desperately poor roving Massawa's alleys and required to beg for their existence.[172] Observers shocked by conjunctural poverty in Massawa between the 1860s through the 1890s witnessed the results of rapidly changing economic conditions and some of its radical social effects.[173]

On the Outskirts of Town, on the Edge of the Countryside: Linking the Port with the Inland

Massawa, Hitumlo, Omkullo, Zaga, Hirgigo and to a lesser extent, the neighborhoods and peninsulas in between them, all comprised a single urban system, centered on the island of Massawa.[174] Massawa's centrality in this urban configuration was founded on its deep-water harbor, its vast bazaar, markets and shop areas, and on being the political and administrative center of those who governed the region. It was thus the business and political center where both foreign and local Massawan merchants operated simultaneously vis-à-vis seaward trade networks, Hijazi, Yemeni and Indian

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[170] Ibidem.
[171] *The Nakfa Documents*, Document 81, Captain Boari to the Gov. Civile e Militare della Colonia Eritrea (Massaua), Asmara, 11 Marzo 1891, "Tributi nel Semhar e paesi limitrofi," in Anthony d'Avray (ed.) *The Nakfa Documents*, 279.
[172] Pascale, *Massaua*, 74-5.
[173] On the difference between 'structural' and 'conjunctural' states of poverty see John Iliffe, *The African Poor: A History* (Cambridge, 1987), 4. Iliffe even gives a quotation from Ruppell on poverty in Massawa on page 18. In the early 1840s D'Abbadie remarked that many poor people come to Massawa during funerary processions where in exchange for prayers for the deceased they received a meal. D'Abbadie, *Géographie de l'Ethiopie*, 20.
[174] Douin, *Histoire du règne*, III, I, 255. Douin referred to the conurbation as a single *commune* (in French).

ports on the one hand, and inland traders and producers - or their brokers - on the other. But the other settlements of the conurbation were crucial to the functioning and servicing of the port, making all its units interdependent to some extent. The mainland elements of the conurbation – principally the villages of Hitumlo, Omkullo and Hirgigo, had several traditional functions.

Water was a crucial factor in the dependence of Massawa-island on the mainland settlements and suggests the principal reason for their foundation in the past. Deprived of any source of water Massawa received daily provisions from Omkullo, Hitumlo and Hirgigo the sites of water wells. Remarking on Hitumlo and Omkullo Henry Blanc noted in the late 1860s that "the wells are the wealth of the villages – their very existence ...[.] The wells number about twenty. Many old ones are closed, but new ones are frequently dug, so as to keep up a constant supply of water."[175] Another vital function of the satellite villages on the outskirts of the conurbation was their role as caravan stations.

The existence of water for incoming and outgoing caravans was crucial in this respect. Caravans bound to and from Massawa often stopped in Omkullo, Hitumlo and Zaga where they unloaded part of the goods brought with them, procured themselves with animals, water, wood and all other provisions required for a long journey - including guides for the first part of the trip through the lowlands. Zaga was explicitly identified as a settlement of Beduins who provided traders and caravans with water, wood and the means of transportation.[176] Omkullo had always been an important caravan station in the gates of Massawa and a bastion of power of the *Nā'ib* family section who resided there.

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[175] Blanc, *A Narrative of Captivity*, 63. But more comments on water and water wells in 64-6.
[176] Lejean, *Voyage en Abyssinie*, 60-1; Hotten, *Abyssinia and its Peoples*, 212; Issel, *Viaggio* (1872), 61; Douin, *Histoire du règne*, III, 1, 255; Gatta, "Da Massaua a Chartum," 404; Gatta, "Massaua e regioni circostanti,", 479; Vigoni, "Massaua e il nord dell'Abissinia," 4.

The French traveler Denis de Rivoire, provided a vivid description of his stay at the house of the chief of cameleers in Omkullo, who boasted two old rugs brought on his pilgrimage to Mecca in the 1840.[177]

The suburbs also provided Massawa with a variety of foodstuffs: fruit, vegetables, poultry, eggs, milk, meat and other foods that were consumed in town on a daily basis. Hirgigo, Hitumlo and Omkullo all had some, even if limited, lands for cultivation and gardens in which a variety of fruits and vegetables were grown in order to "feed the port." Women ground dhurra, prepared bread, and made mats from palm leaves which were all taken to be sold in Massawa. From Hitumlo too a daily flow of people came into Massawa to sell their produce and procure whatever they needed in the town's markets.[178] 'Saho' girls from Hirgigo came to Massawa to sell lemons and bread and every morning a *sanbūq* left Hirgigo to Massawa with people, wood, coal, vegetables, eggs, hens, sheep, goats, pigeons, etc on board.[179] During the rainy seasons Hitumlo and Amatreh provided the town with vegetables, melons, tobacco, dhurra, maize, cucumbers and bultuc (bulrush millet) which were grown there.[180]

As the population of the conurbation grew, Omkullo, and then Hitumlo, provided extra space for residence with a better climate than the island's unbearable heat throughout long months of the year. Some Massawans also had their camels, cows, goats, and donkeys in the more spacious outer villages of the conurbation. Since early in the century numerous observers noted that some of Massawa's wealthier merchants moved – seasonally, or daily – to Omkullo or Hitumlo where they had their primary or secondary

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[177] De Rivoyre, *Au pays du Soudan*, 16. See also De Cosson, *The Cradle of the Blue Nile*, 31-2.
[178] Gatta, "Da Massaua a Chartum per Cheren e Kassala," 404-5.
[179] Matteucci, *In Abissinia*, 54; Negri *Massaua e dintorni*, 18; Pippo Vigoni, "Massaua e il nord dell'Abissinia," 5.

residences.[181] Guillaume Lejean called Omkullo the "Batignolles of Massawa" and Denis de Rivoyre called it "a kind of Bougival or Asnieres," all references to residential quarters on the outskirts of Paris.[182] In the Italian period Hitumlo is said to have been divided into two parts: *Hitumlo ma'dei* (Tigre. 'further away' beyond the stream) and Hitumlo proper. In the first area lived many of the Beduins from Nakfa, Af'abat and Keren, mostly Habab, in straw huts. It was there that the markets to which the pastoralists brought their animals and produce were located. In Hitumlo *inferiore*, as it was called in the Italian era (in contrast to *superiore*), was where only Massawans lived, some of whom, especially the rich and prosperous, had beautiful stone houses. They felt they were superior to the *qabā'il* (Ar. 'tribes'), the dwellers of the northern part of Hitumlo.[183]

On a more conceptual level the outer settlements of the conurbation – Hirgigo, Hitumlo and Omkullo – were the sites where inland producing, trading and transportation networks and the sea-facing Massawa networks were linked to each other through a dense web of different mechanisms and bonds. It was the site where the town met the countryside, the urban merchant met the inland trader and where overland and seaborne networks connected. But it also represented a somewhat fuzzy reality in which urban merchants stretched their patron-client networks deep inland, and countryside folk could penetrate deep into the urban mercantile structures of the port. They had one foot in town and another in the countryside.

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[180] Wylde, *'83 to '87 in the Soudan*, 61; Salvadei, "Massaua", 1833.
[181] Combes and Tamisier, *Voyage en Abyssinie*, I, 113; Munzinger, *Les contrées limitrophes*, 34; Issel, *Viaggio nel mar Rosso*, 61; De Rivoyre, *Mer Rouge et Abyssinie*, 63; Gatta, "Massaua e regioni", 478; Vigoni, "Massaua e il nord dell'Abissinia," 4; Salvadei, "Massaua," 1833.
[182] Lejean, *Voyage aux deux Nils*, 164; De Rivoire, *Mer Rouge et Abyssinie*, 64.
[183] Interviews with Sayyid Ibrāhīm Muḥammad Ibrāhīm al-Sayyid, Massawa, 26 April 2000, Muḥammad Aḥmad 'Abbāsī, Massawa 29 April 2000 and Muḥammad Abū Bakr al-Nātī, Massawa 16 May 2000.

Describing the features of the typical Swahili coastal conurbation Middleton and Horton wrote that it constitutes a micro urban economic system of complementary production by exchange between different categories of settlement and is "tied together into a single unit by various bonds of neighborhood, kinship, political and religious authority, and by some expression of shared or complementary ethnicities."[184] This description is valid in the case of Massawa where a host of micro economic, commercial and social activities and relations took place throughout the conurbation, but were all at the same time geared towards serving the essential role and function of Massawa as a port dispatching goods for exportation and receiving imports for marketing locally and regionally. The structure and operation of the Massawa conurbation reveals an exchange network and an organization that was adjusted to local geographic, economic, commercial and social conditions. The conurbation may be seen as a space delimited by the various types of bonds and inter-relations that linked its inhabitants. The relationships could be based on ethnic or family connections or on patron-client or brokerage ties or all together combined.

The spatial and human organization of the mainland elements of the conurbation is suggestive to the socially porous nature of these mechanisms. As illustrated by Appendix 2, the settled populations of Hirgigo, Hitumlo and Omkullo were mixed ones. They comprised settled nomadic pastoralist traders, producers and others providing services to caravan transportation, brokerage and trade who had originated from the respective inland regions facing them: the different Tigre and Saho-speaking regions of the eastern Eritrean area. With the years, some of those who had settled in Massawa and the urban area, "became urban" and acted as brokers between the port and their original

[184] Horton and Middleton, *The Swahili*,136-7.

homelands in the Akkälä Guzay, Semhar, Sahel and western Eritrean lowlands. On the other, they included families, or branches of families, that are identified as Massawa's patrician classes– themselves of regional or foreign origins. They held in these villages their residences and promoted their business interests on the mainland by building on the historical domination of the inland regions by the leaders and merchants of the coast, essentially the Balaws and their associates, and the wealthy Massawa merchants.

Families belonging to the urban elite such as al-Nātī, Mantay, Ṣā'igh had branches that were energetically involved in a dense web of networks that penetrated deep into the countryside. Historically, these families rose to their high urban status thanks to their pivotal role of mediators between town and countryside. Brokers in Massawa's *umland* gradually developed solid connections with both urban merchants from Massawa and pastoralists and farmers from their respective regions of origin. To the town merchants they could offer access to countryside networks while to inland traders and producers they could offer the "keys to the city."[185]

The formation of these villages had been a gradual process that was closely related to the operation and vitality of the caravan routes from Massawa inland and to brokerage between town and countryside. In order to gain control over the gates entry/exit point of the port, the powerful coastal mercantile families held their power bases also in Omkullo and Hitumlo. The construction of the causeway, the relative safety provided by the Egyptian forces against possible attacks by highland Abyssinian warlords, and the availability of fresh water and land on the mainland, all provided an impetus for this process. Massawa families who set base in these mainland settlements usually built homes with large compounds (*darets*) that came to be known as *daret* 'Ad

'Abbāsī, *daret* 'Ad Makka'alī, *daret* 'Ad Afandī, for example. These compounds served as rest areas, supplying stations and trading centers.[186] Families such as the 'Ad Ḥāmidoi, 'Ad Ṣā'igh, 'Ad Yūsuf 'Obde, 'Ad Yāqūt, 'Ad Agāba and 'Ad Mantay in Hitumlo, and 'Ad Hāshim in Omkullo, have all been noted as important brokers during the Egyptian era.[187] Some of them, such as Mantay, Yāqūt, Ḥāmidoi and Ṣāi'gh had strong power bases in the town itself. In 1883 'Uthmān b. Sa'īd Ḥāmidoi was noted as a *khalīfa* in the records of the Islamic court, undoubtedly linking him as an office holder to one of the active *ṭuruq* in the region.[188] His brother, Shaykh Ahmad b. Sa'id Hamidoi was referred to as "*min a'yān Maṣawwa'*," or one of Massawa's notables, situating the family well within the town's urban elite.[189] The Ḥāmidois epitomize a segment of the Massawa elite whose solid power bases both within overseas and inland-looking webs of networks actually linked the sea and the land.

Accounting for the formation and role of Omkullo Salvadei wrote that "in a short time rich merchants had settled there." They collected cattle, butter and hides from the adjacent tribes and ivory, gold, civet and slaves from the Abyssinian caravans, loading all at Massawa to be shipped to the Arabian coast."[190] Appendix 2 clearly shows the stronghold of locally powerful families in these settlements. Furthermore, some of these families had their mosques in these settlements. Notable examples include the Adam Bārkoi, the Aḥmad Shalāl and the Muḥammad 'Umar Yāqūt mosques in Hitumlo; the shaykh 'Uthmān Ḥābūna mosque in Amatreh; the shaykh Muḥammad Jābir mosque and

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[185] The term is borrowed from Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine*, 81, 88.
[186] Letter from Fu'ād Makkī, 30 July 2004.
[187] Abdu Ali Habib, "History of Massawa", 21.
[188] MICR 8/61c (6 Dhū 'l-ḥijja 1300) also 2/46a.
[189] MICR 8/94d (10 Rajab 1301).
[190] Salvadei, "Massaua," 1833.

numerous others in Hirgigo.[191] These mosques served as influential power bases on the non-settled and recently settled pastoralists in Hitumlo and Hirgigo, and were important in binding new patron-client relationships.

Italian merchant and broker lists show how both brokers and grain merchants of whom many had firmly established urban bases (eg. Bā 'Īssa, al-Nātī, Sālim, Hayūtī, Sharīf, Hilāl, Masāwa and many others) operated from the outskirts of the conurbation, in Hirgigo and Hitumlo. But urban coastal families' networks and connections went even further inland to a second circle comprising villages such as Waqiro to the north and 'Ailat at the foot of the escarpment. For example, the presence of members of well-known Massawa families such as Aḥmad 'Abdu Seror and Muḥammad Nūr Mantay in Waqiro, Aḥmad 'Ubayd Bā Zar'a in Embereme, Sa'īd Bakri Ṣāigh in Harena, and Muḥammad 'Umar Shāwish and Muḥammad Sa'īd Ḥābūna in Mai Atal, all attest to these connections inland.[192]

Two noteworthy and suggestive observations may be made from the list mentioned above. First, the Shīnītī family, of Balaw origins and undoubtedly one of an exclusive circle of prominently wealthy and influential families, owning significant real-estate property and having a central role in Massawa's urban institutions, is noted as having strongholds in all three settlements (in addition to Massawa).

The Shīnītīs were but an example among other families who epitomized Massawa's urban mercantile elite, holding strong power bases in the outskirts of the conurbation and beyond, capitalizing on Balaw hegemony and control in the wider region

[191] Ibrāhīm al-Mukhtār Aḥmad 'Umar, *al-Jāmi'li akhbār jazīrat Bāḍi'*, 59-61 and Odorizzi, *Il commissariato regionale di Massawa*, 160-1.

in past centuries. Several members of this family, such as Muḥammad 'Uthmān b. Muḥammad b. Sa'īd Shineti, Muḥammad Nūr b. 'Āmir b. Ḥamad Shīnītī and Muḥammad Ṭāhir b. 'Uthmān Shīnītī (ca.40 years old in 1902-3), were qualified as among the port's most prominent notables in the last quarter of the century. The first, Muḥammad 'Uthmān Shīnītī, the most prominent of them, was the first-born of Muḥammad b. Sa'īd Shīnītī, who was already considered a notable at the time of his death some time in the early 1860s. The wealth he had accumulated and left to his sons Muḥammad 'Uthmān and 'Abd Allāh enabled them to invest together in urban real estate, land, shops, and water cisterns. Muḥammad 'Uthmān, the most prominent Shīnītī during the 1870s and 1880s, was qualified in the court records "the pride of the noble merchants," a prestigious and honorable appellation that only a handful in the port could attain. He was also qualified as a *khalīfa* (as his late father), suggesting his intimate association with one of the Sufi orders, most probably the Khatmiyya.[193] Muḥammad Ṭāhir b. 'Uthmān Shīnītī was a foremost merchant in textiles, civet and ivory. He was well-connected in the lowland interior as far as the Bani 'Amer regions through Balaw networks. In the early twentieth century he registered two of his boats with the Italian authorities, attesting again to the family's relative wealth in property.[194]

Another observation concerns cultural and identitary dynamics in the conurbation. It is interesting to note that the al-Nātī, Mantay and Yāqūt families were identified as being of "Arab" origins when their origins clearly pointed to the Eritrean interior. The

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[192] *Elenco dei commercianti, industriali, negozianti, imprenditori, appaltatori o fornitori, e degli esercenti professioni, arti e mestieri inscritti nel ruolo dei contribuenti della Colonia Eritrea (Esercizio 1912-13)*, Colonia Eritrea N. 58 (Asmara, 1913), 40-47.

[193] MICR 16/4a, 14/3b [1866]; 16/8a [1867]; 16/18b, 16/28b, 16/31b, 16/32c, 1637b, 16/40a, 16/46a, 14/7h [1868]; 16/95a, 16/96a, 16/96b, 16/98a [1873]; 16/100a [1874]; 16/112a, 16/113b [1876]; 11/31a, 9/9a, 9/13a [1878], 9/50a, 9/55a [1880], 8/4b, 8/5b [1881]; 8/43a, 8/56b [1883]; 12/9a [1886]; 12/51a [1888].

Mantay were originally from the western Eritrean lowlands and the al-Nātī family was from the Tigre-speaking Tsaura tribe and had family branches in Nakfa, Af'abat, Keren and Massawa.[195] It might be suggestive of the contemporary urban cultural dynamics that had identified Massawa's rich urban families with "Arab" origins and culture and a process of "Arabization" that ensued. Struggles for citizenship were often reflected by the use and manipulation of social and cultural markers. The increased urbanization of the outer circles of the conurbation prompted a process of heightened competition over the various forms of capital – social, economic, but also symbolic - necessary for joining urban socio-commercial structures and maximizing one's opportunities to benefit from the port's resources. In the lesser elements and on the fringes of the conurbation, in the markets and huts of Hirgigo, Omkullo and Hitumlo, the social, economic and cultural dynamics involved in the process of the integration into urban-dominated commercial networks took place and could at times offer the key to membership in urban society.

The villages on the periphery of the conurbation – or on the outskirts of town and the edge of the countryside - were the locus of multi-layered social interactions among their dwellers and between them and the nomads and pastoralists who often settled on the fringes of the satellite settlements. These were the sites where struggles and competition over the port's resources and lucrative networks took place. The markets and caravan stations were the central sites of brokerage and where clientship relationships and business alliances were negotiated. In the early years of the century two large markets operated in Hirgigo and Hitumlo/Omkullo. On Mondays people from all over the Semhar, the eastern escarpments of Akkälä Guzay, the Afar coast (Dancalia), the Habab regions

[194] ASDMAE, *AE*, b. 178, 'Elenco dei Notabili di Massaua' (1893) and ASDMAE, Archivio Eritrea 193 'R. Capitaneria di porto di Massaua': Matricola dei Sambuchi, 1 gennaio 1908.

and the lower escarpments of Hamasien came to the Hirgigo cattle market to sell all types of animals. Odorizzi qualified this market as among the most important in Eritrea. In Hitumlo and Omkullo a market was held on Thursdays in the Obel torrent where camels, cattle, sheep, butter, hides and sesame – all destined to be exported from Massawa – were sold.[196]

Concluding Remarks

The Massawa conurbation was the site of multiple brokering and mediating relationships, or networks that tied the wider world of the Red Sea and the western Indian Ocean with the inland regions of the Ethio-Eritrean region. The culturally heterogeneous composition of its population, yet its pronounced sense of corporateness, attests to the basic role of the urban community in commercial mediation. The formation of Massawa's population throughout its history has involved various levels of mixing and assimilation of merchants who had come from abroad with local coastal entrepreneurs and locally/regionally powerful merchants from Hirgigo and the eastern Eritrean inland. This historical process resulted in the creation of a highly complex janus-faced coastal community who could face the sea and the land simultaneously in order to mediate between commercial worlds separated by geography, polities and culture.

On a wide-scale inter-regional level, as a result of Egyptian imperialism and the commercial revival in the Red Sea region, Arab merchants, commercial entrepreneurs and businessmen mainly from Egypt and Arabia and Gujarati Banyans operated more dynamically in Massawa in the second half of the century. Some were agents and brokers

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[195] Interview with Muḥammad Abū Bakr al-Nātī, Massawa, 8 May 2000.

for business firms that were based abroad, others combined activities of commercial mediation with their own local businesses in the wholesale or/and the retail trade. Some Hadhrami and Egyptian commercial entrepreneurs were able to adapt to the new conditions of Red Sea commerce and accumulate impressive wealth in Massawa. Many became prominent and influential citizens, having their hand in the town's urban institutions.

On the other end of the spectrum, Abyssinian caravan traders, Saho and Tigre-speaking pastoralists, semi-pastoralists, producers and traders were all joint into the expanding economy of the Red Sea, providing goods for exportation and consuming imported products. Local Massawa patricians, assimilated Arabs/Muslims and the new Arab-Muslim migrants and entrepreneurs– or the urban community of Massawa - were the conglutinating element in this chain since they were at the core of the mediating mechanism that linked the world of the sea with that of the land.

[196] Salvadei, "Massaua," 1832-3 and Odorizzi, *Il commissariato regionale di Massaua*, 163, 170 (according to Salvadei a modest cattle market took place on Tuesday in Hitumlo).

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FACING THE LAND, FACING THE SEA: COMMERCIAL TRANSFORMATION AND URBAN DYNAMICS IN THE RED SEA PORT OF MASSAWA, 1840s -1900s

VOLUME II

By

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Chapter 5
SUFIS, SAINTS, AND TOWN ISLAM IN MASSAWA AND ITS INTERIOR, 1820s-1900s

We Massawans have adopted Islam even before the Meccans.
(Informant in Massawa)[1]

Muḥammad, Lord of the Two Worlds,
and of Man and the Jinn,
Lord also of the Arabs and
non Arabs and their Kin.
(al-Būṣīrī's *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah*,
Inscription on a wooden door lintel in Massawa)[2]

For when God's Prophet comes
to one's assistance and one's aid,
Were one to meet in thickets, lions
they'd be cowed and afraid.
(al-Būṣīrī's *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah*,
Inscription on a wooden door lintel in Massawa)[3]

If both a sense of urban distinction and a strong mercantile disposition were pivotal markers to individual and society in Massawa, a staunch devotion to Islam and the expression of Muslim identity was a third foundational pillar characterizing the community. From a Muslim historical perspective, Massawa was in a somewhat paradoxical position. On the one hand, its geographic proximity to Mecca and the Hijaz brought it in close contact with the Arab-Islamic heartlands and the most sacred places of

[1] Interview with Muḥammad Ṣālih Aḥmad Afandī, Massawa, 13 March 2000.
[2] Muḥammad ibn Sa'id al-Būṣīrī (608/1212 - c.694/1296). *Al-Busiri's Burda, The Prophet's Mantle.* Translated by Thoraya Mahdi Allam (Cairo, 1987), verse 34, p. 56. Translated also as "Muhammad, the Prince of the two universes [material and spiritual], of the two ponderable classes [men and demons], and of the two sections [of mankind], of the Arabians and the Non-Arabians." 'Poem of the Cloak' in W. A. Clouston, *Arabian Poetry for English Readers* (Glasgow, 1881), 'al-Burdah' tr. by J. W. Redhouse, 326. Inscription in Cerbella, *Aspetti etnografici,* 12.
[3] Ibid., verse 135, p. 128. Translated also as "For whoso hath his stay in the Apostle of God, if lions meet him in their thickets, they are struck mute and motionless," Clouston, *Arabian Poetry*, 338. Inscription in Cerbella, *Aspetti etnografici*, 11.

the Islamic *umma* (community of the faithful) since the very first days of the Islamic revelation. On the other hand, its relationship and historical dependence on Christian Abyssinia and its peripheries placed it on the fringes/frontier of the Islamic world, with an ancient and hegemonic non-Muslim political entity in its hinterlands and nominally Christian societies in the adjacent lowland areas. Massawa was thus a "Muslim island" in more than one sense, at least until the so called "Islamic revival" of the long nineteenth century, during which almost all lowland societies in its hinterland have either converted to Islam or witnessed a strengthening of Muslim practices and belief - most often through the influence of dynamic holy clans, families and *ṭuruq*.

On a discursive level, in periods of identity formation and politicization Muslims in Massawa and in Eritrea at large have tended to highlight their close affinities with Islamic history and their special place within the *umma* since the very first days of Islam. These discourses put particular emphasis on the story of the Prophet's companions and their flight to Abyssinia in 615 A.D.[4] Persecuted by the Meccan Qurayyshi nobility, the Prophet's companions crossed the Red Sea, landed on the Eritrean coast, and sought refuge in al-Ḥabasha, where they were welcomed by the Aksumite ruler, known in Islamic tradition as al-Najāshī. The episode, known in Islamic history as the ***hijra al-ūla*** (Ar. the first emigration), is viewed by many northeast African Muslims (but more so Eritreans and northern Ethiopians) as the cornerstone of this unique cross-Red Sea Islamic

[4] Such expressions have been recorded both in recent interviews and in the printed media. Ideas in this direction have been already expressed in the politically-liberal, but communally [and religiously] politicized 1940s under the British Military Administration. Eritrean Muslim intellectuals attempted to rally Eritrean Muslims and define the specificity/identity of Eritrean Islam, finding inspiration in Massawa's history and its links to Islamic history. Grand *muftī* Ibrāhīm al-Mukhtār (1909-1969) had been particularly active in this respect, publishing [anonymously] articles in the Muslim League's journal *Ṣawṭ al-Rābiṭa al-Islāmiyya al-Iritriyya* and composing a lengthy unpublished study on Massawa with a pronounced Islamic perspective, titled *al-Jāmi' li-akhbār jazīrat Bāḍi'*, Completed in Asmara in 1958.

relationship.[5] This pivotal historical story, according to these discourses, is proof to the deep loyalty of Massawa's Muslims since they have accepted the Prophet Muḥammad's message prior to its establishment in important centers in the Islamic heartlands such as Mecca, Damascus, Baghdad or Cairo.[6] As discussed below, the alleged landing of the Prophet's companions in Ras Midr on Massawa island also contributed to the notion of the town as a "Muslim island" possessing some type of sacred quality.

This chapter is concerned with the role of Islam in the history of Massawa and the eastern Eritrean area in a period of great social, economic, and political change throughout the nineteenth century. On one level and from a broader regional perspective it examines the effects of the so-called "Islamic revival" on the eastern Eritrean region, characterized by the emergence and operation of new Sufi brotherhoods, the revitalization of older brotherhoods, and the indefatigable activities of several holy families among non-Muslim or nominally Muslim societies of the region. As the most prominent urban center in the region and, together with Sawakin, a principal gateway into the eastern Sudanese and Eritrean regions, Massawa was at the crossroads of such connections. It was situated in a pivotal location in relation to these developing cross-Red Sea and northeast African networks, much redynamized as a result of the mid-nineteenth century commercial boom.

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[5] On the *ṣaḥāba* and Abyssinia see Haggai Erlich, *Ethiopia and the Middle East* (Boulder, CO., 1994), 5ff. See also A. Guérinot, "L'islam et l'Abyssinie," *RMM*, 34, 1917-1918, 6-8; Pollera, *Le popolazioni indigene*, 43-4; Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, 44-6; Joseph Cuoq, *L'islam en Ethiopie*, (Paris, 1981), 28-35, and Dante Odorizzi, *Note storiche sulla religione mussulmana e sulle divisioni dell'Islam con appunti speciali relativi all'Islam in Eritrea* (Asmara, 1916), 15-18. A most recent text written by an Eritrean highlighting the *ṣaḥāba* episode is Muḥammad Sa'īd Nāwad's *Iritriya: ṭarīq al-hijrāt wa-l-diyānāt wa-madkhal al-islām ilā Afriqiya* (Kuwait, 2001), 41-51. Nāwad gives the names of more than a hundred companions who emigrated in three successive waves.

[6] Muḥammad Sa'īd Nāwad, *Iritriya: ṭarīq al-hijrāt*, 37 and 50. Other Muslims in the Horn of Africa, such as the Somalis, have also expressed similar ideas attesting to their strong attachment to their faith. See for example Mohammed Haji Mokhtar, "Islam in Somali History: Fact and Fiction," In Ali Jimale Ahmed (ed.), *The Invention of Somalia* (Lawrenceville, NJ., 1995), 1.

Traders and holy men circulated between the Arabian Peninsula and the eastern Sudanese region much more easily. It is unsurprising that from mid-century the two most influential Muslim movements in the history of Islam in the area, the Khatmiyya and the 'Ad Shaykh holy family, had established centers and intensified their contact with the port and its mainland environs. There, they both gained much success among newcomers settling in and around town and were able to spread their influence over inland societies interacting with the conurbation. In the mid 1880s, as Imperialist Italy moved into the region and occupied territories in what would become the colony of Eritrea, it faced the task of controlling its newly conquered territories – an especially complex task in the context of the Mahdist successes in neighbouring Sudan and the new regional political and military dynamics that it triggered in northern Ethiopia and the territory that would become Eritrea.[7] The perceived Mahdist threat shaped early Italian attitudes to Islam in the area. The Italian authorities interfered with regional Muslim dynamics and aimied to construct a 'useful' relationship with the Khatmiyya, much to the detriment of the 'Ad Shaykh which was denigrated, discredited and consequently undermined. Colonial manipulating eventually led to the consolidation of the Eritrean branch of the Khatmiyya within the confines of the colony.

Moving on to a more town-focused perspective the chapter also examines the religious institutions, shared ideals and distinctive features of urban Muslims in Massawa against the background of the "Islamic revival," the transformations triggered by the commercial boom, and the migration into the conurbation of peoples with diverse social

[7] For the tortuous political, diplomatic and military struggles in the region in the 1880s involving Ethiopians, Egyptians, Sudanese Mahdists and Italians see Zewde Gabre-Sellassie, *Yohannes IV of Ethiopia*; Rubenson, *The Survival of Ethiopian Independence* and Erlich, *Ras Alula and the Scramble for Africa*.

and religious backgrounds from inlands and from across the sea. Urban growth fostered by the commercial revival brought together in a relatively short period of time pious Arab *sayyid*s and only recently converted Tigre-speaking nomads – to highlight the poles - into the Massawa conurbation, entailing various arenas of struggle over the definition (nature) of the Muslim community. Tensions between "popular" and "orthodox" Islamic practices were meaningful since in such a setting religion was by far the most important source of symbolic capital, instrumental both to the definition of communal boundaries and in promoting individual social [and economic] interests.

In general, Islam flourished in Massawa in the second half of the nineteenth century. Muslim dynamics in town radiated throughout the region, which looked up to it as an important Islamic center of law, learning and piety. The town's religious and cultural prestige rested on the existence of its more than sixty mosques (in 1910), its holy saints' tombs and shrines, its yearly celebrations and visitation sites, several qur'ānic schools, the *sharī'a* court, and the location of several sufi centers. It was also the point of departure to Mecca for those who were able to perform the *ḥājj* and, in general, a Red Sea hub where Muslims from all around the Red Sea and western Indian Ocean area rubbed shoulders all year round, exchanging goods and ideas.

The Diffusion of Islam in the Eritrean region before the 19th century: A Brief Overview

Both from a spatial and political perspective, the Eritrean region is a meeting point of several "frontiers" situated between the Red Sea and the facing Arabian Peninsula, the Sudanese Nile valley, and the northern Abyssinian highlands over which it is extended in part. Accordingly, the history of Islam in the area has been markedly

shaped by political, economic, migratory and religious developments in all these spheres and in the ways by which they made an impact on the region and its inhabitants in different historical contexts. From one specific angle, the historical layering of these influences is quite neatly exemplified by the regional distribution of the *madhāhib* (sing. *madhhab*, Islamic school of law) in Eritrea. The Shāfi'ī school, introduced by traders and holy men from the Yemeni region and adopted mostly by the 'Afari and some highland Jabarti, was the earliest in the region.[8] The Māliki legal rite, predominant in the pre-Turkiyya Sudan, was influential with groups in the western lowlands. Finally, Semhar groups and other Tigre and Saho-speaking groups of the eastern lowlands and northern highlands adhered to the Ḥanafī *madhhab*, introduced officially by the Ottomans.[9]

The early seventh century A.D. episode of the Prophet's companions' flight from the Hijaz to Abyssinia is by all means highly symbolic; its actual reflection of the diffusion and establishment of Islam in northeastern Africa at that early stage was nevertheless insignificant. Muslim influence in the region was to some extent more importantly felt beginning in the eighth century A.D. when recently Islamized Arabs occupied the Dahlak islands off the Massawa coast. Approximately one century later several Arab tribes transplanted from the Arabian Peninsula and gradually assimilated into Bejja Hamitic groups introduced Islam to the Bejja tribes inhabiting the plains between the Red Sea and the Nile (covering also areas in northern and western present-

[8] The Jabarti are Muslims inhabiting the Ethiopian and Eritrean highlands. They are mostly urban and are engaged in commerce and artisanal work. See Abdulkadir Salih, "Jabarti," *EA* (forthcoming).
[9] An Italian census of 1931 gave the following proportions: Mālikīs 65%, Ḥanafīs 26% and Shāfi'īs 9%. Pollera doubted these figures and presumed that the Ḥanafīs were nevertheless the majority. Both of Eritrea's Grand *muftīs*, originally from eastern Eritrea and educated in Egypt, have followed the Ḥanafī school. Arnaldo Bertola, *Il regime dei culti nell'Africa italiana* (Bologna, 1939), 163; Pollera, *Le popolazione indigene dell'Eritrea*, 285-6; Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, 232-3; Alessandro Gori, "Soggiorno di studi in Eritrea ed Etiopia. Brevi annotazioni bibliografiche," *RSE*, XXXIX, 1995, 94-7.

day Eritrea).[10] In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the Dahlak archipelago was the seat of an independent emirate ruled by a line of sultans, serving as a lucrative transit station in the trade between Egypt and India, but also in cross-Red Sea trade between Abyssinia and Yemen.[11] It is possible that the first significant Muslim influences on Massawa coincide with the apogée of Dahlaki political power during this period.

The migration of traders and clerics enhanced the diffusion of Islam on the coasts and by the thirteenth century many of the 'Afar and Saho-speaking peoples of the eastern Eritrean region had become Muslims. The political and economic context was the rise of the Fāṭimids in Egypt and the resulting commercial revival of the Red Sea, both boosting the role of Islam in the wider region. Eastern Eritrean Muslim traditions recall [and still venerate] *faqīh* Muḥammad, the Hijazi cleric responsible for the initial spread of Islam among their societies. *Faqīh* Muḥammad had moved from Mecca to Zabid (Yemen) where he settled, eventually becoming a *faqīh* and an *'alīm*. In the eleventh century A.D., traditions continue, he crossed the Red Sea into the coastal region known as Dankalia and converted there many Afar-speaking communities, most often by marrying the daughters of local leaders. He then moved on to the district of Sen'afe in Akkälä Guzay, where he converted the largest and most prominent Saho-speaking clans, the Assaworta (Asaorta) and the Minifere.[12] Later in his life he moved to Deset (Semhar), then Zula where he finally settled. His sons, shaykh Sālim and shaykh Ṣālih are regarded as the ancestors of

[10] John Spencer Trimingham, *Islam in the Sudan* (London, 1965) (1st ed. 1949), 10; Guérinot, "L'islam et l'Abyssinie," 9.
[11] See chapter 3 for references on the Dahlak archipelago in this period.
[12] His descendants from his marriage within the Minifere founded the pious sub-clan Faqih Harak, of whom descended Eritrea's most important scholar in the 20th century, Grand *muftī* Shaykh Ibrāhīm al-Mukhtār Aḥmad 'Umar (1909-1969).

several important holy clans and families in the region (present as far as the Barka in the west and the Sahel in the north).

The most prominent of these holy clans is undoubtedly the Bayt Shaykh Maḥmūd, originally from Zula, spread in numerous settlements throughout Semhar. It was well networked in the urban setting, principally through prominent families issued from it such as Faras, Bādūrī, Mantay, Sa'dūy, Ḥabīb, and Khaydara.[13] Other notable Tigre and Saho-speaking holy clans or lineages that developed in subsequent centuries, are the 'Ad Darqī, 'Ad Mu'alim, 'Ad Zubayr, al-Kabīrī, and others.[14] Some of these became 'religious clans' catering to their wider social groupings or clan confederations with religious services such as providing *qāḍīs* and teachers. Most drew their legitimacy from claims of prestigious descent originating in the Hijaz or the Arabian Peninsula at large. During the nineteenth century religious revival most were actively engaged in spreading Islam in various Eritrean regions, often by marrying into non-Muslim communities.[15]

A second phase of intensified Islamic diffusion and activity began in the fifteenth century and culminated in the sixteenth.[16] The politicization of Islam in the Horn of Africa fostered by the rise to prominence of the sultanate of Adal, and attaining its climax with the *jihād* of Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm al-Ghāzī (nicknamed Grañ. In Amh. the 'left-

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[13] In his early twentieth-century description of marriage, divorce and funerary customs in Massawa Capomazza placed families and members of the Bayt Shaykh Maḥmūd in a prominent position as communal religious leaders. Ilario Capomazza, *Usanze islamiche hanafite di Massaua e dintorni* (Macerata 1910).

[14] In most Arabic sources they are identified as *qaba'il shaykha* (Ar. shaykh tribes?).

[15] Muḥammad 'Uthmān Abū Bakr, *Ta'rīkh Iritriya*, 97-8, 312-6. See also Muḥammad Sa'īd Nāwad, *Iritriya: ṭarīq al-hijrāt*, 52-3. Faqih Muḥammad is buried in a place called 'Ala off the mountain chain of Nefasit and on the road to Deqemhare. On the Ad Mu'alim see Jonathan Miran, "'Ad Mu'alim," *EA*, I, 67-8. On the 'Ad Darqi see D'Avray, *Lords of the Sea*, 35-6.

[16] Broadly, the identification of these phases follows Hussein Ahmed's reasoning in relation to Ethiopia at large. It attempts to balance between external and internal dynamics. Hussein Ahmed, *Islam in Nineteenth-Century Wallo, Ethiopia: Revival, Reform and Reaction* (Leiden, 2001), 74-5. As noted above, Balaw traditions also place their migration from the Barca region eastwards towards the Red Sea coast (and ultimately to Hirgigo) some time in the fifteenth century. The head of the lineage was said to be a *Sayyid* descendant of 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abbās, the Prophet's uncle. Salvadei, "Massaua," 1831.

handed'), fostered the diffusion of Islam in the Ethio-Eritrean region. One of its direct consequences was the prompting of a more elaborate formation of Jabarti communities in the highlands. It was also the cause for numerous disorderly migratory waves of communities, most often directed towards the northern fringes of the Abyssinian polity, to regions located on the borders separating between Christian and Muslim [nominal or 'real'] political and religious influence. Furthermore, the conflict between Christians and Muslims in Ethiopia rallied external imperialist forces in the Red Sea area and culminated in the Ottoman occupation of Massawa in 1557; an occupation that lasted until 1865. The presence of the most prestigious Muslim power of the day in the region and the practical "Ottomanization" of a commercially and strategically revitalized Red Sea also prompted the migration of Arabs from the Hijaz, Yemen and Hadhramawt to Massawa and Hirgigo.

In terms of religious influence, the construction and renovation of several mosques and tombs (Ar. sing. *qubba*), most notably the shaykh Ḥammāl al-Anṣāri religious complex, the shaykh Darwīsh *ḍarīḥ* (Ar. tomb/shrine), and what became known as the Ḥanafī mosque, characterized the Ottoman era in Massawa.[17] The Ottomans introduced the Ḥanafī *madhhab* as the official legal rite and sent Ḥanafī *qāḍī*s to Massawa from the Hijaz in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.[18] The prolonged incorporation of Massawa and its close hinterlands into the Ottoman administrative and

[17] For details on the tombs of Shaykh Ḥammāl 'Umar b. Ṣadīq al-Anṣāri and Shaykh Muḥammad Darwīsh b. Ibrāhīm b. Ja'far b. Ḥasan b. Barakāt, see Ibrāhīm al-Mukhtār, *al-Jāmi' li-akhbār jazīrat Bāḍi'*, 62-4. See also Federico Cresti, "Alcune note storiche su Massaua, con particolare riferimento ad un complesso religioso islamico: la moschea dello sayh Hammali," *Africa* (Roma), 45 (3) 1990, 410-431 and, Ibid, "La mosquée du Sayh Hammali à Massaoua," 303-315. On the origins of the 'Ḥanafī' mosque see Ibrāhīm al-Mukhtār, *al-Rāwiya fī ta'rīkh mudun Iritriya*, Unpublished MS. completed in Asmara 1953, 53.

[18] Members of the 'Abbāsi family still recall the reason for their ancestors' emigration from the Hijaz to Massawa. Their family traditions converge with *qāḍī* lists that mention several *qāḍī*s from the family in the 17th and 18th centuries. See Ibrāhīm al-Mukhtār, *al-Jāmi' li-akhbār jazīrat Bāḍi'*, 77.

commercial setup in the Red Sea area, first and foremost vis-à-vis the Hijaz, positioned it even more firmly than hitherto within a political but also religious sphere of Muslim influence.

Saints and Sufis: Revival and Expansion in the Nineteenth Century

A third pivotal phase in the development of Islam in the region occurred throughout the nineteenth century. It was interwoven with the wave of religious renewal and reform movement throughout the Muslim world, and Egyptian imperialism in northeast Africa. It also coincided with and was generated by the transformation of the political economy of the region, resulting from the Red Sea trade revival and the increasing integration of the broader region to the world economy, via the political and economic structures at place in Massawa. The waning of Abyssinian central power in the period known as the *zämänä mäsäfint* (Amh. The Era of the Princes) was also a factor in the historical development of its peripheral northern fringes in the first half of the nineteenth century.

The set of movements frequently referred to as the "Islamic Revival" emerged in the late-eighteenth century and developed throughout the nineteenth. They were in part a response to the increasing economic penetration of Europe into the Muslim world and the resulting weakening and decentralization of the Ottoman Empire. The stagnation and perceived 'degeneration' of Islam generated also what John Voll called a "spirit of socio-moral reconstruction," inspiring Muslim thinkers to reformulate Islam.[19] Against the background of this atmosphere, the period witnessed a fervent development of fundamentalist movements such as the Wahhābiya, the appearance of millenarian

[19] See John Obert Voll, *Islam. Continuity and Change in the Modern World* (Boulder, CO., 1982), 34-9.

Mahdist movements, the emergence of new Sufi brotherhoods, and the revival of the older orders.[20] On the frontiers of the Islamic world – as in many parts of Africa - the upsurge manifested itself in the missionary activities of the Sufi brotherhoods, aiming at spreading Islam among non-Muslims and deepening Islamic practices and piety among those Muslim societies whom they perceived as morally and religiously adrift.

In northeast Africa the Islamic revival was especially marked by the emergence of influential holy families, new Sufi orders and the revitalization of the older established orders.[21] The Qādiriyya had already attracted followers in the Eritrean area prior to the 'sufi revival', especially in Massawa where qādirī sufis erected a *mazār* (Ar. visitation shrine) in commemoration of 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī.[22] In the nineteenth century it was revived and brought further into the interior, especially through the dynamic activities of the 'Ad Shaykh family in the northern and western lowland regions.[23] Other orders such as the Shādhiliyya have also attracted some followers in Massawa but little detail about them is at present available to us.[24]

The most far-reaching and significant development in term of Sufi brotherhood presence and activity in the nineteenth century was the emergence of the Khatmiyya, the "seal of the orders," drawing its inspiration from the teachings of Aḥmad b. Idrīs

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[20] Nehemia Levtzion, and John Obert Voll, "Introduction," In Nehemia Levtzion, and John Obert Voll, (eds.) *Eighteenth-Century Renewal and Reform in Islam*, (Syracuse, 1987), 3-20.

[21] For a short overview of *tariqa* presence in northeast Africa see Nicole Grandin, "Le nord-est et l'est de l'Afrique," in Alexandre Popovic et Gilles Veinstein (eds.), *Les Voies d'Allah : les ordres mystiques dans le monde musulman des origines à aujourd'hui* (Paris: Fayard, 1996), 428-441.

[22] The Qādiriyya is the most popular and widespread *ṭarīqa* in the Muslim world. The teachings of the Persian sufi 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlāni (1077-1166) have served as the basis for its foundation.

[23] Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, 239-240. Grandin, "Le nord-est et l'est de l'Afrique," 430-1.

[24] The foundation of the Shadhiliyya is ascribed to Shaykh Abū'l-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī (1196-1258). In Massawa, members of the 'Abbāsi family claim a long-term historical affiliation with the Shādhiliyya. The family has been associated with the office of *qāḍī* and other religious institutions for several centuries to this day. Interview with 'Abd al-Bāqi Muḥammad 'Abdu 'Abbāsi, Massawa, 27 September 1999. See also Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, 236 and, for the Shādhiliyya in the Sudan, Karrar, *The Sufi Brotherhoods in the Sudan*, 35.

(1749/1750-1837).[25] Scholars such as O'Fahey and Radtke have argued that the new orders (often called "neo-Sufi" orders) were less innovative in terms of their intellectual dimension than in their new organizational features.[26] If prior to the eighteenth-century most Sufi affiliations with the Qādiriyya and Shādhiliyya were lineage or family-based, the new orders tended to transcend lineage, 'tribal' and social boundaries. They perceived themselves as organizations, were more hierarchical, and were often centered around the families of their founders.[27]

Contrasting Methods of Islamic Diffusion: The 'Ad Shaykh and the Khatmiyya

Several holy families played pivotal roles in the transmission and propagation of Islamic religion, law and culture in the areas extending between the Red Sea and the Nile Valley during the period of "Islamic revival." Their "holiness" usually derived from their claim to *sharīf* descent and from the possession of ***baraka***, a heritable beneficient force of divine origin.[28] One of the most significant holy families to play a role in the history of Islam in the Eritrean area in the nineteenth century was the 'Ad Shaykh, tracing descent to *sharīf* Ḥusayn from Mecca.[29]

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[25] See R. S. O'Fahey, *Enigmatic Saint: Ahmad Ibn Idris and the Idrisi Tradition* (Evanston, 1990).
[26] For a detailed critique of the concept "Neo-Sufism," see R. S. O'Fahey and Berndt Radtke, "Neo-Sufism Reconsidered," *Der Islam*, 70 (1993), 52-87.
[27] R. S. O'Fahey, "Ṭarīka [in northeastern and eastern Africa]," *EI2*, 248. See also O'Fahey, *Enigmatic Saint*, 4-7.
[28] Peter M. Holt, "Holy families and Islam in the Sudan," in Peter M. Holt (ed.), *Studies in the History of the Near East* (London, 1973), 121-2.
[29] A copy of the *nisba* (Ar. pedigree) of Shaykh Ḥāmid b. Naf'ūtay was given to me during the *ziyāra* to the tomb of Shaykh Muḥammad b. Ali (d.1877) at Emberemi in May 2000. It is assumed that the *nisba* was given to Abū Bakr b. Ibrāhīm b. Ḥāmid b. Naf'ūtay in 999H. (1590) at Mecca. Twenty-seven generations are traced from Shaykh Ḥāmid to 'Ali. (See also a *nisba* in Muḥammad 'Uthmān Abū Bakr, *Ta'rīkh Iritriya*, 317). Other typed and manuscript documents were given to me on the same occasion, some of which provide details in the account that follows. See a simplified genealogical table also in Pollera, *Le popolazioni indigene*, 205. The first member of the lineage who came from the Hijaz to the eastern Sudanese region (via Sawakin) was 'Uthmān b. Muḥammad. He had a son ('Āmir) with a woman of the Aliyab. 'Āmir's son, Maḥmūd, settled in Kassala where he had Naf'ūtay with a woman of the 'Ad Qayi'. Naf'ūtay, and later his son Ḥāmid, moved eastwards to the Eritrean Sahel. There, in the early nineteenth

Between the 1820s and 1860s the 'Ad Shaykh family was instrumental in converting all the Bayt Asgäde sub-groups (Habab, 'Ad Takles and 'Ad Tamaryam), the Mansa',[30] the Marya, the Bayt Juk, and segments of the Bilen from local forms of Christianity to Islam. By the 1880s all lowland groups but the Kunama and part of the Bilen had adopted Islam. The 'Ad Shaykh operated in tandem with the Hirgigo-based potent Nā'ib family, to whom many of these societies were tributary. It also appears that it worked hard at initiating these groups into the Qādiriyya Sufi brotherhood, but we lack any substantial data on this aspect of their activities.[31] The 'Ad Shaykh attracted entire families of Tigre vassals to join their ranks by undermining the master/serf structure of Tigre-speaking pastoralist and agro-pastoralist societies. Increased pressures on the more vulnerable Tigre class prompted by the ramifications of the commercial boom might in part explain the success of this process. The unsettling of the prevailing social structure constituted a form of social revolution culminating in the emancipation of the Tigre serfs. But it also posed a threat and a serious challenge to the traditional chiefs, such as in the case of the Bani 'Amir.

In the course of time, the newly converted joined the holy family who was rapidly enlarged, developing gradually into a widely influential and wealthy independent

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century, Shaykh al-Amīn b. Ḥāmid b. Naf'ūtay gradually gained widespread reputation as a holy man through his preaching and miracle working among the nominally Christian Tigre-serfs of the Bet Asgede confederacy who approached him to seek his *baraka*. Shaykh al-Amīn married the daughter of the Bet Asgede *kantibay* (Tig. chief) and thus began a process of marriages with Bet Asgede women that eventually resulted in the conversion of part of that group to Islam. A saintly cult developed around the person of Shaykh al-Amīn and after his death a visitation to his tomb was begun in the vicinity of Af 'abad. See Maria Höfner, "Überlieferungen bei Tigre-stämmen (I) Ad Sek," *Annales d'Ethiopie*, Tome IV, 1961, 181-203. The Tigre-language text translated (into German) and annotated by Höfner is titled "Fagret Ad Shekh" ("Origins of the Ad Shaykh").

[30] One source noted that in the 1870s Beemnat, a Mensa chief, came to Shaykh Muḥammad in Emberemi and converted there to Islam. Roden, *Le tribù dei Mensa*, 115.

[31] Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, 239. Another point that requires further enquiry and confirmation is whether the 'Ad Shaykh followed the Mālikī legal rite.

'tribe'.[32] At some point the family split and began to spread throughout the western, northern and eastern regions of the Eritrean lowlands. Several of shaykh al-Amīn b. Ḥāmid b. Naf'ūtay's sons settled in the 'Ansaba and Barka valleys while others stayed in the Sahel, yet others emigrated to the north, as far as Tokar in the Sudan. This process broadened the family's influence and networks, and considerably increased its wealth. Shaykh al-Amīn's grandson, shaykh Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. al-Amīn (b. Nakhra [?] c. 1210/1795 - d. Emberemi, 14 ṣafar 1297/27 February 1877) moved to Hirgigo where he spent twelve years before moving and settling in Emberemi in ca. 1840, establishing there the Semhar branch of the 'Ad Shaykh.[33] Shaykh Muḥammad gained such widespread reputation as a holy man possessed with *baraka* that in the early 1860s Guillaume Lejean described Emberemi as a pilgrimage site to whom people from all over Semhar and Sahel came.

> Beraimi (Emberemi) has become a little Mecca. Muḥammad, today in his seventies, sends his two sons on propaganda tours in Semhar, Barka, Bet Juk and Bogos (Bilen). They cannot resist their preachings. There are no recently married couples in Massawa, or traders going to Gash who consider themselves safe against any type of ordeal without first going to Emberemi and asking for all sorts of prayers and talismans from the holy man.[34]

Shaykh Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. al-Amīn of Emberemi was undoubtedly one of the more influential religious figures of the coastal region from the 1840s to his death in 1877. In the middle years of the 1860s Henry Blanc remarked that the Habab "were converted to Mohammedanism by an old Sheikh, still alive, who resides near Moncullou,

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[32] On the role and methods of the 'Ad Shaykh in converting these specific societies see Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, 154-5, 159-169; Pollera, *Le popolazione*, 204-10. See also S. F. Nadel, *Races and Tribes of Eritrea* (Asmara, 1944), 42-3; Killion, *Historical Dictionary of Eritrea*, 30; Guérinot, "L'islam et l'Abyssinie," 31-57; Muḥammad 'Uthmān Abū Bakr, *Ta'rīkh Iritriya*, 316, and Miran, "'Ad Shaykh," I, 68-9.

[33] Ibrāhīm al-Mukhtār, *al-Jāmi' li-akhbār jazīrat Bāḍi'*, 65. Two of shaykh al-Amīn's sons settled among the Garabit and the Faydab and lived under the patronage of the Bani 'Amir.

[34] Lejean, *Voyage aux deux Nils*, 142. See also Jonathan Miran, "Embärämi," *EA* (forthcoming).

and is an object of great veneration all over Semhar."[35] The shaykh's association with the Nā'ib family, the wealthy and powerful merchants of Massawa, and his good rapport with the Ottoman, and later Egyptian administration all contributed to his success, enabling him to tap into the prevailing regional networks.[36] Shortly following his death in 1877, a *qubba* (Ar. domed tomb for a noted saint) was erected over his grave, with the financial and logistical assistance of the Egyptian administration in Massawa.[37] A yearly visitation to the tomb developed shortly thereafter. As early as the 1880s Wylde remarked that Emberemi was "the burial place of an old sheikh who died many years ago, and whose tomb is greatly venerated, and at one time of the year many people visit it and bring offerings to the priest in charge." [38]

Other European observers witnessed the atmosphere of religious transformation and the influence of holy men and miracle workers during this period. In the early 1860s Munzinger remarked that Islam was only superficially adopted by many of the recently converted nomadic communities. Little has it transformed their daily lives and many of their "ancient Christian" customs have remained intact. But he also noted, with typical irony and moralistic bias, how superstitious phenomena were on the rise:

> There are here many shaykhs who perform miracles. They are able to cure the sick with two verses from the Qur'ān, chase away demons, and inflame the cold heart of a little girl. Naturally, in order for them to perform these miracles one has to pay them generously. There are women here who seem to get visitations from heaven from time to time. The evil spirits are abundant.....[39]

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[35] Blanc, *A Narrative of Captivity*, 88.
[36] Pollera suggested that one of the factors in 'Ad Shaykh success was their association with "Ottoman prestige." Pollera, *Le popolazioni indigene*, 200.
[37] Ibrāhīm al-Mukhtār, *al-Jāmi' li-akhbār jazīrat Bāḍi'*, 65.
[38] Wylde, *'83 to '87 in the Soudan*, 61. See also Salvadei, "Massaua," 1833.
[39] Munzinger, *Studi sull'Africa orientale*, 125-6.

Henry Blanc was even more cynical and sarcastic:

> The Bedouins of the Semhar, like all bigoted and ignorant savages, have great confidence in charms. The "medicine man" is generally an old, venerable-looking Sheikh – a great rascal, for all his sanctified looks. His most usual prescription is to write a few lines of the Koran upon a piece of parchment, wash off the ink with water, and hand it over to the patient to drink; at other times the writing is enclosed in small squares of red leather, and applied to the seat of the disease. The Mullah is no contemptible rival of his, and though he also applies the all-efficacious words of the revealed "cow," he effects more rapid cures by spitting several times upon the sick person, muttering between each ejection appropriate prayers which no evil spirit could withstand, should his already sanctified spittle not have been sufficient to cast them off.[40]

Slightly earlier, the Italian catholic missionary Giuseppe Sapeto, also described the spirit of the times, without withholding his personal views. Describing the activities of holy men among the Bilen, he noted

> Islamic propaganda has put its hand on this work of sacrilege. Islam is making progress in all the villages and ruining the [Christian] faith. These men [the *faqīr*s, propagating Islam] ... give amulets to the sick and are the source of moral disorder. They preach apostasy, promising Gennat (Paradise). The chief town of their mission is Keren, the meeting place of the traders from Gash and Massawa, from where they monopolize both commodities and souls (consciences).[41]

Three intermittent missionary tours undertaken between c.1817 and probably some point in the 1830s by the founder of the Khatmiyya *ṭarīqa*, Muḥammad 'Uthmān al-Mīrghanī (1793/4-1852), propelled the influence of the order in the Eritrean region.[42] The

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[40] Blanc, *A Narrative of Captivity*, 71-2.

[41] Sapeto, *Viaggio e missione*, II, 156-7.

[42] On Muḥammad 'Uthmān al-Mīrghani and his writings see R. S. O'Fahey, *Arabic Literature of Africa, The Writings of Eastern Sudanic Africa to c.1900*, Volume I (Leiden, 1994), 187-198, 208-9. For a short and outdated treatment of the Khatmiyya in Ertirea see Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, 244-5. On Muḥammad 'Uthmān's travels in the Sudan see Karrar, *The Sufi brotherhoods*, 57-64; For the Eritrean region see R. S. O'Fahey, "Sudanese (and some other) sources for Eritrean history: a bibliographical note," *Sudanic Africa*, 12, 2001, 135-7. See also Archivio Centrale dello Stato (henceforth ACS), Ministero dell'Africa Italiana (henceforth MAI), Governo dell'Eritrea, b. 1066, Allegato no. 9, 'Note sul commissariato regionale di Cheren', Cheren July 1928 by Amerio Liberati, p. 69-70. Aḥmad b. Idrīs b. Aḥmad al-Rubāṭābī, *al-Ibāna al-nūriyya fī sha'n ṣāḥib al-ṭarīqa al-Khatmiyya*, (ed. Muḥammad Ibrāhīm Abū Salīm), Beirut 1991 provides more elements to complete the picture.

success of Khatmiyya influence in the Sudanese and Eritrean regions went hand in hand with the Turco-Egyptian occupation of the Sudan beginning in 1820. The Khatmiyya's broad-based organization was well adjusted to the new political order of the Turkiyya in the Sudan, contributing to its success.[43] The Khatmiyya's method of expansion was by the incorporation of pre-existing religious formations (notables and holy lineages) "into a new supra-community *ṭarīqa* network."[44] In practice this was achieved by what the historian Knut Vikør called the "grafting" model by which *khalīfa*s and *khalīfat al-khulafā'* were initiated, appointed, and linked into a broad-based transethnic and crossregional organization covering a wide area.[45] *Ashrāf* descent and the possession of *baraka* were primordial factors in claiming holiness.[46]

The Khatmiyya relied on local *faqīh*s and religious leaders – who continued to perform their religious role locally - in order to link between commoners and the Sufi brotherhood. Explaining the success of such a flexible and assimilationist method in the Sudan, John Voll has noted that "there was no distinction drawn between the functions of the *faki* as a Khatmiyya *khalīfa* and his other local functions. It all soon came to be looked upon as the actions of a Khatmiyya representative. In this way many old forms and customs were incorporated in what came to be seen as Khatmiyya practice."[47] In other words, in contrast with the methods of the 'Ad Shaykh, communities coming under the influence of the supra-ethnic Khatmiyya were able to preserve their pre-existing social and political structures, much as a sense of stability and continuity.

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[43] John Obert Voll, 'A history of the Khatmiyyah tariqa in the Sudan,' Ph.D. Harvard University 1969, 178-181.
[44] O'Fahey and Radtke "Neo-Sufism Reconsidered," 79.
[45] Knut Vikør, "Sufi Brotherhoods in Africa," in Levtzion and Pouwels, (eds.), *The History of Islam in Africa*, 463.
[46] According to Voll *baraka* was hereditary in the Mīrghani family. Voll, "A history of the Khatmiyyah tariqa," 158.
[47] Ibid, 189-190.

The intensification of Turco-Egyptian encroachments, especially following their conquest of Kassala in 1840, facilitated the entrenchment of the brotherhood in the eastern Sudanese and Eritrean region. Around the same year, Muḥammad al-Ḥasan al-Mīrghanī (1819-1869), known also as *al-sayyid* al-Ḥasan, and son of the founder of the Khatmiyya, had settled in al-Saniyya, at the foot of Kassala mountain, and established there the order's headquarters.[48] The Khatmiyya capitalized on the Turco-Egyptian imperialist drive in the region by maintaining a good relationship with its military-administrative organs, thereby extending its spheres of influence in territories coming under direct or indirect Turkiyya rule.[49] After Muḥammad 'Uthmān al-Mīrghanī's death in 1852 the Khatmiyya split into regional branches each with its own shaykh. *Sayyid* al-Ḥasan became de facto the head and consolidator of the northern and eastern Sudan branch of the order. It was also under *sayyid* al-Ḥasan's leadership that groups such as the Halanqa and the Habab came under greater Khatmi influence. It was in this period that the Khatmiyya won the loyalty of the Habab ruling class.[50]

It seems that an important detail about the establishment of the Khatmiyya in the Massawa area requires some revision. There is still some confusion in the genealogy of the Mīrghaniyya family, at least in its eastern Sudanese and Eritrean branches. Most writers follow Trimingham's assertion that "the Mīrghaniyya was established in the Massawa district by *sayyid* Hāshim al-Mīrghanī who first came there in 1860 when it was under Ottoman rule."[51] Secondary sources note that Hāshim actually settled in the port

[48] Karrar, *The Sufi brotherhoods*, 76.
[49] For a nuanced view of the ambiguous Khatmi-Egyptian relationship see O'Fahey and Radtke, "Neo-Sufism Reconsidered," 82-3.
[50] Voll, "A history of the Khatmiyyah tariqa," 224-5.
[51] Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, 245.

and made it his home.[52] However, on the basis of Italian colonial archival materials it seems that Hāshim settled in Massawa only in mid-April 1885 after fleeing from Kassala during the Mahdiyya together with his nephew Muḥammad 'Uthmān b. Muḥammad Sirr al-Khatm (also known as Muḥammad 'Uthmān Tāj al-Sirr, 1849/50-1903)[53].

In the pre-Italian era Muḥammad 'Uthmān b. Muḥammad Sirr al-Khatm interacted intensively with the eastern Eritrean region, especially with the Habab among whom he lived in the 1860s, but also with Saho-speaking societies of the eastern highland escarpments in the 1870s. Of the Mīrghanī family members touring, visiting, and settling in the wider region between the Red Sea and the Nile Valley before 1885, Muḥammad 'Uthmān Sirr al-Khatm's role was greatest in consolidating the Khatmiyya's influence and gaining adherence in Sahel, Samhar, Akkälä Guzay and in Massawa's burgeoning suburbs and satellite villages.[54]

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[52] On Hāshim al-Mirghani see *ALA, I*, 208-9; Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, 245, 252, Hofheinz, "Sons of a Hidden Imam," 25.

[53] Detailed evidence will be exposed elsewhere. The sources are: Archivio Storico Diplomatico Ministero degli Affari Esteri (henceforth ASDMAE), Archivio storico del Ministero dell'Africa italiana, (henceforth *ASMAI*), Pos 3 / 4, fasc 23, 'Copia della lettera dello scek Saied Mohamed Hascem El Morgani a S. M. il Re d'Italia, d'Africa e dell'Eritrea Vittorio Emanuele III', Massaua, 7 sha'bān 1318 / 29 November 1900; ACS, *MAI*, b.1066, Allegato no. 9, 'Note sul commissariato regionale di Cheren', Cheren July 1928 by Amerio Liberati, 72-3. Puglisi, whose sources are not entirely reliable, noted that Hāshim's daughters, Maryam and 'Alawiya, were both born in Algheden (Sabdarat) in 1862 and 1863 respectively, reinforcing the argument that Hāshim did not settle in Massawa in 1860. Puglisi, *Chi e?*, 213; also ASDMAE, *ASMAI* Pos 3 / 4, fasc 23, Genè to Minister of Foreign Affairs, 28 December 1886. On Muḥammad 'Uthmān Tajj al-Sir see *ALA*, I, 201.

[54] In 1875 Shaykh Aḥmad b.'Umar Kūrī (d.1924), father of the Eritrean Grand *mufti* Ibrāhīm al-Mukhtār and head of the Saho-speaking holy Faqīh Ḥarak clan (of the Minifere), had met Muḥammad 'Uthmān Tāj al-Sirr – a meeting that had profoundly marked him. In one of his unpublished manuscripts Ibrāhīm al-Mukhtār noted that Muḥammad 'Uthmān Tājj al-Sirr came to Massawa in 1876. Upon his arrival to Massawa in 1885 the Italian documents note the extent to which he was venerated and respected by the local population, leaving a strong impression that he was already known and influential in the region. In 1889, from his seat in Sawakin, Muḥammad 'Uthmān Tāj al-Sirr negotiated his return to Massawa with the Italian authorities. In this exchange of messages he remarked that he had family among the Habab and that he considered Massawa his "homeland" (It. patria). Eventually, the plan for his transferal did not materialize. Miran, "Grand mufti, érudit et nationaliste érythréen," 36; Ibrāhīm al-Mukhtār, *al-Bidāya fī ta'rīkh Iritriya*, Completed in Asmara in 1962, 166. Odorizzi seemed to have confused the names of members of the family. In one place he states that 'Muhammad Osman El Morgani'came to Massawa in 1860 and remained there when the town passed over to the Egyptians in 1865. Odorizzi, *Note storiche sulla religione mussulmana*, 20; ASDMAE, *ASMAI* Pos 3 / 4, fasc 23, serie politica no. 184, From Genè to

In general, the Khatmiyya enjoyed great success among migrants to the conurbation, some of whom had only been recently converted as a result of the brotherhood's activities in the region. The newly converted maintained and developed their links with the Khatmiyya even after moving into the conurbation. The egalitarian flavour characteristic of many brotherhoods, appealed greatly to recent converts and newcomers, eager to prove their piety and devotion, hoping thus to be better welcomed in a strong Muslim environment. The brotherhood's method of expansion by absorbing and integrating prevailing social structures was often tolerant of local practices, which were preserved by new adepts. Some scholars have labeled this type of syncretism as characteristic of "popular Islam." But following a brotherhood such as the Khatmiyya could also open the door to a wide web of networks that were useful not only in a spiritual sense but also in the very real material world of labor, commerce and transportation, crucial to every newcomer in town.

A relatively important number of mosques in the outer neighborhoods and villages of the conurbation were associated in one way or another to the Khatmiyya (Appendix 18); such sites of confluence were privileged places of networking and weaving connections.[55] The great success of the Khatmiyya among newcomers and "Massawans of the periphery" is also attested by several *khalīfa* appointments made by *sayyid* Hāshim al-Mīrghanī in the Massawa area in the early years of the Italian period.

Minister of Foreign Affairs, Massaua, 21 June 1886; ASDMAE, *ASMAI* Pos. 3 / 4, fasc 23, From Baldissera to Ministro della Guerra (Roma), Massaua, 13 June 1889.

[55] One part of a neighborhood, the southern part of Edaga Be'rai, was known as "Khatmiyya" (or "Khutmiyya") shortly after its establishment in the 1890s, and is known by that name to this very day. Odorizzi, *Il commissariato regionale di Massaua*, 121.

Most were prominent figures of power, influence and connections in the mainland neighborhoods and villages.[56]

The two dominant religious formations in the Eritrean area, the 'Ad Shaykh and the Khatmiyya, developed in contrasting methods in spreading and reviving Islam among Tigre, Saho and Bilen-speaking societies in the region.[57] In general, their activities were conducive to a veritable socio-religious revolution among societies coming under their influence.[58]

Sorting Out Muslims: the Mahdist Revolution, Early Italian Colonial Rule and Holy Families, 1880s-1900s[59]

The advent of European imperialism, the success of the Mahdist movement in the Sudan and the responses of highland Abyssinian polities to these new external challenges, especially in the 1880s, had far reaching consequences for the history of Islam in the region. Plowden's reference (from 1854) to the region's [Muslim]

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[56] One example was *sayyid* 'Uthmān Abū Sha'rayn, a *sharīf* from Massawa with a strong power base in Hitumlo where he actually resided. A second *khalīfa* was 'Uthmān Shimo from Hitumlo and originally from the Saho-speaking Taro'a group. A third was *khalīfa* Ibrāhīm Shalāl, who represented the most prominent *Bayt* Shaykh Maḥmūd family in Hitumlo and had a mosque there. Another *khalīfa* was Muḥammad 'Egel from the Aflanda group who saw many of its members migrate to the Massawa mainland. A last appointment was that of a certain al-Tom Makki, a Sudanese identified in the Italian document as originally from the "tribe of Shaghi" (sic). ASDMAE, *AE*, 43, Nr. 3277 di protocolo. From Dante Odorizzi (Commissario Regionale of Massawa) to the governor (Affari Civili) in Asmara. Massawa, 24 August 1910. For Shalāl see also Capomazza, *Usanze islamiche hanafite*, 35.

[57] For the ramifications of this process on nationalist politics since the 1940s see David Pool, *From Guerrillas to Government: The Eritrean People's Liberation Front* (Oxford and Athens, OH., 2001), 20-4, 44-9.

[58] Some societies, such as the Marya, were at some point disrupted in the process – the Tigre class having been converted by the 'Ad Shaykh, which some subsequently joined, while part of the ruling/aristocratic class was converted by the Khatmiyya shaykhs and yet another part subsequently by the 'Ad Shaykh. On the Marya and Islam see Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, 167-8 and Guérinot, "L'islam et l'Abyssinie," 53-7. See also RHL, *The Trevaskis Papers*, Box 1, File 2: 'The Tribes and Peoples of Northern Eritrea. A Survey of the Keren Division', 19.

[59] For the relationship between Italian colonial authorities and *ṭuruq* in a different context in the Horn of Africa see Federico Battera, "Le confraternite islamiche somale di fronte al colonialismo (1890-1920): Tra contraposizione e collaborazione," *Africa* (Roma) LIII, 2, 1998, 155-185.

lowlanders who as "flying-fish ... are preyed on by all" could not be more true in the new complex configuration of international and regional struggles in the Massawa-Adwa-Kassala triangle. The host of powers involved -Abyssinians, Sudanese Mahdists, Egyptians, British and Italians – all competed for influence over the Eritrean region's Muslim lowland ethnic groups, ultimately leading to the politicization of religion in the area and to deep internal divisions within these societies. Clearly, these new political developments also deeply impacted the development of the two holy families which have been dominant in the area since the beginning of the century.

The Mahdist rebellion against the Egyptian administration in the Sudan was triggered by Muhammad Ahmad b. Abd Allah's letters informing the notables of the Sudan of his *mahdi*ship in June 1881.[60] In the course of the following few years the Muslim groups inhabiting the region between Kassala and Massawa found themselves in a delicate situation, increasingly caught and divided in between pro-Mahdist and anti-Mahdist positions and loyalties. Mahdist pressure and influence over groups loyal to the Khedive and to the anti-Mahdiyya Khatmiyya *ṭarīqa* proved effective, especially against the background of continuous northern Abyssinian encroachments, raids and imposition of tribute payment on societies in these regions in the context of Egyptian-Abyssinian struggles and trials of power in the 1870s and early 1880s.[61] Furthermore, Emperor Yohannes's nationalistic anti-Muslim policies inevitably politicized Christian-Muslim

[60] The *mahdi* is the 'Awaited One.' A divinely guided leader who is supposed to come some time in the future to restore the original purity of the Islamic faith and God's rule on earth. For the best treatment of the Mahdiyya in the Sudan see Peter M. Holt, *The Mahdist State in the Sudan 1881-1898* (Oxford, 1970) [2nd ed.].

[61] The main Abyssinian (Tigrayan) figure in this context was Ras Alula Ängäda (c. 1847-1897), who was Emperor Yohannes IV's (r. 1872-1889) military commander in northern Abyssinia. For references to Alula's collisions with the Tigre and Saho-speaking groups see Erlich, *Ras Alula and the Scramble for Africa*, 35, 51-4, 58-64, 71-2, 85, 90-4, 100, 112 and more. In general, the Bani Amer maintained an anti-Mahdist position throughout the period, while segments of the Habab and the 'Ad Tamaryam strongly supported the Mahdist cause and cooperated with 'Uthmān Diqna's envoys in the region.

relations and increased lowlanders'sense of alienation from the Christian polity. It directly contributed to the success of Mahdist propaganda and influence among them. As a result, Anglo-Egyptian attempts at forming an anti-Mahdist Muslim front between Massawa and Kassala under the spiritual leadership of the Khatmiyya produced little results.[62]

It seems also that dominant elements of the 'Ad Shaykh holy family took the pro-Mahdist side, collaborated with 'Uthmān Diqna's envoys and perhaps even took on a leadership role in rallying pro-Mahdist support among the Tigre-speaking groups in the area. After the fall of Kassala to the Mahdists in late July 1885 these struggles continue often through propaganda. Abyssinian victory at the battle of Kufit (23 September 1885) put an end to Mahdist aspirations to conquer the coastal zone north of and around Massawa but the loyalties of the lowland groups still navigated between the Mahdi and the Khedive. The sudden appearance of a new force in the arena – imperialist Italy – spelt both continuity and change, at least in the short term.

European imperialism articulated by Italian colonial imposition and the creation of the politically defined territory of 'Eritrea' in 1890 played a critical role in shaping the history of Islam in the region. On a broad level it confined societies which were different in terms of language, mode of production, social structure, culture, and last but not least, religion, within limited boundaries extending over the lowlands and the northern tip of the Abyssinian highlands. The Muslims, comprising approximately 60% of the population in the early colonial period, inhabited about four fifths (4/5) of the territory, mostly in the lowlands, while the Tigrinya-speaking Christians, constituting 40% of the inhabitants, lived on one fifth (1/5) of the colony, exclusively on the highland plateau.

[62] Ibid. 54-5.

Italian colonialism formed the infrastructure within which a diverse grouping of Muslim societies would gradually develop a set of shared experiences (and institutions) as Muslims in colonial Eritrea. This process was shaped by Italian attitudes towards Islam and by the incorporation of Muslims into an entity almost evenly divided between Muslims and Christians.

Italian colonial attitudes towards Islam did not amount to a clear, linear and coherent set of policies; they were shaped throughout the period by a host of factors, both internal and external to the colony proper. Chronologically we can distinguish roughly three phases: a period characterized by the politics of conquest, the response to the Mahdist threat, and Governor Martini's "Muslim policies" (1885-c.1910), the phase following the conquest of Libya and the elaboration of Italy's attitudes towards Islam (1910s-1920s), and the period of overt pro-Muslim policies under the fascists and the more pronounced articulation of Italy as a 'Muslim power' (1920s-1941).

At the outset of their occupation of Massawa in 1885, the Italian colonial authorities proclaimed that the customs and religion of the town's inhabitants would be "scrupulously respected".[63] But early policies went even beyond the mere "respect" of Islam. The authorities continued, as the Egyptians did beforehand, to grant subventions to mosques and monthly stipends to Muslim community leaders and granted the *sharī'a* court autonomy in matters of personal status, family and inheritance. In some contradiction with the official liberal policy of equally respecting all religions in the colony, urban Muslims and their institutions in the Massawa area were privileged by the

[63] ASDMAE, *AE*, pacco 16, 'Proclama agli abitanti di Massaua', by Rear Admiral Caimi, 5 February 1885.

authorities, at least in the first two decades of colonial rule.[64] The inhabitants of Massawa and its region were perceived by colonial officials as the most "evolved," "civilized" and "westernized" among the societies of the colony.[65]

The advent of Italian colonial rule proved crucial to the development of the 'Ad Shaykh and Khatmiyya in the Eritrean region. Italian policies of cooption and colonial control resulted in continuing the Egyptian pro-Khatmiyya political stance, making the *ṭarīqa* the privileged interlocutor of the colonial authorities. The 'Ad Shaykh, on the other hand, gradually lost much of its former economic position and influence, and found itself enfeebled and decentralized following a set of deliberately hostile colonial measures.

The foundations of early Italian colonial attitudes were shaped by the need to maintain stability among the 'tribes' and by the Mahdist and anti-Mahdist loyalties of the Khatmiyya and the 'Ad Shaykh. The Italian authorities were deeply concerned by the spilling-over of the Mahdist rebellion from the Sudan into the colony and feared the destabilization of their control over occupied territories. In the lowland regions, the politics of conquest and 'pacification' sought the cooperation of responsive elements in 'assisting' the authorities to control and secure the stability of their conquered territories and mobilize local forces against the Mahdists and their supporters within the colony and on its borders.[66] The Bani Amer, under the influence of the Khatmi shaykh in Kassala,

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[64] Cesare Marongiu Buonaiuti, *Politica e religioni nel colonialismo italiano (1882-1941)* (Milano, 1982), 41-5, 103-7 and interview with Ḥasan Ibrāhīm Muḥammad Sālim, Massawa, 20 March 2000.
[65] Capomazza, *Usanze islamiche hanafite*, 9.
[66] In this process surveillance and information gathering was part and parcel of colonial practices. Detailed genealogies and biographical notices were collected and compiled on all groups in the colony. See for example ACS, Carte F. Martini, box 8, 'Biografie dei capi indigeni della colonia Eritrea', (Asmara 1903). See also Irma Taddia, "Constructing colonial power and political collaboration in Italian Eritrea," in Mel Page, Stephanie Beswick, Jay Spaulding and Tim Carmichael, (eds.) *Personality and Political Culture in Modern Africa* (Boston, 1998), 23-36.

fought the Mahdist coalition in the eastern Sudan with zeal in 1884.[67] By contrast, sections of the Ḥabab, possibly under the influence of the 'Ad Shaykh, showed pro-Mahdist tendencies and collaborated with the eastern Sudanese Mahdist leader, 'Uthmān Diqna.[68]

The Italian authorities persuaded *sayyid* Hāshim al-Mīrghanī to stay in Massawa – to which he arrived but several months earlier in 1885 - and assist them. They paid him a monthly stipend and offered him the post of *muftī* of Massawa, which he declined.[69] *Sayyid* Hāshim attempted to "milk" the administration as much as he could, while the Italians in turn, were determined to maximize their profits from the collaboration. The colonial authorities expected *sayyid* Hāshim to exercise his influence over the lowland Muslim 'tribes' and also provide intelligence on the Mahdists and the Ethiopians

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[67] Talhami, *Suakin and Massawa*, 234-5.

[68] One British report stated that the principal chief of the Ḥabab, Shaykh 'Umar b. Muḥammad, had said that he had joined the Mahdist holy war. Ibid, 187-8. An Italian report from the 1920s remarked how the 'Ad Shaykh had secretly allied with the Mahdists (to fight the Khatmiyya) through a certain Shaykh Ḥājj Ya'qūb Muḥammad 'Alī who occupied an eminent position with the forces of 'Uthmān Digna, *amīr* of the Hadandowa. ACS, *MAI*, b. 1066, Allegato no. 9, 'Note sul commissariato regionale di Cheren', by Amerio Liberati, (Cheren, July 1928), 55.

[69] The exact balance of power between the *muftī* and *sayyid* Hāshim, and their relationship vis-à-vis the authorities awaits further scrutiny. It seems that for public purposes such as the New Year reception it was the *muftī* who took the role of representative of the Muslim community. But on the other hand *sayyid* Hāshim's influence across the wider area put him in a rather higher and more important position for colonial officials. One letter from General Genè to the Italian Foreign Minister in late 1886 explicitly opens by stating that "Hāshim al-Mīrghani is not the religious chief of the Muslim community of Massawa but since he is a descendant of the Prophet, he is venerated by the Muslims here who give him gifts." Furthermore, at some point *sayyid* Hāshim had appointed *muftī* 'Abd Allāh Sirāj Abū 'Ilāma as *khalīfat al-khulafā'*, the highest- ranking Khatmi representative in Massawa. Italian colonial material from 1910 suggests that the representative of the Mīrghanī family in Eritrea began at some stage in the early colonial period to appoint *khalīfat al-khulafā'* whoever was appointed by the colonial government as *muftī*, or in the absence of this position, *qāḍī* of Massawa. ASDMAE, *ASMAI*, Pos. 3 / 4 fasc. 23, Genè to Minister of Foreign Affairs, Massaua, 28 December 1886. On the *muftī*'s delivery of the 1887 New Year speech see Porro, R., "Notizie da Massaua," *EC*, Fasc. II, February 1887, 52 and the full Arabic text in ASDMAE, *ASMAI* 34 / 1 fasc. 3. On *muftī* 'Abd Allāh Sirāj's appointment as *khalīfat al-khulafā'* of the Khatmiyya see ASDMAE, *AE*, 43, Commissario Regionale di Massaua a Governatore, Massaua, 24 August 1910.

gathered through Khatmi networks. But to little avail; relations often turned sour, mutual accusations followed, and governors were often frustrated with *sayyid* Hāshim.[70]

Elaborating this strategy, in 1898 Governor Ferdinando Martini (Gov. 1897-1907) exerted considerable pressure on *sayyid* Hāshim attempting to convince him to transfer his seat from Massawa to Keren, where his authority over Eritrea's Muslim lowlanders would deflect Kassala's influence from beyond the colony's borders. The return of Khatmi leaders to Kassala following the fall of the Mahdist state created a problem with 'tribes,' notably groups of the Bani 'Amer, who sought to follow them into the Sudan. But Martini's pressure on *sayyid* Hāshim bore no fruits.[71] In one instance –characterizing Martini's notorious anti-clerical disposition, but more importantly, revealing of his strategy - he noted in his diary:

> If this Morgani [Mīrghanī] from Massawa came to Keren it would be of great service to us. But he refuses. The British in Kassala have there his nephew Sidi 'Alī, who is greatly venerated. It is important to help in any way in the construction of a mosque in Keren. I will give another 1000 Thalers and more if needed. Another more modest one should be built in Dega or in Agordat.[72]

Sayyid Hāshim died in 1901 and the authorities sought calculatingly to transport his remains to Keren where they promised to build a shrine in his honor. This initiative was met with vigorous opposition by the Muslim community in Massawa and was

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[70] On the early contacts between the Khatmi leader in Hitumlo and the colonial authorities see especially ASDMAE, *ASMAI*, pos. 3 / 4, fasc. 23, 'Famiglia Morgani', Gené to Ministro Aff. Esteri, (Massaua, 21 January 1886 and 28 December 1886) and Baldissera to Ministro della Guerra (Massaua, 13 June 1889); ASDMAE, *AE*, pacco 43, Ministro Aff. Esteri, Robilant to Gené (Rome, 6 December 1886). Martini wrote in his diary that *sayyid* Hāshim was half 'imbeciled' since his wife and sisters were raped by the Dervishes. Martini, *Il diario eritreo*, I, 30 (Massaua, 22 January 1898).

[71] See correspondence and reports during 1898 in ACS, *Carte F. Martini*, s. 16, fasc. 54-55 and ASDMAE, *ASMAI* Pos 3 / 4, fasc 23, Martini to Ministro Affari Esteri, Asmara, 3 May 1901. See also Martini, *Il diario eritreo*, I, 43-5 (Massaua, 2-3 February 1898). See also Martini, *Il diario eritreo*, I, 52 (7 February 1898).

[72] Ibid, 163 (Keren, 20 May 1898).

eventually abandoned.[73] However, with the critical assistance of 'Alī Yaḥya *Afandī* from Massawa and the *nā'ib* of Omkullo, the colonial authorities were more successful with his nephew's son, *sayyid* Ja'far b. Bakrī b. Ja'far b. Muḥammad 'Uthmān al-Mīrghanī (1871-1943)[74]. *Sayyid* Ja'far was discreetly persuaded to move into the colony from Kassala and establish his seat in Keren in 1903.[75] Consequently, the colonial administration financed the construction of the tomb of Hāshim al-Mīrghanī in Hitumlo and a mosque in Keren.[76] All in all, Martini's workings were conducive to the formation of an Islamic sphere within the confines of the colony by mobilizing a large number of Muslims around an "official" representative of the Khatmiyya branch in Eritrea – a process that was to ultimately benefit both parties.

But the cooption of the Khatmiyya was accompanied by a virulent campaign of discrediting and denigrating of the 'Ad Shaykh. Governor Martini worked at undermining the legitimacy and influence of what colonial officials perceived as the 'tribalizing' and 'exploitative' 'Ad Shaykh. Colonial officials were highly suspicious of the expanding 'tribe', believed to sympathize with the Mahdists and perceived as a dangerous and potentially destabilizing element among lowland Muslims. Governor Martini did not

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[73] See correspondence from 1902-3 in ACS, Carte F. Martini, b. 16, fasc, 54-55, 'Morgani'. See also Martini, *Il diario eritreo*, II, 15 (4 June 1902).

[74] The dates are based on Puglisi, *Chi e?*, 213.

[75] ASDMAE, *AE*, 43, (Il direttore ?) to the Commissario regionale di Massaua, Asmara, 28 December 1902 ('Oggetto: Sidi Giafer el Morgani'). For *sayyid* Ja'far's agreement to transfer to Keren see ASDMAE, *AE*, 43, Salvadei to Governor in Asmara (Massaua, 8 January 1903).

[76] Romandini, M., "Politica musulmana in Eritrea durante il governorato Martini," *Islam, storia e civilta*, anno III, n.2, aprile-giugno 1984, 127-131 and Atti Parlamentari, Legislazione XXIII-sessione 1909-13, Camera dei Deputati, *Allegati alla Relazione sulla Colonia Eritrea*, 32-3. The *ḥawliyya* that was until then performed at the mosque of Ja'far al-Ṣadīq b. Muḥammad 'Uthmān al-Mīrghani (1822/3-1860/61) in Omkullo was now combined with that commemorating *sayyid* Hāshim al-Mīrghani on 2 Jummād II, attracting followers from the wider region. A *ḥawliyya* (Ar.) is a commemorative ceremony in which the tour of the *qubba*, the chanting of *mawlids*, and usually a *dhikr* are performed. On Ja'far al-Ṣadīq b. Muḥammad 'Uthmān al-Mīrghani (1822/3-1860/61) see *ALA*, I, 207. ASDMAE, *AE*, 43, Dante Odorizzi (Massaua) a Regente del Governo (Asmara), 3 November 1910 ('circa la festa del Holl di Morghani'). On the *qubba* see Ibrāhīm al-Mukhtār, *al-Jāmi' li-akhbār jazīrat Bāḍi'*, 65.

make secret his wish that once the Khatmis set their stronghold in Keren they would be able to fight off the "potentially preoccupying" influence of the 'Ad Shaykh and maintain the integrity of the tribes in a period of upheaval and instability.[77] Comments he inscribed in his diary in 1902 stated bluntly and clearly his views and the operational conclusions to be drawn from them:

> The 'Ad Shaykh, a tribe of holy men who came to Sahel from Jiddah, or in any case from Arabia, and which has grown in roughly six generations to more than 2000 people, exercises great religious authority over both the Habab and the Bani 'Amir. With time, this influence (I mean to say in roughly ten-twenty years), might become dangerous, in the context of a general upsurge of Islamism, especially if the chief of the 'Ad Shaykh is as fanatical and scheming as the current chief, Shaykh 'Āmir, but less timid than he is.
>
> It is necessary to contrast this religious authority with another one of equal or greater influence. Of the many Morgani (sic.) [Mīrghanī] who live in Africa we need to find one who will come and settle in Keren. As for the dead Morgani [*sayyid* Hāshim b. Muḥammad 'Uthmān al-Mīrghanī, d. 1901], I accepted the wishes of the Muslim community of Massawa, agreeing to the inhumation in Hitumlo and taking care of the expenses for the construction of the shrine. But Hitumlo is too far away, and in this case one must act energetically, even though the religious authority of the Morgani is superior to that of the 'Ad Shaykh. I am thinking of Ja'far Morgani [*sayyid* Ja'far b. Bakrī b. Ja'far b. Muḥammad 'Uthmān al-Mīrghanī], son of Sidi Abu Bakr al-Mīrghanī who passed away in Mecca. Now he lives in Kassala. I am told that 'Abd Allāh Sharīf of the Sabderat and *nā'ib* Idrīs of Omkullo have great ascendancy over him.[78]

The question of tribute exemption was also at the heart of the relentless criticism and accusations of conspiracy and 'fanaticism' aimed at the 'Ad Shaykh. Italian colonial officials doubted their gratuitous piety. They believed, as they wrote, that "their

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[77] Atti Parlamentari, Legislazione XXIII-sessione 1909-13, Camera dei Deputati, *Allegati alla Relazione sulla Colonia Eritrea*, 33. See also ACS, *MAI*, b. 1066, Allegato no. 9, 'Note sul commissariato regionale di Cheren', by Amerio Liberati (Cheren, July 1928), 75-77.

[78] Martini, *Il diario eritreo*, III, 63 (25 July 1902). Martini was preoccupied by the potentially dangerous influence of the 'Ad Shaykh on the Ḥabab. See Ibid. 63-4 (26 July 1902). Colonial officials went as far as discrediting the religious legitimacy and genealogical authenticity of the 'Ad Shaykh while giving full credence to that of the Khatmiyya: "The 'Ad Shaykh came from the Hijaz and claim to be linked to the Prophet. But even though this ancestry has not been proven the 'Ad Shaykh dare to boast it in front of authentic Meccan sharifs (such as the Morgani), whose Arab origins have been proved beyond any doubt. It is more probable that they are Sahos who have adopted the descent of some Arab element who had migrated from Mecca and settled among them with the aim of spreading religious propaganda." ACS, *MAI*, b. 1066, Allegato no. 9, 'Note sul commissariato regionale di Cheren', by Amerio Liberati (Cheren, July 1928), 53.

enterprise was not only limited to religious propaganda but principally aimed at cultivating their political authority, and attaining an economic position at the expense of the tribes, stripping them from their human capital and their riches."[79]

Colonial officials employed freely terms such as 'subversion' and 'plundering' in describing the methods and effects of the 'Ad Shaykh over the societies that came under their influence. They described the process of the extension of 'Ad Shaykh influence over the Tigre-vassal classes expressing their deep concerns as to the breakdown of pre-existing social structures, leading to 'disorderly' migrations within the colony, the splitting of entire groups, and general instability. Accordingly, the colonial authorities – under Governor Martini – devised a number of measures aimed at curtailing their influence and authority. Their traditional exemption from tribute was ended in 1904-5. In addition, Martini deliberately severed the group placing the Barka and Sahel/Semhar branches under distinct *commissariati* (1903). He also mustered all the dispersed elements of the family inhabiting Sahel and 'Ansaba into one group under one chief. In that way Khatmiyya influence was bound to be more effective.[80] Anti-'Ad Shaykh colonial measures seem to have achieved their goals; the settlement of *sayyid* Ja'far in Keren accelerated even further the decline of 'Ad Shaykh influence.[81]

All in all, policies setting apart 'useful' and 'potentially dangerous' Muslim elements in the colony, consolidated the Khatmiyya's influence and enhanced the decline of the 'Ad Shaykh. Indeed, in the 1920s the latter exercised but very little authority,

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[79] ACS, *MAI*, b. 1066, Allegato no. 9, 'Note sul commissariato regionale di Cheren', by Amerio Liberati (Cheren, July 1928), 53.

[80] ACS, *MAI*, b. 1066, Allegato no. 9, 'Note sul commissariato regionale di Cheren', by Amerio Liberati (Cheren, July 1928), 54, 75-77. *Atti parlamentari*, 33-4.

[81] Anti-'Ad Shaykh discourses were pervasive in colonial literature throughout the period of Italian rule in Eritrea. Pollera's handbook on the populations of Eritrea reproduces the same arguments [and tone] typical of the beginning of the century. Pollera, *Le popolazioni indigene*, 204ff and 286-7.

limited mainly to the Ḥabab. But there too, the influence of the Khatmiyya had already spread significantly and was still making progress in the 1920s.[82] By that period the 'Ad Temaryam were under greater Khatmi influence than that of the 'Ad Shaykh; the 'Ad Takles were all initiated to the Khatmiyya; and the Marya too had changed their allegiance from the 'Ad Shaykh and Qādiriyya to the Khatmiyya.[83]

During the 1900s and 1910s the Khatmiyya became increasingly established in the colony and its status was further formalized. In the early years of the twentieth century, the *qāḍī* of Massawa was appointed by the government and was then immediately appointed as *khalīfat al-khulafā'* by the head of the Khatmiyya in the colony.

"A Sacred Muslim Island": Town Islam and Community between the Local and the Wider *Umma*

Moving on to a more urban-centered focus, piety and a strong attachment to Islamic history and culture have always been central markers in defining the self-awareness of the inhabitants of Massawa and their sense of citizenship. The proximity and historical contact with the sacred heartlands of Islam in the Hijaz, and the centuries-long participation in Muslim political, commercial and religious networks and spheres of influence in the Red Sea and western Indian Ocean regions have shaped this sense of intimacy within an Islamic socio-geographical imagination. Massawans have always felt a sense of belonging to their town which was located somewhat paradoxically in close

[82] ACS, *MAI*, b. 1066, Allegato no. 9, 'Note sul commissariato regionale di Cheren', by Amerio Liberati (Cheren, July 1928), 55.
[83] Ibid., 26-7, 48.

proximity to the Hijaz but at the same time on the margins of the Islamic world, with non-Muslim polities and societies in its close hinterlands.

Massawans perceived their town as the home of an ideal and sacred Muslim community, modeled on the concept of *umma*, or the community of Muslims. According to the Qur'ān the Muslim community *is* Islam: "Ye are the best community that hath been raised up for mankind. Ye enjoin right conduct and forbid indecency; and ye believe in Allāh" (Q 3:110). The community is expected to follow the qur'ānic prescriptions that codify for individual and society how to be Muslim and the ways to lead a proper Muslim life. The social and collective character of some of the sacred pillars and duties of Islam – common prayer on Fridays; almsgiving (*zakāt*); fasting during the month of Ramadan; the pilgrimage to Mecca (*ḥājj*), as well as the duty of *jihād* – are pivotal in defining and maintaining the sense of sacred community.[84]

In Massawa, mosques and open-air prayer esplanades, saints' tombs (Ar. sing. *ḍarīḥ*) and sites of yearly visitations (*mazār*) and celebrations (*ḥawliyya*), as well as other locally-distinct or locally-flavored religious ceremonies and rituals contributed to the notion of the town as *umma*, as well as its sacred character. The *sharī'a* court and Massawa's long and rich history of Islamic legal practices were also central religious institutions regulating and controlling Muslim life in the port and influencing Muslim communities in the town's surroundings. But there were sometimes gaps between ideal concepts of the community and the reality on the ground. The coexistence of 'high' or 'orthodox' Islamic principles with localized traditional religious practices and rituals,

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[84] Louis Gardet, *L'islam: religion et communauté* (Paris, 1967), 274-6 and Louis Gardet, *La cité musulmane* (Paris, 1961), Part III. On the *umma* see also Voll, *Islam. Continuity and Change*, 2-12; Richard C. Martin, *Islamic Studies: A History of Religions Approach* (Upper Saddle River, NJ., 1996) (1st Ed. 1982), 77ff, and Frederick Denny, "umma," *EI2*.

what a historian of 'Swahili Islam' called the "split personality" of coastal town Islam, meant that tensions, struggles and ultimately some accommodation occurred in the process of defining the *umma*.[85] In Massawa in the second half of the nineteenth century the meeting of pious *ashrāf* from the Arabian Peninsula with recently converted Tigre-speaking peoples or other inland Muslims fusing their local cultural traditions with Islamic practice, created such tensions and struggles. This process was even heightened in the context of the renewed religious dynamics in the region as reflected by the activities of the holy families and Sufi brotherhoods.

An anecdotical story epitomizing the conception of Massawa as a sacred Muslim space occurred in the 1860s. Approximately a decade after the opening of the French consulate in the port in 1841, a *firmān* (Tur. edict) issued by the Ottoman Porte granted the French the right to establish a Roman Catholic mission and a church on Massawa island. But the inhabitants of Massawa were so indignant that the governor had delayed the execution of the order for some years.[86] The *muftī* of Massawa, 'Alī Abū 'Ilāmā Muḥammad Nūr, protested vehemently against the execution of the order arguing that Massawa was a "Muslim island" and a sacred space for its Muslim community since it was the point of landing of the Prophet's companions, in 615 A.D. The island could therefore not tolerate the existence of a Christian church.[87] But some time later, when he realized that his protests had been useless and the authorities had indeed approved the beginning of construction, the *muftī* left town and exiled himself to the island of Däset in

[85] Pouwels, *Horn and Crescent*, 64-5.
[86] F.O. 24, Plowden – F.O. 11/5/52. Cited in Marston, *Britain's Imperial Role*, 192.
[87] Ibrāhīm al-Mukhtār, *al-Jāmi' li-akhbār jazīrat Bāḍi'*, 70 and 119. There is some imprecision in the sources regarding the name. It might be 'Alī Muḥammad Nūr Abū 'Ilāma.

the Dahlak archipelago where "his ears would not hear the bells of the church."[88] After some years he returned from his insular *hijra* and settled in Hitumlo on the mainland, before his death in 1866. His remains were later transferred to the family tomb in the Dhahab mosque on Massawa-island. The French had built their church but opposition by the Muslims in subsequent years did not die out. At some point the mission was moved to Omkullo and the Massawa hospital constructed by the Italians where the mission was previously located.[89]

As suggested by the story, the association of the episode of the *hijra al-ūla* (Ar. First emigration of the Prophet's companions) with the port-town was a highly symbolic factor in arguing for the profoundly Islamic nature of Massawa island. The physical materialization of this tradition was institutionalized in the open-air esplanade mosque called Ras Midr, which was believed by some to be the original landing place of the Prophet's companions, and which serves as the site of important religious celebrations and community-wide praying sessions to this day.[90] But of equal if not greater importance its physical sacredness emanated largely from its specific geography as a

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[88] *Hijra* (migration) is an Islamic institution modeled on the experience of the Prophet Muḥammad and the early Muslim community's migration from Mecca to Medina. *Hijra* was defined by Eickelman and Piscatori as "the obligation to migrate from lands where the practice of Islam is constrained to thoses where in principle no such constraint exists." Dale Eickelman and James Piscatori, (eds.), *Muslim Travellers: Pilgrimage, Migration, and the Religious Imagination* (London, 1990), 5. *Hijra* has been applied by Muslim societies in particular historical contexts, for example in northern Nigeria in the early colonial period. See also Muhammad Khalid Masud's chapter in the same volume: "The obligation to migrate: the doctrine of *hijra* in Islamic law" (29-49).

[89] Ibid 120. For various transactions involving the French bishop in the early 1880s see MICR 8/1d (10 Rajab 1298), 8/10d (29 Dhū l-ḥujja 1298), 12/47a (8 Shawwāl 1305). In the 1950s there was a small church inside the hospital building, but Ibrāhīm al-Mukhtār observes in his account that it was not in stone.

[90] On the edge of the esplanade there is a *minbār* (Ar. pulpit) and a *miḥrāb* (Ar. prayer niche) in stone. The name of the site is also sometimes pronounced 'Midri' and/or 'Mudur'. Some local traditions link it with the Ethiopic root 'm d r', signifying 'land'. Others say 'midri' is a deformation of a word from the Arabic (perhaps 'mudun') with the root 'm d n', signifying 'town' or 'urban settlement'. Also discussion and information in interview with Muḥammad Ṣālih Aḥmad Afandī, Massawa, 13 March 2000. In his official correspondence Ibrāhīm al-Mukhtār noted that both 'Īd al-Fiṭr and 'Īd al-Aḍḥa celebrations were performed in Ras Midr in commemoration of the Prophet's companions's landing at the site. See *al-Jāmi' li-akhbār jazīrat Bāḍi'*, 85-87.

small island providing all life cycle necessities to the community that inhabited it, including - most importantly - burial grounds for both holy and lay men. Some old families, such as the Abū 'Ilama, buried their family members in the courts of small family mosques or mosques associated with the family. This was at least the case until Massawa was more closely attached with the mainland in the second half of the century, leading to the establishment of a new cemetery on the mainland.[91]

The significance of the well-known mid-nineteenth century European observation that "half the island belonged to the dead, and the other half to the living" went beyond the mere question of Massawa's urban spatial layout – it inadvertently pointed to the sacred nature of the port town as a physical space. The importance of holy religious figures to urban semiotics was also reflected in the local toponomy. The 'Abd al-Qādir Peninsula was named after the *mazār* erected in commemoration of 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlāni (1077-1166), founder of the Qādiriyya *ṭarīqa*. In the past, it was the site of the yearly *ziyārat al-Jīlāni* performed on 11 Rabi' awwal and attracting worshippers from Massawa and its burgeoning mainland areas.[92] The small island called Shaykh Sa'īd, known today as "Green island," was named after Shaykh Sa'īd al-'Amūdī, a holy man who originally came to the area from Hadhramawt.[93]

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[91] The mainland cemetery was first in Edaga Be'rai, then in a place close to the road known today as the road to Gurgussum. The cemetery is still there today.
[92] Odorizzi, *Note storiche sulla religione mussulmana*, 35-6 and oral interviews.
[93] Odorizzi, *Il commissariato regionale di Massaua*, 108. One source based on Egyptian military correspondence from the 1860s-70s also noted that Shaykh Sa'īd island served as a cemetery. al-Jamal, *Siyāsat Miṣr fī al-baḥr al-aḥmar*, 79.

Visitating Saints' Tombs and Shrines

As common in other coastal towns in northeastern and eastern Africa there were a number of important tombs and shrines in Massawa, standing as focal points of local Muslim life in the urban landscape. The tombs and shrines of holy men and saints were venerated and celebrated in visitation ceremonies. Saints' tombs appealed to people since it was common belief that the soul of a saint lingers around the tomb, and that the saint's *baraka* – even after death – had the power to aid people seeking saintly intervention through prayers, the performing of rituals and offerings.[94]

The most notable *ḍarīḥ* (Ar. tomb) on Massawa island was that of Shaykh Ḥammāl 'Umar b. Ṣādiq al-Anṣāri, who, according to the inscription on his tomb, had died at the beginning of the tenth century of the Muslim calendar (c. 1500 A.D.). The plate notes that a new *tābūt* (Ar. coffin), prepared in Zabid in Yemen was placed on 7 jumāda I 1010 (2 November 1601).[95] The first mention of the mosque in literary sources is made by the famous seventeenth-century Ottoman traveller Evliya Celebi, who mentioned the existence of a certain tomb and mosque of Shaykh Gemali (sic).[96] According to the text on the plate reproduced by Ibrāhīm al-Mukhtār, almost three centuries later, in 1878 under the Egyptian khedivial administration, the tomb was

[94] Insoll, *The archaeology of Islam*, 183-4.

[95] Ibrāhīm al-Mukhtār, *al-Jāmi' li-akhbār jazīrat Bāḍi'*, 62-3. I am not sure which plate Ibrāhīm al-Mukhtār is transcribing, perhaps the two stone plates located immediately before the entrance to the mausoleum. Federico Cresti assumed that the two funerary plates carved in black stone were taken from the necropoles of Dahlak Kabir and placed in the mosque court. I would argue that the assumption seems improbable. The stone might have come from an island in the archipelago, and the clear traces of the displacement of the plates reflect rearrangements following reconstruction and renovation. But more research should be carried out to clarify this question. Federico Cresti, "Alcune note storiche su Massaua, con particolare riferimento ad un complesso religioso islamico: la moschea dello Sayh Hammali." *Africa* (Roma) 45, 3, 1990, 418-9 and Table III. A second text based on the same research is Cresti, "La mosquée du Sayh Hammali à Massaoua."

[96] Bombaci, "Il viaggio in Abissinia," 263. In his two articles Cresti surveys nineteenth and twentieth century literary and iconographic sources pertaining to the religious complex in question.

renovated and enlarged under Muḥammad 'Izzat, *wakīl* of the Governorate of Massawa.[97] The Shaykh Ḥammāli religious complex consists of the mausoleum of the shaykh, and a mosque consisting of a prayer room and an external but covered prayer area. [98] Little is known about the identity of Shaykh Ḥammāli; Dante Odorizzi noted that he was born in Hudaydah in Yemen and was considered the "protector" of Massawa after he settled in the port town. The Italian *commissario* of Massawa further noted that he was buried in Massawa in ca. 1550.[99]

A second notable tomb is that of Shaykh Muḥammad Darwīsh b. Ibrāhīm b. Ja'far b. Ḥasan b. Barakāt, who was identified either as a shaykh of the 'Ad Darwīsh family from Hirgigo or as the ancestor of a certain *sharīf* named al-Bāqir, from the same coastal village.[100] According to Ibrāhīm al-Mukhtār, Shaykh Muḥammad Darwīsh had also died in the tenth century after the *hijra*. He was at first buried in Ras Midr, where several other *maqāms* were found and excavated by the Italians in 1900. Some, like the Shaykh Darwīsh tomb, were transferred to more convenient sites in the proximity of newer neighborhoods. The other tombs and commemorating shrines found in Ras Midr were Ja'far al-Ṭayyār, *maqām* 'Ikāsha (?), *maqām* Shaykh Abū Bakr *al-Sihāwi* ("The Saho"), *maqām* Shaykh Ḥāmid, and *maqām* al-Najāshi. This last shrine was of great importance in the context of the *ṣahāba* story, since according to Islamic tradition al-Najashi was the Ethiopian emperor who had allegedly converted to Islam following his contact with the

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[97] Ibrāhīm al-Mukhtār, *al-Jāmi' li-akhbār jazīrat Bāḍi'*, 63.

[98] See a detailed plan of the religious complex in Cresti, "Alcune note storiche," 416. According to oral data a special visitation and celebration day at the tomb took place in the past. Visit to the Shaykh Ḥammāl religious complex with 'Umar Wahhāb al-Bārri on 'Īd al-Aḍḥa day, 16 March 2000.

[99] Odorizzi, *Il commissariato regionale di Massaua*, 119. He dates the foundation of the tomb at 360 years before 1910.

[100] Ibrāhīm al-Mukhtār, *al-Jāmi' li-akhbār jazīrat Bāḍi'*, 63. The tomb is commonly known as 'Shaykh Darwīsh' (but also 'Shaykh Darbūsh'). Muḥammad 'Uthmān Abū Bakr, *Ta'rīkh Iritriya*, 291. Odorizzi wrote that Shaykh Darwīsh was originally from Mecca. *Il commissariato regionale di Massaua*, 120

exiled companions of the Prophet. It is not clear when the visitation of the *mazār* had begun (perhaps only in the twentieth century) but the *ziyārat al-Najāshi* used to take place on a yearly basis on 10 *muḥarram*.[101] Evidence also suggests that a visitation to the tomb of a certain Shaykh Aḥmad al-Najāsh (d. 1872) was performed in Hitumlo on the first day of the Muslim New Year. It was performed together with the visitation to the tomb of Shaykh Muḥammad 'Uthmān b. Muḥammad 'Alī, son of the great 'Ad Shaykh saint of Emberemi, who had died in Hitumlo some two decades following his father, in 1898.[102]

In 1877 and in ca. 1902-3 coastal Muslims erected two important tombs in Embereme ('Ad Shaykh) and Hitumlo (Khatmiyya), around which widespread regional pilgrimages developed rapidly. With the "highlandization" and the "Eritreanization" of the port, tomb visitations were crucial religious and cultural markers maintaining a sense of Muslim community and identity among Massawa's Muslims. Both shrines came to attract *all* Muslim Massawans regardless of particular sectarian affiliations.[103] Two seemingly paradoxical processes developped throughout the twentieth century. The first was the creation of spaces of religious and social confluence over a large area in the Eritrean region, bringing together Muslims from Sahel, Akkälä Guzay, Semhar, Hamasien and other both highland and lowland regions. It was a result of the large-scale and wide-ranging span of these Muslim movements/organizations and was important in

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[101] Ibrāhīm al-Mukhtār, *al-Jāmi' li-akhbār jazīrat Bāḍi'*, 62-3. Interview with Ṣādiq Muḥsin al-Ṣāfī and 'Uthmān Ḥājji Maḥmūd, Massawa, 14 March 2000 and interview with Muḥammad Aḥmad 'Abbāsi, Massawa, 15 May 2000. The presumed tomb of *Najāshi* is in Adigrat in northern Ethiopia.

[102] Odorizzi, *Il commissariato regionale di Massaua*, 169-170.

[103] See more on Muslim pilgrimages in Eritrea in (n.a.), "Maqāmāt al-āwliya' fī Iritriya wa-hawliāthum al-sanawiyya," *Ṣawṭ al-Rābiṭa al-Islāmiyya al-Iritriyya*, No 147, 2 Dec. 1952, 2, 8 Another "small" Mīrghani *ziyāra* commemorated the sharīfa 'Alawiyya (b.1892/3? d.1940?) on 22 shawwāl. For insights about pilgrimage and identity see relevant parts in Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*. For Mulsim pilgrimages in northeast Africa see Scott Reese, "*ziyāra* [in the Horn of Africa]," *EI2*. Alas, the article contains little about pilgrimage sites in Eritrea.

developing a sense of *imagined* "Eritrean Muslim-ness."[104] The second process was the "localization" of these visitation centers adopting increasingly a local cachet identified with Massawa's religious prestige. Their initial/foundational sectarian identity was gradually blurred.

Coral Stone and Straw Hut Mosques

As the home of a Muslim community and a notable Muslim urban center there have always been in Massawa several Friday mosques (Ar. *jāmi'*), smaller sectarian or neighborhood mosques, and finally private family mosques and praying rooms. All were essential focal points of Muslim communal life in town. People gathered in mosques essentially for prayer and other religious rituals, but mosques were also places where family, social and business relationships were tied and cultivated. Some mosques also served as qur'ānic schools where children were educated. Their open-air courts sometimes served as meeting sites for the performance of Sufi ceremonies.[105] The religious edifices seen by Evliya Celebi in 1673 were six *zaviye* [Tur.] (In Ar. *zāwiya*, usually 'sufi lodge' but can also signify small minaret-less mosques used during the week), the *oratorio* of Qara Dey, and the mosque of Shaykh Gemali (sic).[106]

In the first half of the nineteenth century Combes and Tamisier counted four mosques in Massawa, Rüppell five. Significant growth of the number of religious edifices began in mid-century, through the Egyptian and early Italian colonial period. Already in the early 1860s Lejean had counted about twelve religious edifices on the island of

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[104] As other religious communities, Muslim communities may be thought of as *imagined*, following Benedict Anderson's term. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London, 1983), 14-6.
[105] Traversi, "Usi e costumi africani di Massaua," 378.
[106] For such *zāwiyas* in the Red Sea region see Greenlaw, *The Coral Buildings of Suakin*, 62ff. Bombaci, "Il viaggio in Abissinia," 259-275.

Massawa, probably including tombs and shrines.[107] In 1885 Pennazzi counted about a dozen mosques and De Robilant identified three main mosques (Ar. sing. *jāmi'*) and ten secondary mosques on Massawa island.[108] By 1910 Odorizzi had counted sixteen mosques in Massawa, including the islet of Shaykh Sa'īd and 'Abd al-Qādir Peninsula. In Hirgigo he counted twenty-six mosques, in Hitumlo seventeen, in Omkullo five – a total of sixty-four mosques excluding Emberemi.[109] This impressive number of mosques for a total population that rarely exceeded 20,000 is mainly explained by urban growth, the inward migration of Arabs and Muslims and the degree of prosperity attained by some of Massawa's merchants in the first two decades of the Italian period. The consequences of the religious revolution of the middle decades of the century – such as the conversion of significant lowland groups, the intensification of Sufi brotherhood activities, the circulation of holy men and scholars between the Arabian peninsula and the Nile Valley – are also factors accounting for the growth of religious piety.

Much as other crucial questions about the foundation and early history of the port town, we possess little information regarding the history of its mosques. This is so at least until some construction, reconstruction and renovation of buildings, edifices - including mosques – occured in the second half of the sixteenth century, following the establishment of Ottoman power. Since some old mosques have been totally reconstructed from their foundation – and most often newly styled by the constructors and/or renovators themselves - it is difficult to learn much from deconstructing their

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[107] Lejean, *Voyage aux Deux Nils*, 166. On mosques in Massawa in that period see also Issel, *Viaggio nel Mar Rosso*, 63 and Blanc, *A Narrative of Captivity in Abyssinia*, 59. Blanc noted that a "big mosque" was being rebuilt in 1864-5. Might that be the Ḥanafī mosque?

[108] Luigi Pennazzi, "Massauah (Mar Rosso), il suo suolo, la sua popolazione, i suoi dintorni," *NASLA*, ser. II, vol XXII, Roma, 1880, 326; Di Robillant, "Presidi e domini dell'Italia nel Mar Rosso," *BSGI*, II, 12, 1887, 16.

[109] Odorizzi, *Il commissariato regionale di Massaua*, 119-120, 160-1, 168-170.

architectural features and design. Oral traditions collected by Odorizzi in the early twentieth century do not appear reliable in terms of dating. According to some of these the Ḥanafī and Shāfi'ī mosques were the oldest, dating eight hundred years back from 1910.[110] But through the gathering of oral data it appears that the Shāfi'ī mosque was older than the Ḥanafī, and in essence the oldest in Massawa. This seems possible since pre-Ottoman Islamic influences on the Eritrean coast originated in the Yemeni region of the southern Arabian Peninsula – an area in which the Shāfi'ī legal rite is by large the predominant *madhhab*.[111]

In the sixteenth century the Ḥanafī *madhhab* was introduced by the Ottomans and the so-called Ḥanafī Friday mosque gained increasing importance, equalling and surpassing – since it was the official legal rite of Massawa's military and political administrations from 1557 to 1885 - that of the Shāfi'ī and Shaykh Ḥammāl Friday mosques. The 'Ḥanafī mosque' provides an excellent example of the multi-layered development resulting from several waves of building and renovation drives. According to information collected by Ibrāhīm al-Mukhtār in 1953, the Ḥanafī mosque was first constructed in the tenth century after the *hijra*; according to some it was built by the Ottoman government following the conquest of Massawa in 1557.[112] In following centuries the mosque had been renovated several times, most importantly under the Egyptians (1865-85) during their massive enterprises of construction and renovation of

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[110] Odorizzi, *Il commissariato regionale di Massaua*, 119-120.
[111] The 'Afar on the Red Sea coasts follow the Shāfi'ī *madhhab*.
[112] Others said it was built by shaykh Adam b. Muḥammad Barkūy, whose father, Muḥammad (d. 981/1573), was a Turkish religious scholar and author of many books, among which was the *Kitāb al-muḥammadiyya bi-bayān al-ṣīra al-Aḥmadiyya*. Shaykh Adam had stores and shops and he built the Ḥanafī mosque as a second floor on top of his shops. Following his passing the shops were divided among his inheritors and sold; the mosque was subsequently moved to the place where it currently stands. Ibrāhīm al-Mukhtār, *al-Rāwiya fī ta'rīkh mudun Iritriya*, (Unpublished Manuscript), Completed in Asmara 1372/1953, 53-7.

the town and its edifices. In 1901 the mosque was partly renovated under the Italians – partly explaining its exceptional resistance to the great 1921 earthquake that destroyed most of old Massawa's houses. In 1948, in the period under the British Administration in Eritrea, it was again renovated and an adjacent open esplanade was regularized for prayer in hot days.

In the early period of Eritrea's federation with Ethiopia, in early 1953, Haile Sellassie manipulative attempts to coopt Muslim leaders throughout the territory led him to propose the financing the renovation and enlargement of the Ḥanafī mosque; an initiative that had stirred some controversy among Muslim community leaders. This is not the place to expand on mid-twentieth century developments; suffice is to say that the controversy stemming from the involvement of a non-Muslim (Haile Sellasie) in what is undoubtedly one of the more sensitive issues to a Muslim community - a mosque - highlights the centrality of notions of Islamic communal identity in Massawa.[113]

But beyond the three Friday mosques on Massawa Island (Shaykh Ḥammāl, the Ḥanafī and the Shāfi'ī) there were other Friday mosques and smaller mosques and praying rooms throughout the conurbation. Commercial growth and prosperity in the second half of the nineteenth century were reflected by the growing construction of private houses and public edifices, including mosques.[114] Intensive urban expansion and construction characterized the Egyptian (1865-1885) and early Italian periods (from 1885 to 1900s). Mosques were built to accommodate the growing number of people living in the mainland elements of the conurbation, in Hirgigo, Hitumlo, Amatrih, Edaga Be'rai, while others were renovated and expanded to adjust to the town's new needs. Some lived

[113] Ibid.
[114] A similar pattern is observed in coastal East African towns in the same period. Middleton, *The World of the Swahili*, 164.

on the mainland and came to work in the port and bazar area on a daily basis, making extra praying spaces on the port island a practical necessity. The Egyptian administration had built or supported financially the construction of mosques and other religious edifices such as schools and shrines in the 1870s.[115] The historian Marongiu Buonaiuti noted that the early Italian colonial administration continued – as the Egyptians did beforehand - to support Muslim institutions in Massawa; "it had granted mosques various subventions and contributed generously to the construction of other new ones."[116]

Mosque lists dating to the Italian colonial period also identify the association or affiliation of mosques with specific legal rites (Ar. *madhhab*) or Sufi brotherhoods. As noted above, in Massawa island there was one Ḥanafī and one Shāfi'ī Friday mosque. But there were other, smaller ones undoubtedly following Ḥanafī rites (Ḥusayn Bāsha, Mīrghanī), one that we know of following the Māliki rite ('Abd Ḥāmid), and possibly several other Shāfi'ī affiliations of mosques named after Yemeni holy men (Sa'īd al-'Amūdi, 'Abd Allāh Sa'ad al-Yafi'ī and others).

The question of *madhhab* affiliation in Massawa is one that deserves further research.[117] The conjuncture of three principal factors was at the basis of potential problems within the Muslim community. The first factor was that the Ḥanafī *madhhab* was predominant since it was introduced by the Ottomans and followed by the Egyptians and the Khatmiyya *ṭarīqa*. A second point was that the great majority of migrants – among whom a notable group of *ashrāf*- who settled in Massawa in the nineteenth century were from the Hadhrami region, most of whom – with the exception of the

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[115] As noted above the Shaykh Ḥammāli tomb was renovated in 1878 under the Egyptians. See also al-Jamal, *al-Wathā'iq al-ta'rīkhiyya li siyāsat Miṣr*, 139 (document no. 59).
[116] Marongiu-Buonaiuti, *Politica e religioni nel colonialismo italiano*, 103
[117] On the distribution of the *madhhāhib* in the Eritrean region see Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, 231-3 and Odorizzi, *Note storiche sulla religione mussulmana*, 29.

Ibādhites and some Zayidis from the Yemen – followed the Shāfi'ī *madhhab*. The third factor was was the redynamization of exchanges – in terms of both goods and peoples – between Massawa and the Sudanese region, a part of whose inhabitants followed the Mālikī rite.

One incident that epitomizes the results of such tensions occurred in Hirgigo in the 1890s where a group of merchants and notables, followers of the Shāfi'ī *madhhab* and the Shādhilī *ṭarīqa*, took the initiative to construct a Friday mosque. 'Abd Allāh Bā Junayd, a Massawa merchant of Hadhrami origins, led the notables. But since the Shāfi'īs and Shādhilīs were in a minority in Hirgigo, their project met significant resistance. Undoubtedly the majority - Ḥanafīs and Khatmis –who believed it was inappropriate for a Friday mosque to be sectarian, expressed opposition. Bā Junayd was able to "pull strings" and have a *firmān* from the Ottoman Sultan issued authorizing the establishment of the Friday mosque. As a result, the opposition party was determined to take its revenge on Bā Junayd; they were successful in bringing the matter to the local administration, as a result of which the Italians expelled Bā Junayd from Massawa and he left for Jiddah.[118]

Mosques associated with Sufi brotherhoods were also common in the Massawa area. In the early twentieth century most mosques in this category related to the Khatmiyya: one in Massawa Island, three in Hirgigo, two in Omkullo, and two in Hitumlo, giving a total of eight mosques named after members of the Mīrghanī family, who were perhaps their founders. There was also a Shādhilī mosque in Hirgigo and a Shādhilī Friday mosque in Hitumlo. There were also several qādirī mosques but probably a few more were indirectly related to the *ṭarīqa* through local holy men such as Shaykh

[118] Ibrāhīm al-Mukhtār, *al-Jāmi' li-akhbār jazīrat Bāḍi'*, 114.

Aḥmad al-Najāsh.[119] Some prominent Massawa families enjoying high religious status had their own small mosques, usually attached to a house or a group of houses, where members of the family and family friends and associates prayed during weekdays and where ancestors were sometimes buried in an adjacent court.[120]

The configuration of mosques in Massawa also reflected the spectacular success of the Sufi brotherhoods in the mainland elements of the conurbation where large groups of Saho and Tigre-speaking laborers, peddlars and brokers settled since mid-century. Hirgigo, for example, had many mosques associated with local holy men, families and lineages, such as those founded by or named after *sayyid* Dirhāwi, Bayt Zubayr, Shaykh Muḥammad Jābir, Bayt Shaykh Maḥmūd, Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥāmid Minifirāwi, and others. In Omkullo one mosque was named after *nā'ib* Idrīs 'Uthmān. In Hitumlo important elite families involved in commerce, brokerage and transportation services such as Shalāl, Mantay, Sā'igh and Shaykh Adam Burkuy, had mosques where their religious capital could be pivotal in establishing patronage (patron-client) networks with producers, brokers and service providers from, or connected to the interior.[121] In Hitumlo

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[119] Ja'far Sa'īd al-Nāti established a *zāwiya* and a mosque of the Aḥmadiyya only later in the late Italian period. The sufi lodge was based in Amatere in Massawa's suburbs and a yearly visitation commemorating *sayyid* Aḥmad b. Idrīs was performed there around the 20th of *rajab*. Interview with Muḥammad Abū Bakr al-Nāti, Massawa, 16 May 2000.

[120] In Massawa island the Makka'alī, Adūbāsh ('Adūlāy), Masāwa, and Dhahab li- Abū 'Ilāma mosques - the latter two being families of notable *qāḍīs*. There is also a '*sayyid* Masāwa mosque' in Hitumlo, revealing a certain pattern of duplication in mosque names throughout the elements of the conurbation. It is perhaps explained by the fact that due to the conurbation's unusual geography, peoples' social and family lives were at times scattered/fragmented throughout the urban area. A Massawan could thus pray in the morning near his house in Hitumlo, pray at midday in a mosque on Massawa island where he worked, and in the evening enter a mosque in Hirgigo or Edaga where he stopped to chat with a friend before returning to his home in Hitumlo.

[121] According to oral data the Adam Burkūy family is descended from the Prophet's companions, known as the *ṣahāba*. They are originally from Tigray in northern Ethiopia. In some sources they are identified as 'Jambako' or Adam Bāqo'. One informant related that the Makka'ali family descends from the Adam Burkūy family. It was a leading family in Massawa in the second half of the 19th century, well connected both in foreland and inland socio-commercial networks. In one instance in the early 1880s, Muḥammad Bey b. Muṣṭafa al-Shināwi, the head of *majlis Sawākin* and the chief of Sawakin's Merchants (Ar.

we also find two 'Ad Darqī mosques, associated with the 'Ad Darqi holy clan whose function it was to provide religious services to the Ḥabab. The existence of two 'Ad Darqī mosques reflects the important presence of the Habab in Massawa's mainland, where they were active in brokerage and trade throughout this period.

Pious Endowments (*waqf*)

Records of the Islamic court of Massawa dating from the 1860s and 1870s confirm the use of the Islamic institution of *waqf* (Ar. pious endowment) in the port throughout the nineteenth century.[122] The essential elements of a pious endowment "are that a person, with the intention of committing a pious deed, declares part of his or her property to be henceforth unalienable and designates persons or public utilities as beneficiaries of its yields."[123] The beneficiaries of an endowed object or property can be both persons and public utilities such as mosques, cemeteries, water wells, schools and bridges. Modern Islamic legislation distinguishes between *waqf ahlī* (Ar. family endowment), that is endowments that are in favour of one's children, or family, and *waqf khayrī* (Ar. charitable endowment) which is dedicated to pious causes (maintaining mosques, assisting the poor). But since no distinction between the two types of endowment has ever been made in classical doctrine, the two are administered according to the same rules.[124]

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sarrtujjār), gives power of attorney to 'Abd al-Qādir b. Adam b. Muḥammad b. Adam Burkūy, to represent his interests in Massawa. MICR 4/16b (1 Rabī' I 1299).

[122] The institution of *waqf* was undoubtedly used well before in Massawa. An anecdotical piece of evidence tells of a man who presented himself to the *qāḍī* in 1943 claiming that his ancestor came to the port from Fursān town in Yemen (sic.) [but probably Fursān islands] in 750H./1330. He settled in the port, built there mosques and they all had *waqf*s that the claimant now wanted to be recognized. Ibrāhīm al-Mukhtār, *al-Jāmi' li-akhbār jazīrat Bāḍi'*, 108.

[123] R. Peters, "Wakf [in classical Islamic law]," *EI2*.

[124] Ibidem.

In Massawa in the second part of the nineteenth century we find records involving both charitable and family endowments.[125] Most, if not all, founders of *waqf*s in Massawa were members of the mercantile or religious elite, who were able to accumulate enough property and endow part of it to pious institutions or to their offspring – a technique often used for preserving family wealth. The foundation of pious endowments was a sign of great piety and devotion, an essential ingredient of symbolic capital and a marker of high status and success in Massawa's environment.

The first registration of *waqfiyya*s in the records of the *sharī'a* court available to us dates to 1285/1868. In that year 'Uthmān b. Aḥmad Ḥarak came to court to endow eight of his shops to the mosque named 'Abd Allāh al-Mahdi [Awmudui].[126] A couple of years later, on 14 ṣafar 1287/1870, three *waqf* cases were brought to court. In the first *Sayyid* 'Umar b. *Sayyid* Aḥmad Abū Sha'rayn endowed three shops and two parcels of land – over which there was 'Alī Yamani's shop and also a straw hut serving as a café – to the Adūbāsh mosque. The property at hand had been initially endowed to *Sayyid* 'Umar by his grandfather Ḥasan Abū Sha'rayn. The second case involved one of Muḥammad Ṣālih b. Aḥmad Ṣālih 'Adūlāy's properties that had been endowed to 'Abd Allāh Sa'ad al-Yāfi'ī mosque. In the third case, Za'fran, wife of the late 'Abd al-Nabī al-Maghribi, together with Amna b. Surūr, a slave who belonged to the late husband/master, endowed a stone house with a wooden *rawshān* to the Shāfi'ī Friday mosque.[127]

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[125] Ibrāhīm al-Mukhtār noted that in the Ottoman era in mid-century, under *qāḍī*s such as *Sayyid* Muḥammad Masāwa, Maḥmūd Nāṣir and Adam Ismā'īl, *waqf* deeds (Ar. sing. *ḥujja*, pl. *ḥujjāj*) were regularly delivered to individuals at the court. Ibrāhīm al-Mukhtār, *al-Jāmi' li-akhbār jazīrat Bāḍi'*, 46.

[126] MICR 16/39a (17 jumād II 1285), 16/39b (17 jumad II 1285), 16/39c (17 jumad II 1285). Ibrāhīm al-Mukhtār noted that before the mosque was destroyed in the 1921 earthquake, it had eight shops and eleven pieces of land as *waqf*. *al-Jāmi' li-akhbār jazīrat Bāḍi'*, 55.

[127] MICR 16/54b (14 Ṣafar 1287), 16/55a (14 Ṣafar 1287), 16/56b (14 Ṣafar 1287). Other records of *waqf khayri* are found in: MICR 16/60b (17 Rabi' I 1287); MICR 16/70a (5 Jumād II 1288); MICR 16/70c (?

A more elaborate case of *waqf* foundation was recorded in sha'bān 1296 [1879]. The prominent and wealthy 'Abd Allāh *Bey* b. Aḥmad b. Yūsuf al-Ghūl bought a parcel of land from Bakhīta b. 'Abd Allāh and Faṭma Hindī b. 'Abd Allāh who were the liberated slaves of Aḥmad Hindi b. Ṣādiq al-Qashmīri, for 25 French *riyāl*s. Two days later he endowed the land to the Shāfi'ī Friday mosque. The endowment record reproduces the elaborate references and quotations from the *ḥadīth*, undoubtedly pronounced in court, presenting the great merits of the *waqf* and its founder.[128] But there are also some traces of the use of family endowments (Ar. *waqf ahlī*) in the nineteenth century. Ibrāhīm al-Mukhtār noted three that he had found in deeds and court records examined by him: the *waqf* of Mūsā Qashmīr, the *waqf* of Aḥmad 'Alī al-Fayrūzī, and the *waqf* of Muḥammad Adāla.[129] In general, some cases involving *waqf* presented problems, especially in the context of a rapidly expanding economy followed by a spectacular building boom. In one case retrieved from the records a certain Muḥammad Shaqray came to court with a fatwa from the *muftī* of Mecca in his hand, stating that a *waqf* cannot be transferred according to his legal rite.

As part of their constant attempts to modernize the administration, a special committee for *waqf* affairs was established by the Egyptians in 1882-3. It was placed under the jurisdiction of the *qāḍī*. In 1916, under the Italians, new regulations concerning *waqf* were decreed, and the *waqf* committee was placed under the Governor of the Colony.

Jumād I 1288), 16/69c (? 1288), 16/71b (? Rajab 1288); MICR 16/73b (? Dhū 'l-ḥijja 1288); MICR 16/91a (1290); MICR 16/105a (1 Rajab 1292).

[128] MICR 9/27b (18 Sha'bān 1296), 9/28a (20 Sha'bān 1296). In addition to all the above mosques one case also mentions the endowments of the Ḥanafī Friday mosque of Massawa and the Friday mosque of Hirgigo MICR 4/9d (4 Ṣafar 1299).

[129] Ibrāhīm al-Mukhtār, *al-Jāmi' li-akhbār jazīrat Bāḍi'*, 47. The *waqf* of Muḥammad Adala is also mentioned in MICR 16/61b (15 Rabī' II 1287). Another record made note of a *waqf* owned by the Shinītī family. MICR 16/100a (Jumād II 1291).

'*Sharia* in the Sea, Law in Gondar': The Centrality of Massawa's Islamic Court[130]

No other local institution has been as central to both individual and society in Massawa as the Islamic court (also *sharia* court, Ar. *al-maḥkama al-sharī'iyya*) or the office of *qāḍī*.[131] Up to the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the court was instrumental in administering most aspects of civil, religious, communal and family life in town. Islamic law provided the framework for regulating and controlling social and economic practices and relationships among Massawa's citizens - until the 1880s - both Muslim and non-Muslim. During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Egyptian judicial reform leading to the reorganization of Massawa's judicial system, and the advent of Italian colonial rule, had gradually and increasingly led to a restriction of the office of *qāḍī* to matters of personal status and notarial functions.

Today, Massawans in particular, but also Eritrean Muslims at large, attach great importance and take pride in the town's long and rich Islamic legal tradition. Such voices emphasize the centrality of the court as an institution that organized urban and communal life, and highlight the prominent role of *qāḍī*s as leaders enjoying a position of prestige and authority, exercising an influential role on the local public scene.[132]

The prominent position of *qāḍī*s may perhaps also be understood in the context of the judicial structure in the Ottoman Empire in the sixteenth century, where *qāḍī*s derived

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[130] "*Sharī'a ab bahari, seri'at ab Gwonder.*" A saying in Tigrinya quoted in Abdu Ali Habib, 46.

[131] This was also true for what one could call Massawa's "sister" port-town [in that period], Sawakin. See a detailed chapter on Sawakin's Islamic court in Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ Ḍirār, *Ta'rīkh Sawākin wa-l'baḥr al-aḥmar* (Khartum, 1991), 131-146.

[132] As noted in a previous chapter one [entirely unfounded, yet revealing] tradition collected in the early 1970s attributed the town's name 'Massawa' to a well-known *qāḍī*, *sayyid* Muḥammad Masāwa b. Aḥmad al-'Alawī, who was in office in the middle of the nineteenth century. His reputation as a judge was so great throughout the region that people coming to see him said "they had gone to Masawa," gradually interchanging it with the town's name.

their authority directly from the Sultan and were responsible only to him.[133] *Qāḍī*s could attain a high level of autonomy in certain contexts, especially so where governmental presence was weak such as over long stretches of time in Massawa's history, up to the middle of the nineteenth century.[134] Reflecting this notion when describing the historical and pivotal role of the *qāḍī* in Massawa, Ibrāhīm al-Mukhtār wrote in the 1950s as follows:

> The *qāḍī* in the court of Badi' ("Massawa") was the only authoritative person applying the *sharī'a* from the dawn of Islam, from the time the first Muslim delegation came from Mecca and landed in the island of Bāḍi' ... From ancient times, the *qāḍī* of Bāḍi' was the only official authority for Eritrean Muslims. He solved their legal and religious problems and was the only person to adjudicate. He ruled in all sorts of cases that occurred in the island of Bāḍi', and for different peoples from different legal schools. He was the only authoritative person in the island on questions of land and other real estate.[135]

The earliest mention of the Islamic court in Massawa in the available sources does not predate the Ottoman period (beginning in 1557), and the few traces dating from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries are scarce. From both written sources and family traditions it is reasonable to conclude that following their occupation of Massawa in 1557 and the creation of the province called *Habesh Eyaleti*, the Ottomans appointed a

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[133] Halil Inalcik, "*Maḥkama* [The Ottoman Empire. i. The earlier centuries]," *EI2*. It also helps to explain the all-too-known stereotypical notion of "Qadi Justice" (*Kadijustiz*), describing the process of justice administration as erratic, emotional and subjective, most often dependent on extra-legal considerations, as opposed to the legal formalism and 'rationality' of western legal systems.

[134] In this context a question that deserves further thought is whether and to what extent has Massawa's Islamic legal tradition – its *sharī'a* court, its *qāḍī*s and *muftī*s - played a role and constituted a factor in shaping local notions of communal identity. See a thought-provoking study on the role of the *qāḍī*s court in preserving the distinct character of the Swahili of Mombasa. Marc Swartz, "Religious courts, community, and ethnicity among the Swahili of Mombasa: an historical study of social boundaries," *Africa* (London), 49 (1) 1979, 29-41.

[135] Ibrāhīm al-Mukhtār, *al-Jāmi' li-akhbār jazīrat Bāḍi'*, 73.

qāḍī in Massawa and made the Ḥanafī *madhhab* the official legal school.[136] Even if incomplete and in some cases approximative at best, a list of *qāḍī*s in office in Massawa since 1012/1603 prepared by *muftī* Ibrāhīm al-Mukhtār with the assistance of *qāḍī* 'Uthmān Ḥasan [137] is useful in providing some information on the history of the court (Appendix 19).[138]

A first observation was that all *qāḍī*s in the list followed the Ḥanafī *madhhab* – the court had formally adopted this school even if the parties at court were Shāfi'īs or Mālikīs, for example. A second point is that the six first *qāḍī*s (up to the late-eighteenth century) were noted as born locally - either *al-Ḥarqiqāwi* or *al-Maṣawwi'ī* was added to their names. However, in the nineteenth century there were also *qāḍī*s whose origins were from the Hijaz (Ṭā'if), Hadhramawt, the Sudan (Sawakin), Egypt, and North Africa. Of the first six *qāḍī*s four belonged to the 'Abbāsī family which has been associated with religious institutions and offices in Massawa for several centuries and is considered to this day as one of a handful of the foremost families of the town's religious elite.[139]

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[136] Suleyman I, Sultan of the Ottoman Empire from 1520 to 1566, had ordered that all courts in the Ottoman dominions should be administered according to the Ḥanafī *madhhab*. Inalcik, "*Maḥkama* [The Ottoman Empire. i. The earlier centuries]." *EI2*.

[137] *Qāḍī* 'Uthmān Ḥasan is very well remembered for his strong personality and his sense of leadership during his period in office in the Italian era. He was also a *khalīfa* of the Khatmiya *ṭarīqa*.

[138] In June 1943 *muftī* Ibrāhīm al-Mukhtār had formally requested *qāḍī* 'Uthmān Ḥasan to collect any piece of information he could find about Massawa's past *qāḍī*s. Following his investigations among the town notables and sifting through old court registers, *qāḍī* 'Uthmān sent *muftī* Ibrāhīm a list, augmented and completed by the *muftī*, and which constitutes a large part of Appendix 19. Ibrāhīm al-Mukhtār, *al-Jāmi' li-akhbār jazīrat Bāḍi'*, 75-6.

[139] Examples of prominent 'Abbāsis include Shaykh Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh Aḥmad 'Abbāsi (d. 1899) who was a prominent merchant and the second head of the *waqf* committee in Massawa in the late nineteenth century. In the year 2000 the *waqf* council of the town of Massawa was headed by a member of the 'Abbāsi family and administered by two 'Abbāsis. See also Appendix for 'Abbāsi family tree. In interviews 'Abbāsi family members claimed that their ancestor, the first 'Abbāsi in Massawa, was sent to the island-port from Medina by the Ottoman authorities three centuries ago. Interviews with Ḥāmid 'Abd al-Bāqi 'Abbāsi, Massawa, 18 March 2000 and Muḥammad Aḥmad 'Abbāsi, Massawa, 20 March 2000. They claimed that the first 'Abbāsi came to Massawa in 1090/1679. All these dates should be taken very cautiously.

There is little information about the administration of justice in Massawa prior to the establishment of the Egyptian khedivial administration in the port. An early colonial Italian report typically reproduces European colonial perceptions of corrupt judicial administration in Muslim societies, and especially in the dominions of the Ottoman Empire. Such discourses were obviously useful in legitimizing the colonial project, bringing justice and enlightenment to colonized societies:

> In Massawa, until 1289 (1872), there was no real court as one would find in a civilized state. A Turkish governor ruled there, dealing with all affairs and in matters of justice he acted more by talent than by reason and law. He judged as he pleased, according to the customs of those who had ruled the country. This rough method was perhaps practical and useful in that period, but it was certainly not appropriate to an advanced civilization.[140]

The description is undoubtedly exaggerated, even if it probably rightly points out to a fairly rudimentary state of organized judicial administration. Only after the establishment of the Egyptian khedivial administration in the port in 1865 were its judicial institutions restructured and modernized. This corresponded to major reforms in the judicial system in Egypt under Khedive Ismā'īl (r. 1863-1879) and his successors, which, in general, tended to restrict the power of sharī'a courts in favor of a larger distribution of jurisdiction among several judicial institutions. [141]

Judicial reform in Egypt obviously affected all its territorial dominions, the Red Sea and the Sudan included. Shortly after the Egyptian takeover of Massawa in 1865 several structural and organizational reforms were made in the judicial field. The

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[140] Vincenzo Mellana, *L'Italia in Africa: serie giuridico-amministrativa: v. 2, t.1. L'amministrazione della giustizia in Eritrea e in Somalia (1869-1936)* (Roma, 1971-2), Allegato I, 288. Also ASDMAE, *ASMAI*, 12 / 1, fasc. 1.

[141] Joseph Schacht [Aharon Layish], "*Maḥkama* [The Arab lands and Israel. i. Egypt]," *EI2*. See more on Egyptian judicial reform in the last quarter of the nineteenth century in Nathan J. Brown, *The Rule of Law in the Arab World: Courts in Egypt and the Gulf* (Cambridge, 1997), 23-40. See also Robert F. Hunter, *Egypt under the Khedives, 1805-1879: From Household Government to Modern Bureaucracy* (Pittsburgh, 1984), 44-5.

administration under Ḥasan Rif'at *Bey* delegated an official to the market with the power to solve any case of civil or commercial litigation on sums not exceeding 500 Egyptian Piasters. For adjudicating on other infractions the Governor established and headed a Council with four or six members, who were among the town's leading notables and merchants. The office of *qāḍī* was maintained with jurisdiction over matters pertaining to the family, marriage, divorce, maintenance, *waqf*, slave manumission, gifts, succession, and other issues of personal status.

Governor Werner Munzinger initiated a second significant organizational reform in 1872. [142] He instituted a regular court for civil and penal affairs in Massawa, with a President and three government-appointed and remunerated judges. The court's jurisdiction went beyond the Massawa conurbation and extended over a large population in the eastern Eritrean area: in Semhar, the northern Afar coast, the Habab areas in Sahel, the Keren region and the Dahlak islands. The court had competence over civil cases of any sum and penal cases of any nature, it continued to follow the Ottoman legal Code (*Qānūn*), and it had the right of appeal to Kassala where a *muftī* at government service resided. [143] Commercial cases were handled by the *sarrtujjār* (chief of merchants) who either judged alone or assisted by four individuals, depending on the importance of the cases. It was a commercial court attached to and ultimately dependent upon the Civil and Penal Court. Notwithstanding these changes, the authorities maintained the office of *qāḍī* for all matters related to family and personal status.[144]

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[142] Mellana, *L'Italia in Africa: serie giuridico-amministrativa: v. 2, t.1. L'amministrazione della giustizia in Eritrea e in Somalia (1869-1936)*, 288-290.

[143] Since communications between Massawa and Kassala and Kartum were cut during the Mahdist revolt, the court of appeal for Massawa's tribunal became the Supreme Court of Appeal in Cairo.

[144] Literary data about the Islamic court in Massawa from the 1860s through the 1880s is scarce but a useful source providing information on recording procedures, aspects of court bureaucracy and *qāḍī*s in office, are the registers of the *maḥkama*. In the 1940s, the first Grand *muftī* of Eritrea, Shaykh Ibrāhīm al-Mukhtār

Several *muftīs* had been in office from the 1860s to the turn of the century, although in a rather intermittent manner. The Mahdist revolt and the British occupation of Egypt in 1882 added to the tortuous state of administrative instability that had prevailed even beforehand. On the basis of Ibrāhīm al-Mukhtār's manuscript Appendix 19 makes note of four *muftīs*, two from Egypt or the Sudan, and two from the Abū 'Ilāmā family that we have already encountered. The fourth and last was *muftī* 'Abd Allāh Sirāj Abū 'Ilāmā (1845-1900) who was described as the descendant of a Tunisian family of notables.[145]

The advent of Italian colonial rule with the occupation of Massawa in February 1885 also generated a set of administrative and judicial changes in relation to the status of *qāḍīs* and the administration of Islamic law, at times somewhat paradoxical and contradictory. Already in 1882 after the acquisition of Assab the Italian government opted for a fairly liberal attitude in matters of judicial administration. Italian law was applied to Italian subjects of the Realm, while the religious practices and customs of the 'natives' were respected and administered according to local practices, and by a *qāḍī*. At the outset of their occupation of Massawa too, the Italian colonial authorities proclaimed

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(1909-1969), made great efforts to uncover and preserve the religious, legal and cultural heritage of Eritrean Muslims. His investigations led him to the court in Massawa where he had discovered one hundred and two bound volumes of court registers, of which sixty-three corrsponded to the Egyptian era (1865-1885), and the rest to the Italian period (c.1885/1890 to 1941). Unfortunately, the Ethiopian army destroyed most registers in the 1950s. While visiting the court in 1959 Ibrāhīm al-Mukhtār was able to salvage only ca. 30 volumes from the Egyptian era, which he subsequently transferred to Asmara for preservation. Ibrāhīm al-Mukhtār, *al-Jāmi' li-akhbār jazīrat Bāḍi'*, 80-4.

[145] His father 'Alī Abū 'Ilāma Muḥammad Nūr – previously encountered in the incident with the French Catholic mission - had been appointed as *muftī* by the Ottomans, who passed the office from father to son. Like all other *muftīs* in Massawa, he followed the Ḥanafī *madhhab* but issued *fatwas* in cases involving Ḥanbalis, Mālikis and Shāfi'īs. 'Abd Allāh Sirāj served initially as a *qāḍī* with the authority of a *muftī*, but following the Egyptian appointment of a *qāḍī* brought from Khartum, he was appointed to the office of *muftī* in 1884. This arrangement continued until 1895-6 when 'Abd Allāh Sirāj held both offices of *qāḍī* and *muftī*. ASDMAE, *AE*, pacco 349 fascicolo 37. 'Foglietto di servizio dello Scech 'Abd Allah Seraj ben Ali Abū Alama', Massaua, December 1900. In 1898 he became *Cavaliere della Corona d'Italia*.

that the customs and religion of the town's inhabitants would be "scrupulously respected."[146]

The Italian colonial administration reorganized the judicial system in Massawa. The Egyptian Court for Civil and Penal affairs was converted into a Local Civil and Commercial Tribunal with jurisdiction on any case whatsoever and maintained the principle of legislative and jurisdictional duplicity, hence a separate administration of justice to Italians and 'natives'. But this state of uncertain balance and lack of clarity was short lived. It ended in August 1886 with what became known as the "Regolamento giudiziario Celli," which introduced a single jurisdiction and abolished the 'Natives Tribunal'. The 'natives', Celli's report stated, "had to submit themselves to the methods and precepts of justice administered by the conqueror" who, however, seeks to avoid offending too radically "the judicial and religious conscience" of the locals.[147]

In practice, the *qāḍī* was left to deal with all matters of personal status, as well as cases of voluntary adjuducating, all under the control of the Tribunal's President.[148] Now that Massawans were judged in a non-Muslim colonial court this new arrangement was indeed somewhat paradoxical with the approach of full respect to the religious customs and practices of the local inhabitants.[149] But General Genè was aware of the potential risk of stripping local Muslim leaders from all their judicial powers. Indeed, he constantly called for leaving some judicial powers in the hands of Shaykhs, *nā'ib*s and *qāḍī*s. In late 1886 during the ceremony of the installment in office of the President of the Tribunal to

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[146] ASDMAE, *AE*, pacco 16, 'Proclama agli abitanti di Massaua', by rear admiral Caimi, 5 February 1885. Marongiu-Buonaiuti, *Politica e religioni nel colonialismo italiano*, 40-1.
[147] Marongiu-Buonaiuti, *Politica e religioni nel colonialismo italiano*, 43.
[148] A colorful and somewhat anecdotal description of a court session held at the beginning of 1888 is provided in Mantegazza, *Da Massaua a Saati*, 239-240.
[149] Marongiu-Buonaiuti, *Politica e religioni nel colonialismo italiano*, 43

which the *qāḍī* of Massawa was aptly invited, Genè solemnly appointed a *muftī*, who became, de facto, leader of the Muslim community of Massawa until the turn of the century.[150]

The process of "colonial pacification" of interior highland and lowland societies in the 1890s and the early development of elements of an Islamic policy nevertheless generated new colonial perceptions and constructions of culture and civilization, placing Muslim urban and coastal people at the top of the ladder. This approach indeed reflected the favourable attitude enjoyed by the Muslim inhabitants of the Massawa conurbation, at least in relation to highland societies and until the judicial reform of 1908.[151] An Italian report from 1893 recommended that Massawa and its region should be given a distinct, more "advanced" and "refined," legislation and jurisdiction separating it from that of the highlanders:

> Regarding the condition of its inhabitants, the Eritrean territory is divided into two distinct regions. Massawa and its surroundings, where the European element predominates, constitute the main commercial hub. Even the natives lose here their pure features of race (tribe) and with time have adopted customs and practices that were imported from civilized regions ... This zone ... may be given the legislation of a civilized nation. In contrast the interior has conserved its primitive character, inhabited by native tribes to whom European customs have not yet reached, and even if so, in a very imperfect manner. European legislation, with all its details necessary for the refinements of civilization and all its pedantic formal processes, will be adopted there with great difficulty.[152]

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[150] Marongiu-Buonaiuti, *Politica e religioni nel colonialismo italiano*, 43-4.
[151] Marongiu-Buonaiuti, *Politica e religioni nel colonialismo italiano*, 103.
[152] Tribunale Civile e Penale di Massaua. *Relazione statistica deo lavori compiuti nell'anno 1892 dal Tribunale Civile e Penale di Massaua. (Dal Pres. Avv. Luigi Scotti)*, Massaua, 1893, p. 3 (in ASDMAE, *AE* 156).

Dancing, Chanting and Protesting: 'Orthodox' versus 'Popular' Islam,

> Barth, the famous German explorer, wrote that in Africa people dance all night long; for Massawa he would have said that people dance day and night... Dancing in Massawa is on the boundary between the brutality of central Africa and the refinement of the customs of the [ancient] Egyptian. (P. Matteucci)[153]
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> [In Massawa people] dance to chase away the Devil (*Afrit*) from the sick. The Massawans believe that the Devil is the cause for all the misfortunes that oppress humanity. They dance when one gets married; they dance when a child is born; they continue to dance when he is circumcised. They dance and sing and cry together when a friend dies...[154]

The politically, economically and socially tumultuous decades of the second half of the century left their mark on the religious scene in the wider region and in the Massawa conurbation. The effects of the Islamic revival, the Egyptian occupation, and the greater mobility of people between the African and Arabian shores of the Red Sea – for commerce, pilgrimage, or education - were all factors influencing and shaping the intensive dynamics of Islam in the region. But the same drastic social, political and religious transformations of coastal society in the latter decades of the nineteenth century – added to which was the imposition of a new non-Muslim colonial power – led to a state of some degree of social, cultural and moral confusion. The reconstruction of the socio-moral landscape was manifested principally in struggles over power, authority, influence and access to various forms of capital. Some of these struggles played out in the arena of cultural, customary and ritual practices. Since Islam constituted perhaps the most cardinal source of symbolic capital, struggles over what constituted 'proper' Islamic practice and what defined the Muslim community were pervasive in such a setting.

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[153] Matteucci, *In Abissinia*, 38-9.
[154] Negri, *Massaua e dintorni*, 12-3.

The confluence of migrants from the Arabian Peninsula – some of whom were *ashrāf*, and perhaps learned to some extent - and newcomers from the recently Islamized (or religiously revivified) interior in only a few decades leaves little to imagine as to the existence of tensions in the fields of religion and culture in a rapidly transforming urban community. These tensions generated complex negotiations, conflicts and struggles over religious authority and leadership expressed through discourses relating to citizenship and conceptions of the Muslim community.

Contention over Islamic 'purity' and 'impurity', 'orthodox' and *ḥarām* (Ar. forbidden by religion) practices were especially reflected in various religious, social and cultural rituals, which, in Massawa, were almost always marked by spectacular and intense festive dances. These dances were much more popular among newcomers from the inland, in the mainland villages of the conurbation and in Tewalet. The Khatmiyya, for example, tolerated many local customary and cultural practices of its ever-numerous members throughout the conurbation, including various types of dances. There are numerous accounts describing these festive dances in early Italian colonial journalistic and travel literature from the 1880s to the turn of the century. One example was Porro's vivid description:

> In the native villages of Massawa and its environs there are four or five daily 'fantasie' (small celebrations). A death, a sick person, a birth, a circumcision, may be the reason for one of these ceremonies. The natives' drums are extremely loud and noisy for twenty-four hours... One evening we went to see one of these 'fantasie'. It was performed for a sick woman who would - one of her doctors told us - either die or get better in the following morning as a result of the ceremony. The poor woman was lying down in a big hut with about thirty people around her. Two or three beat their drums, the others were dancing, hopping from one leg to the other, chanting an eternally repetitive refrain...[155]

[155] Porro, "Notizie da Massaua," 101-102.

Pippo Vigoni described in detail his observations from a ceremony aiming to cure a sick woman:

> Among the thousands of cries that continually vibrate the atmosphere, one very strong and continuous mix of voices and sounds attracted our attention an entire day and the best part of the night... [In the morning] we entered into the hut ... where eight young black women were sitting on two beds. They were covered in a sort of white cloth with silver bracelets and rings in the nose, the ears and on their fingers in a way that they almost covered all of them up to their red-tainted nails. The poor sick young woman lied on the ground... on her sides two persons were beating drums while all the sitting women chanted in a very high voice, interrupted by a very acute trill. The public, including about twenty other people accompanied with a regular clapping of hands. From time to time they poured perfumed oils on the forehead of the patient ... This savage and original scene aimed at chasing the devil away from the illness that took over the poor woman...[156]

The description of such ritual and festive dancing does not make their identification always simple. It is often unclear whether the description refers to a customary local dance of a Saho or Tigre-speaking group, a Sufi ceremony (usually the *dhikr*), a dancing ritual originating in the interior and brought to the coast by migrants or slaves, or some degree of mixing of several influences in specific cases.[157] However, it appears quite clearly that some dances were perceived negatively by those practising what they thought of as a more 'orthodox' Islam. Such voices scorned and downplayed aspects of local culture such as spirit possession and ritual dances that were too associated with what they perceived as less 'civilized' and less 'Muslim' tribes of the interior and the non-urban coast. Differences between 'orthodox' and local-customary understandings of religious and cultural rituals generated tensions between those who

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[156] Vigoni, *Abissinia*, 24-5. Other elaborate descriptions include Pascale, *Massaua*, 78-80 and Traversi, "Usi e costumi africani di Massaua," 367-9, 372-4.

[157] See Alpers' stimulating study of dance in nineteenth-century Muqdishu. Edward A. Alpers, "Dance and society in nineteenth century Mogadishu," In *Proceedings of the Second International Congress of Somali Studies, University of Hamburg, 1-6 August 1983*, Ed. by Thomas Labahn, Vol. II., 127-144.

stressed a more "Arab" or "Middle Eastern" behaviour, associated with the Arabian holy lands of Islam and the more numerous populace who flowed into the port and defended their right to practice their own local cultural traditions.

Hormuzd Rassam's observations from a wedding that he had attended is revealing of the dynamics of religion, culture and tradition in a rapidly changing town. Rassam accounted how while the bride was conducted to the house of her new husband, the father of the groom danced before the procession with a drawn sword in his hand. Rassam noted that when the undoubtedly high-status Arab or 'Arabized' groom's father had noticed that Rassam was observing the ceremony

> he apologized for having made himself ridiculous, alleging as an excuse the tyranny of a national custom which had been bequeathed (handed down) to the true believers by the dark ages. It was his pious belief, indeed, that this and all other vain ceremonies which prevailed among the faithful had been handed over to them by the heathen, and that consequently in the day of judgement the sins, which had thus been inherited by the followers of the Prophet would be laid to the charge of the unbelievers.[158]

But 'orthodox' and 'popular' approaches did not always reflect real or significant differences on the ground. Indeed, the fiercest tensions and struggles opposed groups who had been living together on the coast - sometimes for long periods of time - sharing many cultural and social features.

The most salient conflict over customary and ritual practice in the Massawa area opposed elements of the Hirgigo Balaw (Tigre speakers) with families of the Bayt Shaykh Maḥmūd (Saho speakers), whose main seat was at Zula but who lived in great numbers in Hirgigo, Massawa and their neighborhoods. The Bayt Shaykh Maḥmūd was an important local holy family descended from the illustrious Faqīh Muḥammad, who

[158] Rassam, *Narrative of the British Mission*, 16.

attained even greater prominence as the migration of Saho-speaking pastoralists into the conurbation intensified in the second half of the century. In the early years of the twentieth century observers such as Ilario Capomazza noted the preeminence of Bayt Shaykh Maḥmūd authority in religious rituals in the Massawa area. But such writers perceived the exercise of Bayt Shaykh Maḥmūd religious autority for granted; they were unaware of the internal conflicts and struggles between the group and their opponents who attempted to discredit and undermine their authority, by arguing that their ritualistic traditions were "improper" and "unappropriate" in Islamic tradition.

The main source of contention was the use of drums and hand clapping in various religious ceremonies. The Bayt Shaykh Maḥmūd were the custodians of a sacred drum, the *coborò*; they had the exclusive privilege to use the drum in all ceremonies such as birth, weddings, burials, and were compensated for the special services they provided on these occasions. But elements of the Balaw, through the principal Nā'ib family, had as well privileged usage of the *tasat*, another type of drum which was beaten with two sticks called *cidad*.[159] Evidence suggests that the factions – in conflict over local religious leadership for a long time, some sources say four centuries - struggled over the monopoly of religious offices and religious authority in a town rapidly transformed by commerce, migration and religion.[160]

In May 1909 the conflict between the Bayt Shaykh Maḥmūd and families of the Balaw Yussuf Hassab Allah – both of Hirgigo - seems to have re-erupted in a legal

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[159] Capomazza, *Usanze islamiche hanafite*, 34-37ff. Remarks on their role in funerary ceremonies: 69-74. Transcriptions are undoubtedly inaccurate. They follow Capomazza's Italianized transliteration.

[160] Already in 1322/1903 Khalīfa 'Uthmān b Abd al-Raḥmān, the *imām* and *khaṭīb* of the Hirgigo Friday mosque was replaced by Ḥasan Khalīfa Ṭāha in this office. The latter was a *khalīfa* of the Khatmiyya. Pressure by his followers was put to give him the *imāmship* so that a Khatmi reading during *mawlid* celebrations will take place. The replacement took place after the *qāḍī* of Massawa, Muḥammad Nūr 'Abd Allāh Sirāj Abū 'Ilāma, sent the three members of the *waqf* committee to investigate the issue. Ibrāhīm al-Mukhtār, *al-Jāmi' li-akhbār jazīrat Bāḍi'*, 115-6.

controversy over defamation (slander, libel) brought before the Italian judicial authorities in the colony. The case opposed Ḥasan Ḥāmid Ḥāmidūy of the Balaw, accompanied by Ḥasan Khalīfa Ṭāha and Umar Muḥammad Bādūri of the Bayt Shaykh Maḥmūd. Ḥāmidūy accused Baduri of practicing rituals in weddings, burial ceremonies and other religious occasions which were not in conformity with any legal school, especially not the Ḥanafī *madhhab*. The Ḥāmidūy claimed that hand clapping (*cufuf*) and drum beating (*dufuf* and *eidan*) were inappropriate practices, condemned in the Qur'an and ought therefore to be considered *haram*. The Bayt Shaykh Maḥmūd argued, on the other hand, that whatever is not specifically prohibited by the Quran or the four *madhāhib* (Ar. pl. Legal schools) was therefore legitimate and acceptable (Ar. *mustaḥab*).[161] The conflict re-erupted after several incidents opposing the two parties. On May 13 at a funeral administered by the Bayt Shaykh Maḥmūd, Ḥasan Ḥāmid Ḥāmidūy and his relative Yahya Amir had told the ceremony's participants that the beating of the drum was *ḥarām*. Then later, Ḥāmidūy and his uncle, a certain 'Abd al-Razzāq went to 'Uthmān Sā'igh and tried to persuade him not to ask the Bayt Shaykh Maḥmūd to administer their relative's funeral. Finally, in the month of *rajab*, when the Bayt Shaykh Maḥmūd celebrated the ceremony of the Prophet's birthday (Ar. *Mawlid al-Nabī*) in a private mosque, Ḥasan Ḥāmidūy and 'Abd al-Razzāq told the owner of the mosque to throw away the mats and cloth in the praying area since they were contaminated by the presence of the Bayt Shaykh Maḥmūd.[162]

[161] Colonia Eritrea. Giurisprudenza Coloniale. (N. 23). Sentenza 18 maggio 1909 del Commissario Regionale di Massaua – *Usanze rituali del Semhar*, (Asmara, 1909), 3-4.
[162] Ibid. 5-6.

The Italian legal authorities sought recourse to Islamic legal interpretations, notably three *fatwas* issued by Yemeni *muftīs*. The oldest *fatwa* was that issued by a Ḥanafī *muftī* in Zabid in 1822 (1245). *Muftī* Sulayman ruled as follows:

> The *cufuf*, the *dufuf* and the *eidan*, have always been practised in the four *madhhāhib*. Therefore they are not *ḥarām*. Since the scholars of the four schools Ḥanafī, Ḥanbali, Māliki and Shāfi'ī have not declared these practices *ḥarām*, they are to be considered *mustaḥab* (legitimate and acceptable). Such ceremonies have also been practiced in the time of the Prophet and he remained silent, which should be understood as his consent. Even Sulaymān, Ḥammār and Abder who were among the Prophet's companions, practised such ceremonies.

Muftī Sulaymān's *fatwa* concluded by reminding that the Qurayshis asked the Prophet to stop such practices as hand clapping and drum beating. But the Prophet replied with what became Sūra 6 verse 52 in the Qur'ān:

> Do not drive away those that call on their Lord morning and evening, seeking only to gain His favour. You are in no way accountable for them, nor are they in any way accountable for you. If you dismiss them, you shall yourself become an evil-doer.[163]

A second *fatwa* on which the Italian judges relied on in making their decision in the case was decreed in 1908 (1326) by the Shāfi'ī Shaykh 'Abd Allāh Yaḥya Mukaram of Hudaydah and by the Ḥanafī Shaykh Aḥmad Muḥammad Shahari from the same Yemeni port town. Issuing a collective *fatwa* they declared that "those who condemn as *ḥarām* the followers of the Sufi brotherhoods who adopt local rituals, are *jāhil*, or in other words ignorant people." The third and last *fatwa* was issued in 1908 by *qāḍī* Muḥammad Ṣālih Atih of the Shafi'ī *madhhab* in Luhayya. In his *fatwa* he said that the Prophet assisted and accepted a ceremony with hand clapping and drum beating by a slave. He said that "no one should condemn this custom."[164] On the basis of these three *fatwas* the

[163] Ibid. 7.
[164] Ibid. 7-8.

Italian commissario of the Massawa administrative region, Dante Odorizzi, therefore concluded as inadmissible the exclusion of the Bayt Shaykh Maḥmūd from the Muslim community. Ḥasan Ḥāmid Ḥāmidūy and Ḥasan Khalīfa Ṭāha were consequently convicted and sent to six months in Assab.[165]

The conflict over customary practice and religious ritual opposing the two Hirgigo-based families and their followers epitomizes clearly the struggle over power, authority and legitimacy in a setting experiencing profound political, economic and religious transformations. The conflictual cleavage between 'orthodox' and 'popular' versions of Muslim ritual practice reflects opposing visions in the process of negotiating a new moral order in the Muslim community of the conurbation.

Concluding Remarks

Massawa's position in proximity to the holy places of Islam in Arabia, its particular historical experience linking it to broader Muslim empires, and its pivotal mercantile role have always vested its society with a strong sense of Muslim identity and prestige. Massawa's paradigmatic Islamic character – as it is manifested in its mosques, saints' tombs, local communal rituals, and its religious notables - is part and parcel of the identity and ethos of its citizens. Massawans and other Muslim inhabitants of the region have perceived Massawa as a 'Muslim town', serving as a gateway to the wider Islamic world and solidly linking them to the community of Muslim believers (*umma*). But external influences were not total, one-sided and imposed. They were appropriated and negotiated locally in different contexts throughout the town's history, gradually leading to the development of a local-regional Islamic culture.

[165] Ibid. 9.

This chapter focused on the role of Islam in the history of Massawa, its close environment and the wider region in the second half of the nineteenth century. The period witnessed sweeping political, economic and religious change profoundly transforming the political economy of the region and its societies. The Islamic revival of the 'long nineteenth century' had a far-reaching impact on societies inhabiting the regions extending from the Red Sea to the Nile Valley. The proselytizing activities of the Khatmiyya Sufi brotherhood the 'Ad Shaykh holy family – among other active religious clans – resulted in the nearly total Islamization of all lowland Tigre-speaking societies between the coast and the Sudanese region. It thus created a territorial continuity of Muslim societies on the route between Massawa, Keren and Kassala and went hand in hand with the spectacular revival of commerce and commercial networks along this caravan route. In the last three decades of the century both the Khatmiyya and the 'Ad Shaykh had strong power bases in the Massawa area.

Migrations to Massawa from overseas and from the interior greatly affected religious dynamics in the town and its hinterlands, as well as the interplay between these spheres. Intensive urbanization and the relative stability under the [Muslim] Egyptian occupation (1865-1885) intensified the migration to Massawa of both Arab and Muslim merchants from the Arabian Peninsula and the Islamic world, and Tigre and Saho-speaking pastoralists from the interior. The simultaneous influx of these populations transformed the town's social landscape and generated several arenas of struggle and agitation over the reconfiguration of Muslim society, involving competition over the control of its religious institutions and the establishment of a new communal moral order.

This process was reflected in the vitality of Muslim communal and institutional dynamics in Massawa from the 1860s onwards.

Early Italian colonial attitudes to the Muslims in Eritrea also contributed to the thriving of Islam in Massawa. After the occupation of Massawa in 1885 Italian officials manipulated religion in their search for effective colonial domination and control. In the process they interfered with local and regional Muslim dynamics, preferring to develop a relationship with the anti-Mahdist Khatmiyya Sufi brotherhood, which they raised to the role of formally representing Eritrea's Muslims. Early Italian colonial officials perceived Muslim Massawans as the most evolved and civilized subjects in their colony. As a result they privileged urban Muslims and their institutions by giving subventions to mosques, paying monthly stipends to Muslim leaders and by granting Muslims a special juridical status permitting them to preserve the autonomy of the Islamic court in matters related to family and personal status.

Chapter 6
"BEING MASSAWAN": CITIZENSHIP, STATUS, AND FAMILY, 1850s-1880s

> Many of the natives of Massawa boast their Arab origins - but their dark skin discloses a mixed race. (Antoine d'Abbadie 1838) [1]
>
> The inhabitants of Massawa think of themselves as much more superior to those who inhabit the countryside due to the refinement of their customs. An inhabitant of Massawa is profoundly insulted if treated as a Beduin. Family pride is so great that, only in recent times, impoverishment could force a member of an old family to work for a salary. In the past, the entire town would have acted as his creditors. (Werner Munzinger 1858 [1864]) [2]
>
> The customs of the natives of Massawa are neither Abyssinian nor Arab. There is too much mixing of races and habits to enable making (drawing) a clear conception of their customs. (Pellegrino Matteucci 1880)[3]
>
> Due to its peaceful habits, its commercial relations with Arabia, India, and Egypt, as well as its frequent and continuous contact with Europeans, the population of Massawa and its environs is undoubtedly the most civilized and the one which has assimilated most to western civilization among all the colony's peoples. (Ilario Capomazza 1910)[4]

As a town with a mixed population originating from both land and sea, Massawa's constructions of identity and culture have always been complex. The above quotations mirror a complicated reality of cultural *métissage* and influences, but they also reflect the various self-designations, discourses and cultural politics of nineteenth-century Massawans. They express as well the representations of European observers who

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[1] d'Abbadie, *Douze ans de séjour dans la Haute Ethiopie*, 9.
[2] Munzinger, *Studi sull'Africa orientale*, 92 and Munzinger, "Les contrées limitrophes de l'Habesch," 28-29.
[3] Matteucci, *In Abissinia*, 38.
[4] Ilario Capomazza, *Usanze islamiche hanafite di Massaua e dintorni*, 9.

interpreted what they saw in Massawa within their own mindset, often marred by prejudice and a qualitatively hierarchical view of civilizations. But above all they unveil the predominance of Arab and Islamic constructions of socio-cultural influences in the middle decades of the nineteenth century and the preeminence of Massawa's upper classes over the control of cultural dynamics and discourses, and their success in promoting their ideals.

Several factors account for the enhancement of the particular "Arab" construction of cultural superiority that characterized Massawa's leading stratum in this period. Egyptian hegemony in the region from the middle decades of the century; the wave of merchant-entrepreneur migration from the Arab-Islamic world; the Islamic "revival" that witnessed the energetic activities of holy families and *ṭuruq* in propagating Islam, and Italian colonial attitudes towards Islam and what they perceived as a more advanced society in urban Massawa, all reinforced, Islam and what may be termed a process of Arabization in the second half of the nineteenth century. But there were also more local factors. The constant flow of non-urban dwellers into the conurbation from the inland in the second half of the century led those who viewed themselves as Massawa's culturally and morally superior citizens to sharpen the distinctions between themselves and the newcomers by erecting communal boundaries.

This chapter investigates several aspects of these dynamics primarily by exploring the social world of Massawa's urban elite. It is therefore mostly concerned with a group of potent families whose authority was based on their high social or religious status, their wealth and their privileged access to political power. From the middle decades of the century Massawa's elite was able to exercise significant power, set much of the agenda in

terms of urban social dynamics and impose its own conception of what it meant "to be Massawan". They did so in order to protect and maintain a sense of group cohesion necessary in their role as commercial intermediaries controlling a main gateway and mediating between several trans-regional commercial spheres. The chapter analyzes the social and economic sources and bases of power of Massawa's elite families and the various connections that allowed them to share a set of common goals and sense of urban identity.

The chapter explores the institution of the family - fundamental to the experience of the town's elite and the articulation of its social and cultural constructions of identity. Indeed, the most striking feature in Massawa's urban social structure is the existence and centrality of the patrilineages and households (*bayt*). This feature did not resemble the social structure of the Tigre, Saho and 'Afar-speaking populations that inhabit its environs and hinterlands and whose categories of kinship and descent were based on either various clusters of cognatic kin or the clanic structure common to pastoralists.[5] The records of Massawa's Islamic court open windows on important aspects of family and household structure, size and dynamics in this period. This includes marriage patterns and strategies that reveal the webs of connections that both tied elite families together and linked them to the African inland and the Red Sea world.

[5] On the originality of Massawa's social structure see Muḥammad 'Uthmān Abū Bakr, *Ta'rīkh Iritriya*, 293. The author also uses the term *usra* to designate family.

The Contours of a Local Urban Identity: Invoking Group Cohesion, Urban-Rural Distinction, and "Arabness"

The historical making and development of what Dante Odorizzi termed in the early twentieth century the "aristocratic class of Massawa" is a complex issue since it involves long-term processes of migration, social and cultural mixing and cultural representations that are impossible to unravel clearly. However, the *esprit de corps* and sense of group identity shared by its members - in past and present - reflect the unique position and role of this mercantile community. Studying the coastal towns of Benaadir in southern Somalia, Scott Reese argued that as a community of cross-cultural brokers Benaadiri merchants managed their identity by performing a delicate balancing act in which they could maintain social and cultural links with both local and overseas trade partners while at the same time remaining separate from each. The result of such cultural juggling was the creation of a local, coastal sense of identity which, while closely linked to the cultures of the African interior shared close socio-cultural affinities with Muslim merchants overseas.[6]

The specific make-up of Massawa's mercantile population was the result of a mixture of local coastal elites and overseas traders and entrepreneurs. Such a society was ideally able to function as a community of culture brokers, able to develop the social and cultural mechanisms tying them both to inland and overseas trading partners. Historically, it has developed - to various degrees and at different moments - certain shared traits and ideals of a local, yet worldly identity, namely a sophisticated and refined urban culture, a strong sense of Muslim identity, a link to the wider *umma* of Muslim believers, and a sense of connectedness to Arab history, Arabic literacy and culture.

Urban dwellers saw the town as standing for a set of worthy ideals, primarily civilty, urbanity, culture and religious piety. But it must be stressed that the cultural traits epitomizing this coastal, urban identity were the ideal values of the elite class in Massawa. In other words, in this context "being Massawan" – with the dimensions of identity and culture that this implied - meant being part of its elite stratum, sharing its values, its interests and goals, and "playing the same game," as anthropologist Fredrik Barth put it in a groundbreaking text on ethnic groups and boundaries.[7]

Urban superiority reflected the ideal values, self-perceptions and images of the elite town dwellers or those who aspired to become part of it. Political and economic change in the second half of the century rapidly transformed social realities in the town and its immediate environment. The increasingly heterogeneous nature of the town's population resulting from the migration of numerous Saho and Tigre-speaking inlanders mainly into the conurbation's mainland settlements, explain in part the importance of defining and maintaining social boundaries in an increasingly blurred and complex social context. The town's traditional elite saw itself vastly outnumbered by the flow of non-urbanites into the conurbation. Struggles for citizenship and leadership– both entering the town's higher classes and maintaining high status - entailed various cultural strategies of which some of these identitary and cultural discourses were part.[8]

Massawans convey in interviews a strong sense of group identity - even if partly anecdotal and to some extent reflecting more recent constructions of identity and culture. Self-designations of the citizens of Massawa – past and present – such as *Maṣawwi'īn*

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[6] Reese, 'Patricians of the Benaadir,' 11.
[7] Fredrik Barth, "Introduction," in Fredrik Barth (ed.) *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (Bergen, 1969), 15.

(Ar. "the Massawans"), *ahl Maṣawwa'* (Ar. "the Massawa family"), or expressions such as *nazionalità di Massawa* (Ita. "Massawa nationality"), constantly come up as self-designations.[9] Attempting to explain this sense of tight-knit yet cosmopolitan identity one informant who traces the arrival of the first member of his lineage to Massawa from Egypt in the mid-nineteenth century, said that "the townspeople identified with Massawa. They were *sha'ab Maṣawwa'* (Ar. "the people, nation of Massawa"). This was their identity. Everyone came from abroad. They were all foreigners and they lived their life and intermarried here."[10]

Another informant from a family of *sayyids*, whose ancestors came from Wādī Fāṭma on the outskirts of Mecca, characterized Massawa as a "big chain" whose families are all related to one another.[11] Comparing Massawa to Harar in Ethiopia he reflected that "Harar is like Massawa. Some people are light-skinned. In Harar they also have doors that they close at night. At midnight they close the door like a family."[12] Whereas the city of Harar is physically separated from the outside by a wall that surrounds it, Massawa, as an island was separated from the mainland by water, at least until the 1870s when it was linked to the mainland by two causeways.

Portraying Massawa's old town as a distinctly organized social space and utilizing this image as a socio-cultural marker to distinguish between town and "outside" the gate

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[8] For the Swahili coast see the judicious analysis of Glassman in Part II of his book (especially pp. 117-120 introducing the relevant section). Glassman, *Feasts and Riot.*

[9] I have also seen some of these terms and their variants in articles from the late 1940s (under the British Military Administration) in *Ṣawṭ al-Rābiṭa al-Islāmiyya al-Iritriyya* whose editors had been from Massawa's most prominent families: *Sayyid* Muḥammad 'Uthmān Ḥayūtī and Yāsīn Maḥmūd Bā Ṭūq (They were both from originally Hadhrami families who had settled in Massawa).

[10] Interview with 'Alī Yūsuf 'Alī al-Ghūl, Massawa, 26 February 2000.

[11] This sense of solidarity exists also on a practical level. For example *Sayyid* Ṣādiq b. Muḥsin al-Ṣāfī (b. 1921) who curently resides in Massawa, is the *wakīl* (Ar. legal representative) in matters of real-estate to members of the Bā Ḥamdūn, Bā Zaḥam, 'Adūlāy, Bā Ḥubayshī, Sardāl, and Nahārī families who have fled the country in the 1960s and 1970s as a result of Ethiopian oppression. Many of them reside in Jiddah, Saudi Arabia. *Sayyid* Ṣādiq collects the rent from their properties and administers them.

in this informant's account refers to the *bāb 'ashara* (Ar. also *bawābat al-'asharāt*). It was initially built some time during the Ottoman era by the customs authorities and rebuilt or renovated by the Egyptians in 1879, after two causeways linked Massawa to the mainland and access to it was greatly facilitated. The imposition of a fee of 10 *fiḍḍa* (hence its name) on any person entering Massawa and closing the gate every night undoubtedly aimed to control and limit the increasing flow of people entering the port-island, the *badawini di fuori* (Ita. "Beduins from outside"), as my informant put it.[13] The *bāb 'ashara* is still visible in illustrations dating from the first couple of years of colonial Massawa, but seem to have disappeared shortly thereafter. Another expression of the urban elite – most probably a twentieth-century term - used to distinguish between urban and non-urban is *säb bar* in the Tigre language, meaning 'people from outside,' 'country folk.' The self-designated *säb medinat* ('townspeople') perceived themselves as the extreme opposite of what they believd were the disorganized and backward *säb bar.*[14]

The insistence on traditions of foreign origins and a sense of cosmopolitanism have also taken a central position in the ways by which Massawans express their distinctiveness. Prestigious origins from the Arab Middle East and the Muslim world have been fundamental in cultivating and maintaining the sense of identity of those who perceived themselves as Massawans. "Here everybody is of Arab origins; we all came from outside; there are people here from Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Turkey [sic], etc," exemplifies the message that I heard on many occasions during interviews.[15] The insistence on this point in numerous discussions is revealing of the importance of foreign

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[12] Interview with *Sayyid* Ibrāhīm Muḥammad Ibrāhīm al-*Sayyid*, Massawa, 26 April 2000.
[13] Ibidem and Shawqī 'Atta' Allāh al-Jamal, *Siyāsat Mīsr fī al-baḥr al aḥmar fī al-niṣf al-thānī min al-qarn al tāsi' 'ashar* (Cairo, 1974), 78; Blanc, *A Narrative of Captivity in Abyssinia*, 59. Interviews with Muḥammad Qa'aṣ, Massawa, 10 April 2000 and 'Uthmān *Hājjī* Maḥmūd, Massawa, 28 April 2000.

origins in the construction of their identity. It appears that many families – but more so the *ashrāf* and *sayyids* – have jealously preserved family genealogies attesting to religiously prestigious origins. Elaborate family histories have always been central to the cultural dynamics of Massawa's 'big' families, to the affirmation and confirmation of prestige and high social standing.[16] Unfortunately the recent turbulent decades in the history of Eritrea has made it difficult to keep documentation; much was lost and destroyed during the long nationalist struggle, others were taken with family members into exile where they are securely kept.[17]

Another ingredient of the sense of group connectedness cultivated by Massawans revolved around the town's distinct historical trajectory. Urban dwellers take pride in the port's unique history of multiple occupiers, perceived by them as proof to the town's historical strategic importance and its connection to great world empires, especially Arab and Islamic polities, from the Umayyads, through the Ottomans, to khedivial Egypt. The association with these empires linked Massawa to the wider world of the *umma* and connected it with other predominantly Muslim Red Sea port towns. The flexibility necessary to adapt to new political conditions and the need to organize commercial activities and civic life in periods of loose occupation – much as the period of Ottoman indirect rule – contributed to a sense of shared destiny and a tight-knit, albeit flexible and

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[14] Conversation with Fu'ād Makkī, Asmara, 27 July 2001.
[15] Interview with Muḥammad 'Abdu Bakrī Ḥijjī, Massawa, 5 May 2000.
[16] Muḥammad 'Uthmān Ḥasan Ḥayūtī (1901-1995), perhaps Massawa's most prominent intellectual and activist in the twentieth century, was known to possess an exceptional knowledge of the town's family histories. See a biographical notice on his life and career in Puglisi, *Chi e? dell'Eritrea*, 209.
[17] Many talked about the importance of genealogies and family trees (Ḥayūtī, Makka'alī [Makkī], 'Abbāsī, Bā Ṭūq, Nahārī and others). Some have also kept family records pertaining to property and inheritance, especially the *ḥujjāj* (Ar. deed, sing. *ḥujja*) that were issued to their ancestors by the *sharī'a* court. Many of these documents are known to be in possession of family members in Jiddah where numerous Massawans have settled after leaving Eritrea in the 1960s and 1970s.

ever changing, urban community. Massawa was not a city-state but in some periods of its history some of its main features strongly resembled one.

Reminding to some extent the situation on the East African coasts, Massawans who today physically resemble each other and many of the lowland peoples of the Eritrean region, still insist on pointing to distant origins in Pakistan, Morocco, Iran or Iraq, to take several unusual examples (as opposed to the more common and frequent Yemeni, Hadhrami, Hijazi and Egyptian origins). It is however clear that many of those who insist on distant origins are the descendants of peoples who have been in the Ethio-Eritrean region for several centuries at least and who have no memory of migrations such as the more recent nineteenth-century migrants from the Arabian Peninsula and Egypt. As in other settings where family origins and history have been of much importance, in Massawa too some appear to construct 'convenient' stories mixing elements of authentic with idealized origins. In the case of some families claims and designations of origins are indeed confused and have undoubtedly been subject to some manipulation.

In various sources, the Ṣā'igh family is given a variety of origins from the "Yemen," to the "Arabian Coast," "Hirgigo" (often referring to Balaw origins), and "India." One elderly member of the family claimed that seven grandfathers back, a certain Bakrī Muḥammad Ṣā'igh came to Massawa from Baghdad. According to his account, once in Eritrea the family spread across the Eritrean lowlands as far as Keren and Aqurdat, and married into the various tribes. The Ṣā'ighs had been initially goldsmiths (Ar. sing. *ṣā'igh*) but then they became merchants and farmers. But it appears that there are two Ṣā'igh families in the region, one from Nakfa and the other from Massawa, to which my informant belonged. Although it is difficult to establish with any

solidity the precise origins of the family it is interesting to note how in the context of late twentieth-century Eritrean nationalism, a member of the Massawa Ṣā'ighs appears to have mixed his family story with that of the interior and seemingly more "Eritrean" Ṣā'ighs.[18] This anecdote is however quite exceptional (from goldsmiths and merchants to farmers); the opposite pattern is more frequent among Massawans who place local pride and prestige before anything else.

The Eritrean region's proximity to the Hijaz and the historical migration of Muslim holy men from the Arabian peninsula to the African shores of the Red Sea renders the claims of various inland societies to putative Arab/Islamic origins more complex than elsewhere. Some Saho and Tigre speaking groups such as the different 'Ad Shaykh branches and some of the Bet Asgede among others, have adopted the *nisbas*, or pedigrees, of *shaykhs* or holy families who had converted them to Islam in more recent times, mostly in the nineteenth century. Thus, the phenomenon of nineteenth-century converted inlanders claiming distant Arabian origins was not uncommon in general.[19] In Massawa, in a period of competition over the town's symbolic and material resources, such claims could be even more vital. Finally, it is interesting to note that on one or two occasions more fully educated informants have themselves expressed skepticism about the authenticity of their own claimed or designated family origins, published in the family lists provided in Odorizzi and Muḥammad 'Uthmān Abū Bakr's books.[20]

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[18] Extracted from family lists in Muḥammad 'Uthmān Abū Bakr, *Ta'rīkh Iritriya* and in Odorizzi, *Il commissariato regionale di Massaua*. Interview with 'Abd Allāh Yūsuf Ṣā'igh, Massawa, 5 and 6 May 2000.

[19] This is also true today. Ḥāmid Gūlāy's article is a typical example. Gulay, H., "We are 'Non-Arabic-Speaking' Arabs." Posted on http://www.awate.com and dated May 1, 2001.

[20] Interview with Muḥammad Ṣālih Aḥmad *Afandī*, Massawa, 13 March 2000. The family is said to be from Istanbul in Turkey. However, it seems more plausible that the title '*Afandī*', given to one of the ancestors by the 'Turks', became the family name. The family lists have been mentioned above (published in the works of Dante Odorizzi [1911] and Muḥammad 'Uthmān Abū Bakr [1994]).

Elaborate expressions of identity are more difficult to unveil when coming to examine nineteenth-century European written sources. They are few and they often reveal more about European concerns, prejudice, and constructions of race and culture during the heyday of imperialism than anything else.[21]

Notwithstanding, some of these accounts do offer valuable insights on the differences between town and countryside, on customary varieties and on the discourses of contemporary informants. Throughout the period observers noted the variety of clothes worn by Massawa's inhabitants, making clear distinctions between the wealthy notables and merchants and poorer laborers, porters, fishermen and the like. The wealthy often wore lavishly ornate and colorful long-sleeved robes (caftans) and sandals while members of lower status were often minimally covered by a *fūta* around the waste and a simple shirt.[22] Alluding to the 'Arab' character of women of high status Combes and Tamisier noted that they were "dressed like those [women] of Ghonfouda."[23] Pascale called women of high class the "invisible princesses" who were almost always withdrawn, at home in reclusion ("in some *harem*") and when they went out, were fully covered in colorful cloths in a way that only their eyes were exposed.[24]

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[21] The following quote from Combes and Tamisier's account from the late 1830s exemplifies this type of judgemental characterization: "The astuteness of the Arabs, the notorious bad will of the Chohos (Sahos), the ridiculous pretentions of the Abyssinian Muslims, the savagery of the Gallas (Oromo) and the pride of the Turks, all combined together, constitute the character of the man of Massawa." Combes and Tamisier, *Voyage en Abyssinie*, Vol I, 102. For similar characterizations see also Gatta, "Massaua e le regioni circostanti," 1885, 482.

[22] D'Abbadie, *Douze ans dans la Haute-Ethiopie*, Vol I, 9; Munzinger, *Studi sull'Africa orientale*, 94; Rassam, *Narrative of the British Mission*, 10; Blanc, *A Narrative of Captivity*, 67; Issel, *Viaggio nel Mar Rosso* [1885], 61; Salvadei, "Massaua," 1819. Describing Muftī 'Abd Allāh Sirāj Abū 'Ilāma's impressive appearance Ferdinando Martini noted that "except for the color of his skin, he looks like a Turk from an engraving." Martini, *Nell'Affrica italiana*, 19.

[23] Combes and Tamisier, *Voyage en Abyssinie*, Vol I, 103. Al-Qunfudhah is a port town located south of Jiddah and opposite Sawakin.

[24] Pascale, *Massaua*, 54-6; Leopoldo Traversi, "Usi e costumi africani in Massaua," *Archivio per lo studio delle tradizioni popolari*, Vol. V, Palermo 1889, 372.

The differences between Massawa's urban dwellers and the Beduins of the surrounding Semhar region have also drawn observers' attention. They are revealing and significant in terms of the construction of identities in the region. Werner Munzinger who lived in the region for long years between the 1850s and the 1870s provides ethnographic data, combined with his own judgements, on the cultural, customary and religious distinctions between townsmen and nomads. First, he noted a physical difference between the urban dwellers, who were lighter-skinned than the Beduins of the interior. In terms of dress and clothing he remarked that the Beduins did not wear the Turkish-style headgear, the *tarbūsh*, or the turban as the dwellers of Massawa and its environs used to. He also noted that Beduin dwellers of the conurbation tended to give their children Islamic names while the more recently converted Tigre-speaking groups were not yet accustomed to this practice.

In daily life, Munzinger observed, Beduin boys tended to follow their fathers to the markets of Massawa, learning rapidly to ride a camel, while in contrast, urban boys were initiated into business early and tended to learn how to read and write. He also remarked a difference in moral strictness between Beduins and townsmen, especially in what concerns young girls and women. In town, women were almost unseen, strictly covered from head to toe, they were deeply religious - "they pray a lot and are a bit fanatical." All in all, Munzinger's description reflects the different development of town vis-à-vis countryside; urban mercantile society was more "refined," pious and prosperous.[25]

During the three decades following Munzinger's observations a further process of external influences made a significant impact on society and culture in Massawa. The

Egyptian occupation of Massawa from 1865 to 1885 marked a strong process of Arabization mainly through the establishment or reform of institutions such as the *sharī'a* court or the local council (*majlis maḥalī*) in which Arabic was the formal language. The close administrative and commercial contact with Egypt, the Sudan and other Red Sea ports such as Sawakin, Jiddah and the Yemeni ports also contributed to the new wave of Arab-Islamic influences on the port. The more dynamic flow of peoples across the Red Sea, especially the migration of Hadhramis, Yemenis and Egyptians into the port, their rapid success in business, and their usually swift integration into the town's leading strata and urban leadership also enhanced these processes.

All in all, one or more Arabic schools operated in the port, several new mosques and *zawāya* were constructed, and more and more Arabs – including migrants from earlier parts of the century – were able to access the highest echelons of local society, most often following success in business. Material wealth enabled intellectual activities and some members of Massawa's prominent families were able to devote themselves to literary interests ranging from the writing of history and poetry, to the collection of books. In the twentieth century, members of the Ḥayūtī, Bā Ṭūq and Mīya families, among others, have produced literary and historical writings. A certain Muḥammad Sālim *Afandī*, head of the Massawa customs, was said to have owned a library rich in Arabic, Islamic and historical books during the Egyptian period in Massawa.[26]

When European observers remarked on the "Arab" character and manners of Massawans in the second half of the century, they most often witnessed a society in

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[25] Munzinger, *Studi sull'Africa orientale*, 114-128.

[26] Ibrāhīm al-Mukhtār, *Al-bidāya fī ta'rīkh Iritriya*, MS. completed in Asmara 1382/1962, 144. It would be interesting to know more about the provenance of the collection of Arabic manuscripts discovered in the Italian colonial archives and catalogued by Albrecht Hofheinz. A Massawa connection is more than

transformation, heavily influenced by the Red Sea world, to which it was more intensively attached.[27] The use of the term "Arab" in early colonial literature is often confused and incoherent, aptly reflecting a confused colonial disposition that navigated between prejudice and romanticizing assumptions, and the indeed [incoherent] socio-cultural realities on the ground. One revealing example is Leopoldo Traversi's article titled in translation "African customs and practices in Massawa," suggesting, in a way, that African culture was not inherent to his perception of Massawa; one would not expect to find articles titled "African customs in Kano, Kassala or Kampala."[28]

Gatta, to take another example, noted in 1885 that "the inhabitants of Massawa tend to follow Arab customs"; others indistinctly qualified Massawa's upper social echelons as "Arabs." But they were undoubtedly unaware that a new wave of processes of cultural influences were relatively recent and that many who they qualified as "Arabs" were in fact wealthy or prominent notables of local and regional origins – the coastal elite.[29] They were similarly unaware of the struggles and competition over citizenship in a burgeoning town in which social and economic gaps between people widened considerably. Freed slaves, poor nomads in search of labor and opportunities, on the one hand, and very wealthy merchants and entrepreneurs, on the other, were the extremes of a social spectrum sharing [and struggling over] an urban social space in a period of substantial transformation.

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probable. See his "A Yemeni library in Eritrea. Arabic Manuscripts in the Italian Foreign Ministry," *Islam – Zeitschrift fur geschichte und kultur des islamischen orients*, 71 (1) 98-136.

[27] See the "strongest" quotation of this type by Hormuzd Rassam in the "Introduction."

[28] Traversi, "Usi e costumi africani di Massaua," 365-382. The first two sentences of this article are also revealing of early constructions of race and identity: "The town of Massawa is inhabited by real Arabs, some from Jiddah. However, there are Somali families mixed with Arab blood and one encounters a variety of colors due to the presence of black Sudanese, and Abyssinians, and white Egyptians."

Verses and Houses: Urban Space and Islamic Identity

A feature that particularly catches the eye in Massawa's streets – even to visitors today – are the Arabic inscriptions, carved in wood or in stone, decorating numerous door lintels or the bottom parts of stone door-hoods of local houses and buildings.[30] One strolls through the streets and narrow alleys of the port town, moving from one house to another, from door to door, constantly exposed to the powerful visual symbolism of the sacred script. Calligraphy and inscriptions are used extensively in Islamic art, architecture and design throughout the Muslim world. In many cases, calligraphic designs transmit a powerful message that goes beyond the meaning of the inscription – the calligraphic design, or lettering, rather, is experienced as the message itself. Inscriptions in Arabic, the sacred language of the Qur'ān, have not always been used in religious contexts – they have also been utilized to transfer a sacred dimension into the secular sphere.[31] The placing of inscriptions on religious, public and private houses in Massawa makes, in a way, the entire town, a space of piety and faith –home of the *umma*. Every building thus radiates piety and religiosity, much as a profound sense of Islamic and Arabic culture linking the community to the wider *umma*.

In the early 1960s Gino Cerbella surveyed some of the inscriptions, copying, identifying, translating, and publishing them in various periodicals.[32] Cerbella found that

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[29] Gatta, "Da Massaua a Cheren," 486. See other quotes at the beginning of this chapter.

[30] A door lintel is a horizontal support made of wood (or stone) across the top of a door. Stone door-hoods are very common in Massawa. They are called *'aqd mawshah* in Arabic. On building techniques and designs see Greenlaw, *The Coral Buildings of Suakin*, 94-5.

[31] Timothy Insoll, *The Archaeology of Islam* (Oxford, 1999), 139-140. See also Sheila Blair, *Islamic Inscriptions* (Edinburgh, 1998).

[32] Gino Cerbella, *Aspetti etnografici della casa in Etiopia* (Roma, 1963).
The book reproduces, with some additional editing, the following articles: Gino Cerbella, "Il fascino e l'attrattivita di Massaua alla luce di un ricordo d'arte" in *Il Quotidiano eritreo*, 11 febbraio 1962; Gino Cerbella, "Il Waldebit dei notabili eritrei, e qualche cenno ancora sulle iscrizioni delle abitazioni musulmane in Eritrea," *Africa* (Roma), 18 (2) 1963, 78-88; Gino Cerbella, "La diffusione in Eritrea della casa musulmana tipica," *Africa* (Roma), 17 (6) 1962, 291-300.

most of the inscriptions were verses from the Qur'ān, some were verses written by Arab poets, yet others were shorter phrases of praise to the Prophet or Allāh, usually reproducing one, two or more of Allāh's ninety-nine attributes. A very small number were proverbs, or fragments or proverbs of secular origin. Of the two dozen inscriptions collected only three included the dates in which they were created. Two inscriptions date from the period of the Egyptian building boom: one from Rabī' I 1286 (c. June 1869) and the other from 1295 (1877-8). One inscription was created in Ramaḍān 1341 (1922), suggesting the intensive period of reconstruction following the destructive earthquake of the previous year. A very popular inscription reproduced on many door lintels to this day is "Oh you who enter this door seek the mercy of the Chosen Prophet!"

The following are inscriptions found in Massawa:[33]

a) In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful
We have given you a glorious victory, so that God may forgive you your past and future sins.
Rabī' I 1286 [ca. June 1869].
(Qur'an 48:1-2)

b) In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful
'Peace!' shall be the word spoken by a merciful God!
(Q. 36: 58)

c) In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful
This is a favour from my Lord.
Ramaḍān 1341 [1922]
(Q. 27:40)

d) In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful
Blessed be God, the noblest of Creators.
(Q. 23:14)

e) In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

[33] Cerbella, *Aspetti etnografici della casa in Etiopia*, 5-16. See photographs of inscriptions in other parts of the same book.

We have given you a glorious victory, so that God may forgive you
(Q. 48:1)

f) (*Was read on a mill in Shaykh al-Amīn street*)
Happiness Recreated Every Day,
Contrary to the Desire of the Envious!

g) (*On door of the Shāfi'ī Friday mosque*)
In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful
Praise be to God, Lord of the Universe!
(Q. 1: 1-2)

h) In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful
None should visit the mosques of God and the Last Day
1295 [1877-8]
(Q. 9: 18)

i) And as he stood praying in the Shrine, the Angels called out to Him.
(Q. 3:39)

j) In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful
'Peace!' shall be the word spoken by a merciful God.
(Q. 36: 58)

k) Nor can I succeed without God's help.
In Him I have put my trust and to Him I turn in repentance
(Q. 11: 90)

l) Blessed be Allah – in Whatever Allāh wills
Oh You Who enter this door seek the mercy of the Chosen Prophet.

m) And My Success Depends but on Allāh

n) (*Principal door of the house of Sharīfa Alawiya, daughter of Sayyid Hāshim Muḥammad 'Uthmān al-Mīrghanī [Khatmiyya]*)
Oh Allāh, oh Benefactor (of his creations), oh Rightful!

o) (*Back door of the house of Sharīfa Alawiya, daughter of Sayyid Hāshim Muḥammad 'Uthmān al-Mīrghanī [Khatmiyya]*)
Oh Vivacious, oh Protector!

p) Oh Helper, Help the Interests of the Muslims!

q) Oh, Opener, oh All-Knowing, oh Provider (of bread, of well-being), oh Generous!

r) Enter in Peace and Security!

s) Have Faith in Allāh and Confine Yourself to the Master's Secret Grace!

t) Patience is the Key to Success!

Elite and Notable Families: Status, Wealth, and Urban Authority

One of the outcomes of the political, economic and social transformation of the second half of the nineteenth century was the gradual emergence of a more pronounced and hierarchical order in Massawa's social landscape. The upper stratum of urban society consisted of a group of families, or patrilineages, who provided a sense of identity to their members and conferred social status upon them. This section discusses the social bases of elite status and explores the various attributes, or status markers, that determined social stratification and defined the class of elite and notable families. By identifying the social, economic and religious networks, connections and alliances of specific families it shows the ways by which these families were connected, as well as the inherent functional coherence of this socially porous but discursively tight-knit group of families.

If in the previous sections it has been argued that the ideal of "being Massawan" was largely based on attributes of urban refinement and "civilization," this section shows that it also meant having a family name and belonging to one of the town's potent patrilineages. That said, the concept of 'elite families' should be understood in a dynamic way since status and social relations were to some extent flexible and were not always determined by fixed attributes. Kenneth Brown wrote in a study of the urban communities of Salé in Morocco that social relations were "characterized by a pattern of shifting coalitions, of networks of patrons and clients," based on common interests that

were "sometimes strengthened (but not determined) by descent, marriage, or friendship." The elite, Brown remarked, "dominated cross-cutting social networks" more determined by the control of "clientele groups held together by mutual interests, not ties of consanguity."[34]

In a seminal article on the 'politics of the notables' in the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire, Albert Hourani attempted to define their distinctive role. Departing from Max Weber's term 'patriciate' - a class of urban notables *governing* a city - Hourani noted that in Islamic history the urban notables were more commonly a group *external* to formal authority, able to exercise some type of influence and impose limits on the government in place.[35] The notables, according to Hourani, were "those who can play a certain political role as intermediaries between government and people, and – within certain limits – as leaders of the urban population."[36] But as a group that was not dependent on government, the notables had to possess some social power of their own, giving them a position of accepted and natural leadership in the community. Hourani claimed that in different circumstances, different people with different types of social power played this role. In the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire there were three such groups: a) the *'ulamā'*, whose power was rooted in their religious position, b) the leaders of the local garrisons, and c) the "secular notables," who were individuals or families whose power derived from some military or political tradition, or the memory of

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[34] Kenneth L. Brown, *People of Salé: Tradition and Change in a Moroccan City, 1850-1950* (Cambridge, MA., 1976), 6, 56, 60, 224. Cited in Dale Eickelman, *The Middle East: An Anthropological Approach* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ., 1989) (1st Ed. 1981], 119-120.

[35] On Weber's "Patrician City" see Max Weber, *The City* (New York, 1958), 121-156.

[36] Albert Hourani, "Ottoman Reform and the Politics of the Notables," In W. R. Polk and R. L. Chambers (eds.), *Beginnings of Modernization in the Middle East* (Chicago, 1968), 48. On the 'politics of the notables'see also Ehud Toledano, "The Emergence of Ottoman-Local Elites (1700-1900): A Framework for Research," In Moshe Ma'oz and Ilan Pappe, (eds.), *Middle Eastern Politics and Ideas: A History from Within* (London, 1997), 145-162.

some prestigious ancestor or predecessor, or their control of land and supervision of *waqf*s. The secular notables had independent bases of power and were connected to other notable families, *'ulamā'*, *shaykh*s, and also potent chieftains outside the city.[37]

Differences persist among historians as to who should be labeled a notable, the precise role they played and whether or not they formed a cohesive group. Historians of different regions and periods of the Middle East have come up with different definitions and restrictive uses of the term.[38] Some, like Margaret Meriwether, have used the term *notable* in a more general sense than in the historiography of Ottoman notable politics, referring to those in Ottoman urban society "whose role and importance in the city were determined by high social status and wealth, rather than their political role. The elite occupied the top layer of the social hierarchy. While there was considerable overlap between the political elite and the social elite, they were not identical."[39] In general, the foundations of high status were quite similar throughout the Ottoman Middle East in this period but the relative weight given to specific social markers could differ in time and space and were after all localized. This meant that the composition of the higher urban echelons and its degree of integration varied widely.

In Massawa the situation is also complex, first and foremost since the port was ruled by different governments in the nineteenth century. But furthermore, even within the framework of each power, the structure of relationships between government and notables varied significantly. As a relatively marginal, distant, and isolated outpost in an

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[37] Hourani, "Ottoman Reform," 48-9.

[38] In the context of Ottoman North Africa, Julia Clancy-Smith differentiates between 'elites' who "drew some, although not all, of their political authority from relationships with the state" and 'religious notables' who "tapped deep into other sources – sharifian descent, special piety, erudition, charity ... They thus wielded sociospiritual and moral authority...." Julia Clancy-Smith, *Rebel and Saint: Muslim Notables, Populist Protest, Colonial Encounters (Algeria and Tunisia, 1800-1914)* (Berkeley, 1994), 269-270 (note 4).

unstable period of dwindling Ottoman and forceful, but erratic, Khedivial authority, Massawa's experience with government between the beginning of the century and 1885 navigated between a firm grip of government over it, to more loose periods granting greater autonomy and effective control to the local political, religious and commercial elite.

The imposition of Italian colonialism in 1885 also witnessed the shaping of a relationship between the port's elite and the colonial administration, largely in response to Italian policies and practice. The special position and role of the town's mercantile community, and its unique historical trajectory since the Ottoman occupation in the 16th century, left considerable autonomy to local rulers. Together with the port's leading merchants the locally and regionally potent Balaw lineages were able to develop a privileged position vis-à-vis the government and were recognized as leaders of the urban community. This heterogeneous but in many respects tight-knit and cohesive group, yielding its social power and authority from various sources, constituted Massawa's urban elite.

In Massawa I have identified four categories of elite status groups, or notables, whose bases of power differed from one another but who, in practice, were in many ways connected. Social boundaries were never entirely fixed and where to draw the boundaries between the "elite" and others is never entirely conclusive. Social markers and attributes could intersect - certain individuals could indeed be prominent on several social arenas. Marriage ties and other types of alliances among different groups of the elite could blur the lines between them. First were those potent families deriving their social power from

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[39] Margaret Meriwether, *The Kin Who Count: Family and Society in Ottoman Aleppo, 1760-1840* (Austin, 1999), 34.

their position, role and influence in the close and more distant interior. A second category consisted of those who were associated in some way – mainly as office-holders or militia leaders - with the Ottoman and Egyptian authorities. A third group were those whose power was founded on religious prestige and office The last, but perhaps most porous group category included rich merchants and - in the context of the second half of the nineteenth century - the *nouveaux riches.*

In a way, material wealth could cut across these status groups. It was central in determining social stratification and there are several examples of impoverished traditional notables, on the one hand, and newly enriched individuals of relatively low social background who were able to join the elite strata thanks to their success in business, on the other. This factor explains why the extent to which these traditional status groups represented meaningful social groups was after all limited.

Notables with Strong Mainland Power Bases

A first category of the urban elite comprised some of the oldest families in the port, many of whom had solid bases of power in Hirgigo and among the neighboring Saho, Afar, and Tigre-speaking pastoralist and nomad groups of the inland. This category may be qualified as the traditional coastal elite – it included families from the various Balaw branches, of whom *nā'ib*s were descended in the past. Those associated with or linked to the *Nā'ib* family and other powerful Balaw families from the Balaw Amir and the Balaw Yūsuf Ḥassab Allāh branches were also among this group. One of the most characteristic examples of notable families originally belonging to the Balaw Yūsuf Ḥassab Allāh was the Shinītī family, briefly discussed in a previous chapter. But there

were others, such as the Ḥāmdūy family. 'Uthmān b. Sa'īd Ḥāmdūy and his brother, Shaykh Aḥmad b. Sa'īd Ḥāmdūy, both sons of Shaykh Sa'īd b. Muḥammad Ḥāmdūy (d. 1870s) attained high status in Massawan society as merchants and owners of urban real estate in the 1870s and 1880s. Primarily based in Hirgigo, the Ḥāmdūy family exemplifies a family with high status and strong bases both in town and in the surrounding countryside. Aḥmad Sa'īd qualified as a 'notable' (*min a'yān Maṣawwa'*) in the Islamic court records, while his brother 'Uthmān Sa'īd was a *khalīfa* of the Khatmiyya *ṭarīqa*.[40] Yet other Balaw families of importance were the Danbar, Ḥilū, and Minnī families.

Another large cluster within the category of the old coastal elite derived from the Saho-speaking clans who originated in the Zula area and moved up north to settle in Hirgigo and Massawa during the Ottoman period. The two most important branches, descendant from Faqīh Muḥammad al-Zubayr, were the Bayt Shaykh Maḥmūd and the branch of 'Ad Ṣāliḥ al Zubayr. Both branches yielded religious prestige from their descendance and were considered holy clans.[41] Families such as Faras, Badūrī, Sirāj, Sa'dūy, Ḥabīb, Khaydara belonged to this category and were powerful in their bases in Hirgigo and Massawa. Shaykh 'Umar b. Maḥmūd b. Shaykh 'Umar Badūrī (from Hirgigo), for example, served as *qāḍī* of Massawa some time in the 1840s or 1850s.[42]

Other leading families descended from Assaorta and other Saho-speaking clans were Zakarī, Jabīra and 'Adūlāy. Another large family of particularly high status in Massawa's social landscape (as eminent as the Shinītīs and Mantays) was the al-Nātī

[40] MICR 2/46a , 8/61c, 8/62c [1883]; 8/94d [1884]; 12/64b [1889].
[41] Muḥammad 'Uthmān Abū Bakr, *Ta'rīkh Iritriya*, 99.

family, originally from the 'Ad Tsaura. Members of this family figure prominently in the court proceedings in this period. They bought and sold parcels of land and shops (including to Banyan merchants), they gave and received power of attorney (*tawkīl*) from other elite families, and they liberated domestic slaves and inherited property in real estate.[43]

A last example representing a high-status family of 'Afar origins, was the Dankalī family. They too were involved in a variety of real estate transactions throughout the 1860s to the late 1880s, purchasing land and shops and dividing estates by selling parts of properties. They leased several parcels of land to a foreign merchant named Stefan, they went to court to obtain title deeds for their properties and endowments (Ar. sing. *waqf* pl. *awqāf*), and were tied in marriage bonds with several families, among which 'Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad b. Sa'īd Shinītī mentioned above.[44] However, much as the al-Nātīs and several other families in this category, it seems that in the 1880s and 1890s some loss in wealth occurred. A new class of entrepreneurs – many of whom were Hadhramis, Yemenis and Egyptians (often better connected in the Red Sea and the port's forelands) – were able to purchase much real estate property in the port. In many cases, as the court registers attest, the new class of entrepreneurs bought property precisely from these families, who usually divided estates following the death of a household head.

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[42] MICR 9/27b (18 Sha'bān 1296). In this land sale act, a *ḥujja* delivered by *qāḍī* 'Umar Bādūrī in 1264/1847 was shown to the court as proof of ownership. See also Ibrāhīm al-Mukhtār, *al-Jāmi' li-akhbār jazīrat Bāḍi'*, 77.

[43] MICR 14/2g, 14/2i [1866]; 16/59c [1870] 16/72b [1871]; 9/35a, 9/47a, 9/48a, 9/49a [1880]; 8/31c, 8/42b, 8/45b, 8/49b [1883]; 8/89a, 8/97a, 8/102a [1884]; 12/4a, 12/6a [1886]; 12/42a [1888]; 12/65a, 12/66a [1889].

[44] MICR 14/2e, 14/2f, [1866]; 16/5a [1867]; 14/7h, 16/24a, 16/24b [1868]; 16/62a [1870]; 8/21a, 8/33a [1882], 8/59a [1883]; 8/65a [1884]; 8/114a, 10/25b, 10/26a, 10/27b [1885]; 10/37a [1886].

At Government Service

A second class of families belonging to Massawa's upper echelons derived its status from its formal association or service to the authorities in Massawa. Association with Ottoman and Egyptian rule could elevate the social status of a family. One part of this group undoubtedly comes closest to Hourani's basic definition of the notables as a group playing some political role in the capacity of mediators between government and people. The *nā'ib*s and their families were the foremost in this group, basing their legitimacy and real power on the role they played in regional politics since the Ottomans appointed them as the *de facto* rulers of Massawa and the coast.

Families, specifically from Hirgigo, who derived some type of status as a result of their association with the Ottomans were all those who adopted family names in relation to their functions and services for the 'Turks'. We have noted previously families such as the Kāhya (Kekiya), Sardāl, 'Askar, Kurdī, Basnak, Shāwish and others whose family names are intimately linked to the experience of the Ottoman period in Massawa.[45] But in the second half of the century the status of these families was most notably limited to Hirgigo. Few, if any (perhaps to some extent members of the Kāhya and Kurdī[46] families), had made it into big commerce and were consequently wealthy and influential enough to break through into Massawa's leading elite.[47]

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[45] Odorizzi, *Il commissariato regionale di Massaua*, 135.

[46] Much the same as several other families the Kurdīs prospered during the Italian era. In 1901 Idrīs 'Uthmān Kurdī and his son Ḥasan Idrīs Kurdī (1884-1950), opened a commercial house in Massawa dealing principally with marine products, coffee and textiles. Ḥasan Idrīs was a prominent merchant but was also active in various political and religious matters. Puglisi, *Chi e? dell'Eritrea*, 162. One member of the family published in France [and in French] a study of Eritrean history. Nafi' Hassan Kurdi, *L'Erythrée, une identité retrouvée* (Paris, 1994).

[47] ASDMAE, *ASMAI*, 34 / 1 fasc. 2, Letter from the leading members of Hirgigo to the Superior Commander of the Italian forces in the Red Sea, 10 June 1887. See the list, including Kāhya, Kurdī, Bascinak, Sciauisc (Shāwish) and others.

The political hegemony of the *nā'ib*s was curtailed as Khedivial Egypt took a more direct and active policy of expansion in the region and effective control in the mid-nineteenth century. But *nā'ib* power and authority did not disappear altogether. It continued to yield power first and foremost through the domination of a widespread web of networks in commerce connecting Massawa with the Nile Valley in a period of intense commercial vitality. To some extent it also maintained the bases of its regional authority and power since the Egyptians under khedive Ismā'īl - who attempted to develop the port and link it with their other possessions in the Nile Valley – were eager to develop a certain working relationship with the *nā'ib*s, a relationship of accommodation that was to benefit both parties.

This is best exemplified by the career of *nā'ib* Idrīs Ḥasan (c.1825-1905) who began his tenure as *nā'ib* of Hitumlo and Omkullo in the early 1850s, when revolting and taking up arms against the Ottoman government over the question of tribute collection in the Habab region. But the revolts were followed by accommodation and cooperation and by the mid-1860s when Ismā'īl's Egypt took formal control of the region, *nā'ib* Idrīs began working closely with the Massawa administration who was astute enough to play on the division within the *nā'ib* family. He was especially instrumental in securing the control of Zula and Obok on the Afar and Somali coasts. In the early 1870s he was decorated by the Egyptian army, was awarded the honorary military title of Major (*sagh qol aghāsi*), and was appointed *nāẓir* of Semhar.[48] The cooperation with government continued into the early Italian colonial era. Indeed, *nā'ib* Idrīs was appointed to several

[48] *Nāẓir al-khuṭṭ* is a notable in charge of a subdivision of an administrative district. Hill, *A biographical dictionary of the Sudan*, xiii.

positions by the Italians while he and members of his family fought [and died] alongside the Italian forces in Amba Alagi, Saganeiti and Adwa in the campaigns of 1895-6.[49]

Other individuals also worked closely with the Egyptian administration in Massawa and acquired both considerable material and non-material capital as a result of the dynamics and workings of Egyptian rule. 'Abd Allāh *Bey* al-Ghūl (and later his son Aḥmad *Afandī* al-Ghūl) – Egyptians themselves who made Massawa their home - were without a doubt central pillars of the community in terms of wealth, connections to government, and their role in urban communal affairs and institutions from the 1860s well into the Italian era. They invested much in real-estate throughout the period.[50] Entrepreneurs such as the al-Ghūls in Massawa – and Muṣṭafa Shināwī *Bey* in Sawakin – spearheaded the commercial/economic goals of Egyptian imperialism.

Another prominent example is that of 'Alī *Afandī* b. Shaykh Yaḥya b. 'Alī *Afandī* (commonly known as 'Alī Yaḥya *Afandī*), born some time around the early 1850s. It is difficult to determine the origins of the family since his grandfather, Ali, had already taken the title *Afandī* as the family name probably in the early nineteenth century. Even though various sources note the family's origins as 'Constantinople', members of the family nowadays are highly skeptical of this claim. But they are unable to provide any further clue beyond saying that the family is "Tigre," hence originating in the mainland Tigre-speaking groups. 'Alī Yaḥya was one of the best-networked merchants in Massawa in the 1870s and 1880s, having solid influence and connections in the commercial,

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[49] ASDMAE, *AE*, b. 178, "Notabili e capi indigeni dipendenti dal Commissariato Regionale di Massaua" (1902-3), entry: "*nā'ib* Idris Hassan (Moncullo)," p. 11. Puglisi, *Chi e?*, 168-9.

[50] Real estate transactions of 'Abd Allāh and Aḥmad *Bey* al-Ghūl. Land: MICR 16/83b (1290), 16/85a (1290), 16/101b (1291), 9/27b (1296), 9/41a (1297), 9/42a (1297), 9/43a (1297), 9/44a (1297), 8/36a (1299), 8/100a (1301), 10/35b (1303), 12/53b (1305), 12/59a (1306). Shops: 16/76a (1289), 16/85a (1290), 9/15a (1295), 9/26a (1296), 9/27a (1296), 9/40a (1297), 8/5b (1298), 8/10d (1298), 8/75b (1301), 12/4b (1303), 12/5a (1303), 12/6a (1303). Residential houses: 9/45a (1297), 8/10d (1298), 12/44b (1306).

religious and political spheres. He served as *sartujjār* (head of the merchants) at least from the late 1870s, under the Egyptians and owing to this position, was the most closely associated person (perhaps together with the al-Ghūls) with the Egyptian authorities. 'Alī *Afandī* was able to accumulate considerable wealth and invest in real estate.

According to transactions recorded in the Islamic court, between 1873 and 1889 he purchased at least five shops in the town's bazaar, the *sūq al-Sulṭān*, several parcels of urban land and part of a residential house.[51] However, it seems that in a court case in 1886 opposing *Sayyid* Muḥammad Bakri al-Mīrghanī and Maḥbūb al Ṣāfī, 'Alī Yaḥya, as *Sayyid* Muḥammad's agent and representative, was obliged to pay Ṣāfī a notable amount of money, almost ruining him financially.[52] On the religious scene he was also a man of influence. In the late 1880s he acted as go-between between the Italian authorities and *Sayyid* Muḥammad 'Uthmān Tājj al-Sirr (1849/50-1903) in the latter's attempts to offer his services to the Italians and settle in Massawa.[53] In the first years of the twentieth century he was noted as a *khalīfa* of the Khatmiyya in Massawa.[54] The family, according to his descendants, was always very pious. He was married to 'Aisha Ḥammoda, who was also from a foremost family of notables. The *Afandīs*, as the family came to be known, were further linked in marriage with leading families (among whom were *sayyids* and *ashrāf*) such as Shīnītī, Ṣāfī, 'Abbāsī, Mīya and others.[55]

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[51] MICR 14/6e [1867]; 16/38b [1868]; 16/88b [1873]; 16/113a [1876]; 9/3b, 9/3d, 9/4a [1877]; 9/30a [1879]; 9/46a [1880]; 8/3a [1881]; 8/32b [1882]; 8/50b [1883]; 10/10a [1885]; 12/70a, 12/71a [1889]. See an illustration of Alī Yaḥya's main residential home (built in the Egyptian style) in Martini, *Nell'Affrica italiana*, 18.

[52] ASDMAE, *AE*, b. 21 'Incartamento reelativo ai ricorsi Naharo e Aly *Afandi* Iahia, Annesso XI,' 1886. Also ASDMAE, *AE*, b. 178, 'Notabili e Capi indigeni dipendenti dal Commissariato Regionale di Massaua (1902-3)', Entry: 'Ali *Afandi* Iehia', p. 6.

[53] ASDMAE, *ASMAI*, Pos. 3 / 4, fasc. 23., No. 2031/95 del protocolo. Baldissera to War Minister, Massaua, 13 June 1889.

[54] His son Aḥmad 'Alī [1892-1962] was also a Khatmi *khalīfa*.

[55] Interview with Muḥammad Ṣālih Aḥmad *Afandī*, Massawa, 13 March 2000.

Making use of his widespread connections and influence in commerce and politics 'Alī Yaḥya continued to provide services to the colonial authorities after the Italian takeover in 1885. In 1889 he successfully conducted negotiations leading to the submission of Diglal al-Ḥusayn and Maḥmūd Sharīf of the Bani 'Amer. He was also instrumental in establishing and maintaining solid and secure commercial relations with the Sudanese region, and helped supplying Keren with durra during the period of famine. In 1890 he was charged with establishing commercial links with the Dervish of Ṭahar (name is unclear, perhaps 'Tokar') and was appointed assistant judge in court in addition to his functions as municipal councilor. An Italian colonial report qualified 'Alī Yaḥya as "serious" and "extremely competent" in always providing the authorities with valuable information about commerce, caravan traffic, the use of the saltworks, and about the notable class of Massawa since.[56] In 1903 'Alī Yaḥya and the *nā'ib* of Omkullo were instrumental in convincing *Sayyid* Ja'far al Mīrghanī, a Khatmi leader, to move his seat from Kassala to Keren inside the colony.[57]

Sayyids and *Shaykhs*: The Muslim Religious Elite

The third category of notables derived its status from religious prestige and as the *'ulamā'* (learned men) serving in several religious offices most notably those of *qāḍī* and *muftī*. Others were *khalīfas*, *muqqadams*, and *shaykhs* of Sufi orders active in the conurbation. While the first category consisted of lineages whose origins were traced to the coastal-mainland elite and was ethno-linguistically bounded to originally Afar, Tigre

[56] ASDMAE, *AE*, b. 43, From the Commissario di Massaua G. Salvadei to the Governor's office in Asmara. Oggetto: 'Ali *Afandi* Yehia', 9 March 1903.
[57] ASDMAE, *AE*, b. 43, From the Commissario di Massaua G. Salvadei to the Governor's office in Asmara. Oggetto: 'Sidi Giafer Morgani', 8 January 1903.

and Saho-speaking clans, the religious elite crossed ethnic boundaries and drew its members both from abroad and from the African inland.

The first cluster included the *sayyids* and *ashrāf* who claimed to be of the Prophet Muhammad's blood. Theoretically, they were a caste, a closed group, into which one was born. But as in other places in the Muslim world, those who claimed sacred descent already possessed other foundations for their high social position deriving from one or more of the following: wealth, religious/legal erudition, office-holding, *ṭarīqa* leadership, or political power. In Islamic history some individuals claimed *ashrāf* status only after their success, enabling them to consolidate their position in society. In the records of the Islamic court individuals who were members of the *sādah* had their name preceded by the title *Sayyid.* The most prominent were Ṣāfī, Hāshim, Bā 'Alawī, Ja'far, Abū Sha'rayn, Masāwa, al-'Aṭṭās, Nahārī – all of whom were originally either from Hadhramawt or other parts of the Arabian Peninsula. But there were also *ashrāf* families such as 'Alī Salam from Hirgigo, Shalabī, Turkī, Maghribī, Bāqir, Adam Barkūy, Barakāt, Shakhray (Shagaray), Ramaḍān, and others whose origins were either from the region or from abroad. Others who are not mentioned in the court registers used in this work are the Ḥayūtī family (descended from the al-Ḥibshī), whose members are proud to possess a minutely detailed family tree tracing direct descent from the Prophet. [58]

Some *qāḍī*s were themselves *Sayyids* (Masāwa, Bā 'Alawī, and Nahārī) while others were *ashrāf* from Medina ('Abbāsī) and still others came from Saho-speaking holy clans in the interior (Bādūrī, Nāṣir). Members of the 'Abbāsī family served in religious offices – as *qāḍī*s and *waqf* administrators for over three centuries. But even if the

cultivation of religious prestige by the well-to-do was common practice, prestige derived from religious status did not automatically lead to prosperity and translate into material wealth. One elderly informant originally from Hitumlo, *Sayyid* Ibrāhīm Muḥammad Ibrāhīm al-*Sayyid*, recounted that his family was quite poor. His grandfather was a laborer working with coal on steamships and his father had a "kiosque and a shop here and there [on the Massawa mainland]." But *Sayyid* status was still pivotal for maintaining social status; indeed the family was linked in marriage with other *Sayyid* families of greater prominence, such as Ṣāfī and Masāwa.[59] The combination of high religious status and poverty was not uncommon. In 1901, following the passing of Shaykh 'Abd Allāh Sirāj Abū 'Ilāma, previously *muftī* and *qāḍī*, the community in Massawa presented the *Commissario Regionale* with a petition. In it they requested the appointment as *qāḍī* of the late shaykh's son, Muḥammad Nūr, so that the family would be able to continue to support itself and avoid falling into destitution.[60]

Religious lineages based in Hirgigo were the 'Ad *Sayyid* 'Uthmān, 'Ad *Sayyid* 'Umar Barka, 'Ad *Sayyid* Da'ūd, 'Ad *Sayyid* Madanī, 'Ad Shāwish, 'Ad *Sayyid* Darwīsh, 'Ad *Sayyid* Burij, and 'Ad Sayyid Hāshim.[61] Still, other individual families from Tigre and Saho speaking holy clans in Semhar and Sahel such as the Bayt Shaykh Maḥmūd (Badūrī), the Bayt Khalīfa, Bayt Qāḍī, Bayt Tawwakal, the 'Ad Mua'lim, 'Ad Shaykh Darqī, and the 'Ad Shaykh could wield social power from their religious prestige. Many appear in the court registers with the title *ḥājj* – individuals that have made the

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[58] *Sayyid* Ḥasan Aḥmad Ḥayūtī *Sayyid* (b. Massawa c. 1850), son of a merchant, was employed by the Egyptian authorities as an envoy to Ras Alula in Asmara in 1884 to coordinate the liberation of Egyptians held in Kassala by the Mahdists in accordance with the Hewett accords. Puglisi, *Chi e?*, 163.
[59] Interview with *Sayyid* Ibrāhīm Muhammad Ibrāhīm al-*Sayyid*, Massawa, 26 April 2000. It is interesting to note that the family has no family name, little common in the landscape of Massawa's elite stratum.
[60] ASDMAE, *AE*, pacco 349 fasc. 37, 'Petition from 62 members of the Muslim community to the Commissario Regionale di Massaua' (12 Ramaḍān 1318 / 3 January 1901).

pilgrimage to Mecca, but even if many of them indeed belonged to the ranks of Massawa's social elite, their status was not directly derived from this attribute.[62] The presence of the Sufi orders (*ṭuruq*) will be discussed below – it is sufficient to mention that some of Massawa's notables' power was founded on their role in the *ṭuruq*. *Sayyid* Hāshim al-Mīrghanī (d. 1901), the Khatmi leader in Hitumlo, was, even if somewhat socially distanced from the urban elite, one example. In the court registers Shaykh Aḥmad Shalāl ('Saho' – Bayt Shaykh Mahmud) was noted as "the *khalīfa* of the Khatmi order" in 1881 in Hitumlo, where a straw hut mosque was erected and named after him.[63] A member of the Shalāl family, Ibrāhīm, was appointed *khalīfa* by Hāshim al-Mīrghanī in the late years of the ninteenth century.[64]

The Ḥābūna family of Assaorta origins also wielded prestige in the religious sphere. Ismā'īl Idrīs Ḥābūna was mentioned as the *wakīl* of the *nāẓir* (Ar. comptroller) of the Dhahab mosque in 1873, and in 1886 Muḥammad Sa'īd Idrīs Ḥābūna was noted as "the *khalīfa* of the Shādhiliyya order in Massawa". Ismā'īl Idrīs Ḥābūna's daughter married *sayyid* Muhammad Ya'qūb Ja'far, a noted *sayyid* of Hadhrami origins in 1872.[65] Marrying into *sayyid* families required either *sayyid* status or another form of appropriate religious prestige. It is precisely this point of contact – via a religious attribute – that a family with strong mainland influence (Ḥābūna) and another family, undoubtedly with

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[61] Muḥammad 'Uthmān Abū Bakr, *Ta'rīkh Iritriya*, 307.
[62] Individuals from the following families were designated as *Ḥājj* from the 1860s to the 1880s: Ṭalūl, 'Adūlāy, Madanī, Sarūr, Ḥabīb, Dankalī, Da'ūd, Ḥammūda, Minnī, Karrār, Mantay, Ḥalīl, Mansur, Yāqūt, Ḥamdān.
[63] MICR 8/8b, 8/66b [1881]. Odorizzi, *Il commissariato regionale di Massaua*, 169. Capomazza, *Usanze islamiche hanafite*, 35. The term in Arabic used in the records was *khalīfat al-sādah al-mīrghaniyya*.
[64] ASDMAE, *AE*, 43, Nr. 3277 di protocolo. From Dante Odorizzi ('Commissario Regionale' of Massawa) to the governor (Affari Civili) in Asmara. Massawa, 24 August 1910.
[65] MICR 14/9b [1872]; 16/90a [1873]; 10/37b [1886].

some connections in the Yemeni region (Ja'far), were linked, thus creating what may be called the archetype model of the Massawan merchant family.

Commerce and religion were intimately intertwined in a setting such as Massawa. Religious prestige often represented the cultural capital required to maintain, expand and glue business connections and networks. It was often done through the accumulation and cultivation of religious status, by marriage into other pious families, services in mosques, charity, or by being a respectable member in one of the *ṭuruq* (Sufi orders). As Beshara Doumani wrote about merchants in nineteenth-century Nablus in Palestine, "combining a religious career with a business career was the norm rather than the exception and had an aura of a time-honored tradition."[66] In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, practically all the well-off merchants in Massawa were, in one way or another, intimately involved in the town's religious vitality.

The Very Wealthy and the *Nouveaux Riches*

In Massawa's mercantile environment success in accumulating wealth was pivotal in determining social standing. During the period of the commercial boom there were great contrasts of wealth in Massawa, witnessing the emergence of a new class of entrepreneurs – mostly from Hadhramawt, the Arabian Peninsula, and Egypt – who became by far more prosperous than any family of local origins. The boom heralded the growth of the port-town in population and size, prompting a period of vast urban construction, the competition over urban land and hence opportunities for investors in real-estate. In the mid-1880s the "Arabs" (including "Arabized" patrician Massawans) of

[66] Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine*, 66.

Massawa were said to be dominating the trade in hides, ivory and mother-of-pearl. They owned the most beautiful coral stone houses, and controlled almost all porterage and transportation services to and from the port.[67]

As discussed earlier, several waves of migration from the Arabian Peninsula took place throughout the nineteenth century. Hadhrami traders and entrepreneurs settled in Massawa – sometimes without their families – and benefited from the new commercial atmosphere in the Red Sea area in the middle decades of the century, capitalizing on their webs of connections and networks in the Red Sea ports (Luhayya, Hudaydah, Aden, Jiddah, Sawakin, etc) and beyond, in the Indian Ocean. In Massawa members of the Hadhrami Bā Zar'a and Bā Junayd families stood out as wealthy individuals who had ridden the wave of the real estate boom, at least since the 1860s. By judging from evidence in the records of the Islamic court, they more often came without women and children since they figure only in real estate transactions and cases involving the attribution of power of attorney (*tawkīl*) with no record whatsoever in cases regarding family issues.[68]

In a period of over twenty years, between 1868 and 1889 only two individuals from the Bā Zar'a family, Shaykh 'Umar b. Aḥmad Bā Zar'a and his son Muḥammad b. 'Umar Bā Zar'a, are mentioned in cases in the court registers, almost all in real estate purchases. Usually, members of Massawa families who had their household in town were described in the registers as *min ahalī Maṣawwa'* (of the local families ["natives"] of Massawa). However, Muḥammad 'Umar Bā Zar'a was described as late as 1885 – his

[67] Negri, *Massaua e dintorni*, 12.
[68] On the social integration of Hadhramis in East Africa see Françoise Le Guennec Coppens, "Social and Cultural Integration: a Case Study of the East African Hadhramis," *Africa*, 59 (2) 1989, 185-195 and Le Guennec Coppens, "Changing Patterns of Hadhrami Migration."

father having conducted business in the port for almost twenty years by then - only as *al-tājir bi-Maṣawwa'* (Ar. "who is a merchant, or who is conducting commerce, in Massawa"). This description was more commonly attributed to merchants who were not settled with their families in the port-town, such as the Greek, Levantines, Banyans and Italians. Bā Zar'a, father and son, were involved more than others in real estate transactions and purchased shops, half shops, rooms, houses, and parcels of land in the 1870s and throughout the 1880s.[69] A careful examination of the transactions suggests that they often purchased real estate property following the division of the estate of a deceased individual among heirs.[70]

Muḥammad 'Umar Bā Zar'a was also one of several merchants in Massawa who had enough capital to organize a considerable shipment of goods for exportation from the port. On October 12, 1886 one of his boats was requisitioned by the Egyptian Navy near Taklay, located between Massawa and Sawakin, since it was suspected of carrying provisions to the Mahdists south of Sawakin. The boat carried 300 kg of cotton textiles, 190 kg of fish claws, 200 kg of medical resin, 450 kg of rice, 450 kg of dates, 18 kg of Abyssinian myrrh, 18 kg of cloves, 450 kg of flour, 180 kg of gum and incense, 322 kg of sandalwood and 213 thalers in cash. The total value of the merchandise elevated to Lit 3766.25 (c. 890 thalers).[71]

His standing as a merchant undoubtedly opened the door to a more official and active role in Massawa's urban institutions in the early Italian period. In 1893 he served as assistant judge, a municipal commissioner, and a member of Massawa's chamber of

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[69] MICR 16/34a [1868]; 16/59c [1870]; 9/23a [1879]; 9/36a, 9/47a, 9/48a, 9/49a [1880]; 10/4b, 10/10c, 10/23a [1885]; 10/38a, 10/39a,, 12/2a, 12/3a [1886]; 12/54a, 12/55a [1888]; 12/60a, 12/67a [1889].
[70] MICR 9/48a [al-Nāti family]; 9/49a [al-Nāti family]; 10/4b [heirs of Ḥamad Aḥmad Aia]; 10/38a [heirs of 'Alī b. 'Umar Shaqray]; 10/39a, 12/54a [daughter of Ṣafāf Bāqī].

commerce (see Appendix 6). Some evidence also points to control deep in the countryside. In the early twentieth century, a wealthy merchant in Keren told Governor Martini how Bā Zar'a (it is not clear which member of the family), had provided him with capital for purchasing cattle and land. But since his departure to Aden, all his business with the Sudan was terribly affected, eventually reaching a halt.[72]

Another even more prominent example was that of 'Abd Allāh b. 'Umar b. Sa'īd Bā Junayd, his two sons Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh and 'Umar b. 'Abd Allāh, as well as two individuals who seem to be 'Abd Allāh's cousins, 'Umar b. Aḥmad Bā Junayd and 'Alī b. Aḥmad Bā Junayd. The Bā Junayd (also, al-Junayd) family was one of the Hadhrami families who had spread across the Indian Ocean world in the early nineteenth century, from Jiddah to Singapore and Java, where they formed part of the Arab elite.[73] The precise date of their establishment in Massawa is impossible to recover with the available sources but in 1858 we know that an 'Alī Bā Junayd acted as agent for the Indian Farah Yusur, who was described as the "first merchant at Jiddah." 'Alī was involved in shipping slaves to the Hijaz.[74] 'Abd Allāh Bā Junayd bought a truly impressive amount of real estate mainly in the 1870s but also some in the late 1860s and in the 1880s. Buildings, shops, land (including land on Tewalet), houses, rooms, *rawshāns* (Ar. projecting oriel window with wooden latticework, known also as *mashrabiyah*), but also sailing boats (*sanābīq*) were all bought by 'Abd Allāh and his

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[71] ASDMAE, *AE*, pacco 151 'Nota delle merci facenti parte di quelle sequestrate dal piroscafo El-Gafarieh nel porto di Taklai...,' 2 August 1887.
[72] Martini, *Il diario eritreo*, III, 169 (Keren, 23 April 1903).
[73] See for example Sumit K. Mandal, "Natural leaders of native Muslims: Arab ethnicity and politics in Java under Dutch rule," In Freitag and Clarence-Smith (eds.), *Hadhrami Traders, Scholars and Statesmen*, 189-90, 195. See more details on members of the Bā Junayd's in South East Asia in articles by Engseng Ho (p. 139) and Clarence-Smith (p. 307) in the same volume. See also Ulrike Freitag, *Indian Ocean Migrants and State Formation in Hadhramaut* (Leiden, 2003).

relatives. They constructed buildings and shops on bought or leased land. Some property was bought in public auctions (*mazād*) following the death of an individual with no heirs.[75]

As was the case with the Bā Zar'as much was bought as a consequence of the division of family property. Since in accordance with Islamic law estates were divided equitably among the remaining members of the family (it was not uncommon that following the settling of an estate, heirs would sell property that became equally owned by several of them together).[76] 'Abd Allāh 'Umar Sa'īd Bā Junayd's wealth gave him a prominent position in the institutions of the urban community. Indeed, he co-headed with the Egyptian Ḥasan b. Mūsā al-'Akkād the first *Lajnat al-awqāf* (Pious endowments committee) that began formal operation in 1882-3.[77] 'Abd Allāh Bā Junayd was noted by the Italians as a 'notable' and held the role of assistant judge in the local court in 1893. His son, 'Umar 'Abd Allāh, was involved in the importation of textiles and the exportation of coffee and ivory. In 1898 he was considered by Governor Martini to be the second richest merchant in Massawa after Ahmad *Afandī* al-Ghūl.[78]

An incident that occurred in Hirgigo some time in the mid-1890s brought 'Abd Allāh Bā Junayd's success in the urban community to a halt, and ultimately to forced exile. In his unpublished manuscript about Massawa, Grand *muftī* Ibrāhīm al-Mukhtār relates that a group of Hirgigo merchants and notables, followers of the Shafi'ī *madhhab*

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[74] Ewald and Clarence-Smith, "The Economic role of the Hadhrami diaspora in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, 1820sto 1930s," 290.
[75] 'Abd Allāh Bā Junayd bought 3 shops in an auction selling the property of *sayyid* Muḥammad Masāwa, who had been a prominent *qāḍī*. MICR 16/41a & 16/41b (Jumāda II 1286/1869).
[76] A sample is MICR 16/53b [heirs of 'Uthmān b. Mūsā 'Adūlāy]; 16/77a [heirs of Jābir Yamanī]; 16/80a [heirs of Ibrāhīm Ḥamdān]; 16/117b [heirs of 'Alī 'Adūlāy]; 8/59a [heirs of Dankalī]; 10/7a [heirs of Maḥmūd Nāṣir].
[77] Ibrāhīm al-Mukhtār, *al-Jāmi' li-akhbār jazīrat Bāḍi'*, 51.
[78] Martini, *Il diario eritreo*, I, 50 (Massaua, 7 February 1898).

and the Shādhili *ṭarīqa*, promoted the idea to build a *jāmi'* (Friday mosque) in Hirgigo.They were led by 'Abd Allāh Bā Junayd. But since the Shafi'īs and Shādhilīs were in a minority in Hirgigo, there was significant resistance to their project. Opposition was undoubtedly expressed by the majority - Hanafīs and Khatmīs – who thought that a Friday mosque should not be sectarian. Bā Junayd was able to "pull strings" and have a *firman* (decree) from the Ottoman Sultan issued authorizing the establishment of the Friday mosque. As a result, the opposition party was determined to take its revenge on Ba Junayd; they were successful in bringing the matter to the administration, as a result of which Bā Junayd was expelled from Massawa and left for Jiddah.[79] But he left behind him a great deal of real-estate and endowed properties. A note written by *muftī* 'Abd Allāh Sirāj Abū 'Ilāma was added to all recordings of properties bought by 'Abd Allāh Bā Junayd certifying that all his property was now transferred to Muḥammad Sālim Bā Ṭūq. It is reasonable to assume that Bā Ṭūq continued to administer Bā Junayd's real estate sending him the profits across the sea.[80] The cases of Bā Zar'a and Bā Junayd are but examples of merchants who were able to accumulate much wealth in a period of commercial vitality. They were able to adjust to a 'modernized' Red Sea commercial system and capitalize on extensive Hadhrami networks in almost all Red Sea ports and beyond. Their acquisition of wealth in Massawa elevated their social standing considerably. In early Italian Massawa both held seats in the town's leading municipal, judicial and commercial institutions.

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[79] Ibrāhīm al-Mukhtār, *al-Jāmi' li-akhbār jazīrat Bāḍi'*, 114. Salvadei too noted the departure of the Bā Junayd and Ba Zar'a families "back to their countries" in the early twentieth century. Salvadei, "Massaua," 1817.

[80] In 1898 a note attesting to this, and signed by the *muftī*, was added to all acts recording 'Abd Allāh Bā Junayd's real estate acquisitions. See MICR 16. For details on the incident see Ibrāhīm al-Mukhtār, *al-Jāmi' li-akhbār jazīrat Bāḍi'*, 114.

There were others who attained impressive wealth during the period. The wealth of families such as al-Ghūl and Nahārī did not fall from that of the two Hadhrami cases described. The Naharīs made great wealth in the marine products trade and had very strong bases in town and in the primary settled centers of the islands. Still, in the early Italian era other Hadhrami merchants moved to the port to conduct successful business enterprises and establish families. The ownership of boats is an important marker of wealth, but also of access to cross-Red Sea networks and connections. In 1901 there were 255 boats registered in Massawa, the Dahlak archipelago and in Hirgigo, of which the principal owners were the leading members of the al-Ghūl, 'Abbāsī, Bā Junayd, Ḥammūda, Shīnītī, Bā Ṭūq, Nahārī, Bā 'Alawī and Hilāl families.[81] In 1908 in Massawa (excluding other localities) as much as seventeen boats were owned by the al-Ghūls, seven by the Ṣāfīs, five by Bā Ṭūq, four by Nahārī, two by 'Adūlāy, two by Shinītī and one each by Ḥayūtī, Hilāl, 'Abbāsī, Bā Ḥamdūn and several others.[82]

[81] ASDMAE, *AE*, pacco 349, From Capitaneria di Porto (Massaua) al Ufficio del Governo (Asmara), No 554, Oggetto: 'Sambucchi italiani di Massaua', 2 November 1901.
[82] ASDMAE, *AE*, 193 (Categoria XIII), R. Capitaneria di Porto di Massaua. Matricola dei Sambucchi (1 January 1908). The Nahārīs, it must be noted, owned many other boats registered in the Dahlak islands.

Family, Household, and Marriage

> The town does not allow one to observe the customs of the inhabitants because, with the exception of the commercial aspects, everything else is hidden within the houses (*palazzi*) of the *signori* ... the huts are so sheltered and the houses so closed, that beyond life on the streets, everything is mysterious in the homes of these compatriots of ours in the Red Sea. (Leopoldo Traversi 1889).[83]

Family Structure and Family Names

Several nineteenth-century writers noted the contrast between the social organization of Massawa's urban community in families and the "tribal" or clanic organization of the pastoralists and nomads of the countryside. More than a century later the anecdote about identity card applications in post-Independence Eritrea and Massawans' insistence on inscribing their family names as their 'ethnic affiliation' (chapter 1) reveals much about the centrality of the institution of the family in Massawa's urban mercantile society. A strong sense of family was central to the existence of a sense of identity and to the perpetuation of social power. The anecdote also signals the importance of family names as markers of one's affiliation to the urban community. A family name in a mercantile environment was a type of trademark, an identifying marker that was supposed to emit a message of prestige, wealth, respectability, reliability, and trustworthiness – all essential for success in business relationships. Family names have been in use in Massawa since a process of urbanization – most probably during the Ottoman period - was set in motion. Many town dwellers – either from the African inland or from abroad - adopted family names, most often referring to their claimed regions/cities of origin ('Adūlāy, Mantay, Mensay, Dihlī, Dankalī, Karanī, Sūmālī,

Jiddāwī, Maghribī, Turkī, Hindī, 'Irāqī, Qabūlī, Bukhārī, Qashmīr, etc.). This feature distinguished them from non-urban nomads and pastoralists who were usually referred to as *x* son of *y*; his son, as *z* son of *x*; and so on.

This characteristic is also visible in the records of the Islamic court. Individuals with no family name were usually nomads, pastoralists, agriculturalists, caravaneers or slaves, originally not from Massawa, or not from its high-ranking families. However, it seems that with the process of increased urbanization in the last decades of the nineteenth century – and well into the twentieth – more individuals who had joined the conurbation began using surnames.[84] For example surnames such as Wariāy (Wariā) and Ḥababāy (Ḥabab), to name two examples that visibly refer to inland pastoralist Tigre-speaking groups, were adopted by individuals and families who became more established, in this case in Hitumlo. They were neither wealthy nor among the high classes, and they didn't live in stone houses, or on Massawa island. But adopting a family name was functional in brokerage and local networks. It was a form of cultural capital (in the sense employed by the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu) that could provide access to the town's mercantile elite, on the one hand, and made them appear as respectable and powerful town dwellers in the eyes of clients in the countryside whose understanding of the subtleties of urban social dynamics was limited, on the other. In his study of merchants and peasants in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Palestine, Beshara Doumani noted that family names were "in a sense, a form of property whose value depended on the intimate connections between

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[83] Traversi, "Usi e costumi africani in Massaua," 365.

[84] In the twentieth-century this process was also due to the break-up of clans, the individuation of the family, and the need of the authorities to keep records. In Eritrea, leading clan families also adopted their titles as family names. Examples are 'Kantibay' (*Kantiba* - Ḥabab) and Shūmay (*Shūm* - 'Ad Shūma). Members of the Kantibay family, who were still referred to as *min ahālī Ḥabab* (Ar. From the Habab), appear in the court records several times in the 1880s. MICR 8/3b [1881], 8/94b [1884], 12/44b [1888], 12/49b [1888].

physical space, economic fortune, social standing, and cultural practices of the household."[85]

In the second half of the century, individuals who migrated to Massawa or its environment usually adopted a family name. As noted in a previous chapter, the Khayl family name was taken by a Saho-speaking convert who came to the Dahlak islands, from his Yemeni employer. 'Ali Sa'īd Ṣūrī, who came to the Dahlak islands to engage in the marine products trade and transportation in the 1880s, also attached the name of his town of origin (or its vicinities) in Oman, Ṣūr, to his name. Aḥmad Ḥayūti, head of a Hadhrami family of *sādah*, has also changed its name from Ḥibshī to Hayūtī in the second half of the century, perhaps as a consequence of a household/lineage division among the Ḥibshis. Family names could also come and go with the growing or fading fortunes of families. Other Hadhrami families in Massawa such as 'Aydarūs and Bā 'Alawī, were noted to be "of the Ḥibshis" in the past, strengthening a lineage division hypothesis.[86]

The fragmentation of a lineage (sometimes ulteriorly expressed in interviews as "we are in fact the same family") is also suggested with the al-Ghūl, Bayt Sanūsī and Bayt Sakīra families, all originally from Egypt, and claiming to closeness that appears to go beyond marriage ties.[87] The link between the Mīya and Khayr ad-Dīn families – sometimes unseparated and referred to as Mīyā Khayr ad-Dīn – is also suggestive of this hypothesis. Another phenomenon which might be a result of the cultural capital with

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[85] Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine*, 63.

[86] Interview with the brothers Ḥasan Muḥammad 'Uthmān Ḥayūtī and Aḥmad Muḥammad 'Uthmān Ḥayūtī, Asmara, 31 July 2001. Another, perhaps far-fetched, hypothesis might be that the name 'Hibshi' was very similar to 'Ḥabashī' (in Arabic it spelled the same), potentially causing confusion and 'embarrassment' for the Ḥibshī *Sayyids*. In the court records usually lower class laborers and even slaves coming from Abyssinia were referred to as such and such *al-Ḥabashī*. For mention of other members of the Ḥibshī lineage see Ulrike Freitag and W. G. Clarence-Smith (eds.) *Hadhrami Traders, Scholars and Statesmen in the Indian Ocean, 1750s-1960s* (Leiden, 1997), 376. See also the two Hadhrami genealogical compilations by Bā Maṭraf and al-Mashhūr (refs. in Bib.).

which a surname is charged with, is the utilization of one family name by two separate families, usually one tracing origins from abroad and another from the countryside. Three examples include Ṣā'igh, Khaydara, and Hilāl.

The words in Arabic designating family are quite ambiguous, much as their meanings. They vary from one location to another (even within a relatively limited space), from one period to another, and leave room for individual interpretation. Similarities, variations and a range of levels of inclusivity in the terms *'ā'ila* (nuclear or extended family, lineage), *bayt* (nuclear family or extended group, physical house), *dār* (household, physical house), *ahl* (family, large group of kin, lineage) exist throughout the Arabic-speaking world. In Massawa the terms employed for designating a family was usually *bayt*, sometimes *ahl*. Most of those who had family names in Massawa – even more so the notable and wealthy families - are referred to as *bayt* such and such.[88] In Egyptian terminology, but also in the Fertile Crescent *bayt* means literally "house," including a strong sense of residential place. It could therefore designate both the house and the group of people living under the same roof or in the same compound. This group could be either a nuclear family (simple household) or an extended basic family including a widowed parent, a spinstered aunt, etc. But it could also mean an extended family (multiple households, or, joint family households), living under a patriarch and including father, mother, unmarried children and married sons and their families all living together in a compound divided to rooms (or small 'flats'). *Ahl* is another term for family that can

[87] Interview with Alī Yūsuf 'Alī al-Ghūl, Massawa, 26 February 2000.
[88] Fu'ād Makkī has informed me that the terms 'Bayt' and ''Ad' were, and continue to be, interchangeably used by Massawans.

mean from immediate family to larger groups of kin.[89] Members of the town's leading families were sometimes referred to in the court registers (1860s-1880s) as *z* the son of *y*, the son of *x*, the son of *w* + his family name, thus recalling father, grandfather and great grandfather, approximately to the beginning of the nineteenth century. In some cases it could perhaps refer to the first patriarch adopting a family name. But the practice of recalling a father and one grandfather was more common in the records.

In order to reveal with greater precision the process of household formation and household size, a systematic study of inheritance cases in the Massawa court records must be carried out. Counting the number of children alive at the time of a father's death allows estimating the size of households. Until such study is carried out, less precise impressions in reading through inheritance cases, divisions of family property (including estates), the appointment of legal tutors, and real estate transactions among family members, reveal that in the last quarter of the century many typical Massawa households included between 2 to 4 non-minor children and sometimes several other smaller children. [90] A prudent estimate would put the average of household size at between 4 and 6 children. But this varied from family to family, depending on wealth, the length of stay in Massawa, and other variants. It seems that the wealthier the family, the larger it was. In the late nineteenth century, ultra-rich Massawans – all of whom were of Arab origins - such as Aḥmad *Afandī* al-Ghūl, 'Alī al-Nahārī, Muḥammad Sālim Bā Ṭūq, Muḥammad 'Umar al-Ṣāfī, had a large number of children, between eight and as much as seventeen –

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[89] Andrea B. Rugh, *Family in Contemporary Egypt* (Syracuse, 1984), 54-5; Meriwether, *The Kin who Count*, 17-18; Hildred Geertz, "The meaning of family ties," in Clifford Geertz, Hildred Geertz, and Lawrence Rosen, *Meaning and Order in Moroccan Society* (Cambridge, 1979), 341-355.

[90] Several examples between 1867 and 1888 include MICR 2/62b (Adam Barkūy), 4/36b ('Adūlāy), 4/41b (Ḥaṭam), 8/56b (Badūrī), 8/72b (Ḥijjī), 8/110a (Shaykh), 10/25a (Mihrī), 10/38b (Alī Faqīh), 16/8a (Shinītī), 16/59b (Turkī).

most often with several wives.[91] Large and medium-sized households usually owned a large house, or a compound, divided to rooms or flats where married sons could live with their wives. Families of more modest means were smaller, but could grow with the accumulation of wealth.

The ability to have several wives and support a large family required considerable wealth, but having a large family also secured the perpetuation of a family's capital by avoiding the breaking up and division of property that household divisions usually entailed. When the head of a household died and his estate divided between his heirs, a process of redistribution of property usually followed.[92] In Massawa's economic climate many heirs realized property inherited from a father, as the many cases in which heirs sold property outside the family shows. Sometimes this process entailed the division of households; in other cases a process of buying and selling of property (parts of houses and land) among heirs secured the integrity of the family's assets. [93] Non-kin members of a household included servants and domestic slaves, who were owned by the household head or his wife and were part and parcel of their own private property. But the relationship with slaves could be quite close; some even adopted the household family name and could thus climb the social ladder and access urban citizenship. One example was that of Faraj b. 'Abd Allāh "al-Ḥabashī" ("the Abyssinian") and his sister Fatma, who were both manumitted by their owner, Aḥmad Hindī b. al-Ṣadīq al-Qashmīrī and who were referred to after manumission as Faraj Hindī b. 'Abd Allāh and Fatma Hindī b.

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[91] See appendices with genealogical trees of the Nahārī, Ṣāfī, Bā Ṭūq and Bā Ḥubayshī and al-Ghūl families.

[92] See among many examples to this strategy MICR 16/106b (3 Dhū 'l-qa'da 1292). *Sayyid* Muḥammad b. 'Umar b. 'Abd Allāh al-Ṣāfī bought parts in real-estate inherited by his brothers and sisters, *sayyid* Shaykh, *sharīfa* Shūfa, *sharīfa* Nūr and *sharīfa* Ṭayiba.

[93] On inheritance in Islamic law see Joseph Schacht, *An Introduction to Islamic Law* (Oxford, 1964), 169-174. On inheritance and family structure see also Meriwether, *The Kin who Count*, 153-177.

'Abd Allāh.[94] It was also the case of Serur, a slave belonging to 'Abd al-Nabī al-Maghribī whose daughter was referred to in the *sharī'a* court as Amna b. Serur 'Abd al-Nabī al-Maghribī.[95]

The situation in the outer elements of the conurbation, in Hitumlo and Omkullo seems more complex since in some cases several family structures must have co-existed and since the process of urbanization entailed a transition from a nomadic clanic kinship structure to a more individuated family.[96] In Hirgigo the situation was also complex, straddling the urban family type and several types of nomadic and pastoralist clanic and kinship structures. The Balaw and the various Saho-speaking groups were organized in clusters of cognatic kin, in turn divided into branches and further down, separate families. The Tigre-language term to designate a family was *'Ad*, whose meaning had a wide range of alternatives: tribe, people, family, village, country, home. So that for example members of the 'Ad Qūlāy family were part of the Bayt Ḥasan Nā'ib 'Amir, which was descended from the Balaw 'Amir lineage, referring to the founder of the branch. Or a member of the 'Ad Badūrī family descended from the *fara'* (Ar. branch) Bayt Shaykh Maḥmūd (which was descended from Shaykh Sālim b. Faqīh Muḥammad) from yet the larger cognatic descent group of a lineage founder, Faqīh Muḥammad al-Zubayr.[97] On the other hand there were separate families in Hirgigo which were not tied to the larger structures of the Balaw branches and the Saho clans. As in Massawa, they were autonomous families that settled in Hirgigo, either from abroad or from the interior (See Appendix 2).

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[94] MICR 9/27b (18 Sha'bān 1296) and 9/28a (20 sha'bān 1296).
[95] MICR 16/56b (14 Ṣafar 1287). The same case was mentionned in an earlier chapter concerning slaves belonging to the Ṣāfī household.
[96] See comments on this matter in Ferronato, 'La città di Massaua', 282.

Houses and Families: Spatial and Domestic Arrangements

Massawans take great pride in the architectural legacy of their town.[98] Living in coral stone houses – more or less elegant, depending on a family's wealth and social standing - was another pivotal ingredient of the sense of cultural superiority and urban identity that elite Massawans have always projected both inwards and outwards. It was thus closely connected to ideal values about the institution of the family, its structure, and its domestic arrangements on the one hand, and to the centrality of Arab and Islamic influences on self-generated cultural constructions, on the other.[99] Massawa's architectural style is of a unique and original composite and multi-layered character that is not simple to deconstruct and identify with precision. Colonial urban development, earthquakes (and consequent reconstruction in an Islamic/Red Sea-inspired Italian colonial style) and the devastating effects of wars have all contributed to create a fascinating mixed pot of styles and influences. A systematic and rigorous study of the genealogy of Massawa's buildings and architectural styles is eagerly awaited.

"Jealously closed vast and mysterious Arab houses" was how one writer described the increasing number of handsome houses emerging in town at the height of the late nineteenth-century building boom.[100] Prosperous merchants - both from among recent migrants from Egypt and the Arabian Peninsula and long-established Massawan patricians - owned and built residential houses on the port island. Several houses were large, elegant and luxurious. In the late 1880s one observer remarked that the house of

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[97] Muḥammad 'Uthmān Abū Bakr, *Ta'rīkh Iritriya*, 304-6.

[98] Even though al-Mukhtar was not from Massawa, his remarks and the tone of his account reflect the relationship between the town's prestige and its old and impressive stone edifices. See Ibrāhīm al-Mukhtār, *al-Jāmi' li-akhbār jazīrat Bāḍi'*, 18-19.

[99] See the interesting chapter on the structures, meanings and diversity of the domestic environment in Muslim societies in Insoll, *The Archaeology of Islam*, 60-92.

'Abd Allāh *Bey* al-Ghūl, head of the Massawa Local Council, was the largest in town. It had a very large reception room, luxurious furniture (including European), sofas, carpets, mirrors and a wall clock.[101] To some extent at least, 'Abd Allāh *Bey* al-Ghūl's house was probably comparable to some of the larger and more luxurious mansions owned by Sawakin's business and political elite. One example would be the [first] house of Sawakin's Local Head Council, Muṣṭafa Shināwī *Bey*, illustrated in detail by Jean-Pierre Greenlaw in his book.[102] The same Muṣṭafa Shināwī had purchased a residential house in Massawa in 1882.[103] Another example of a large and lavish upper scale house was that owned by another ultra-wealthy Egyptian, Ḥasan Mūsā al-'Akkād.[104]

But the majority of Massawa's upper classes lived in smaller coral stone houses. The basic type Turkish house (pre-1860s) was a single-storey dwelling unit of two or three rooms divided into a small family room and a larger guest room for males known in Arabic as *maq'ad* (In the larger and more sophisticated houses it was known as the *salāmlik*, from the Turkish). These small houses were perhaps the most common in Massawa. They reflected the basic structure of edifices other than residential dwellings; the basic prayer room of the Shaykh Ḥammāl religious complex (less the large windows for ventilation/airing) fits this model very well.[105] However, when households grew and

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[100] Buchs, "Voyages en Abyssinie," 33.
[101] Mantegazza, *Da Massaua a Saati*, 92.
[102] Greenlaw, *The Coral Buildings of Suakin*, 29-35. The origin of this style most probably leads to Ottoman Cairo (but also very common in places such as Jiddah). See Emile Pauty, *Les palais et les maisons d'époque musulmane, au Caire* (Cairo: IFAO, 1932). For a detailed study of a house built by a merchant in Luhayya, opposite Massawa on the Tihama coast, see Paul Bonnenfant and Jean-Marie Gentilleau, "Une maison de commerçant-armateur sur la mer Rouge: Bayt 'Abd al-'Ubud à al-Luhayya (Yémen)," in Daniel Panzac, (ed.) *Les villes dans l'empire ottoman: activités et sociétés*, Tôme II (Paris: Éd. du CNRS, 1994), 125-188.
[103] MICR 4/24b (and 8/26a) 20 Rajab 1299.
[104] See two illustrations of this house in Bizzoni, *L'Eritrea nel passato e nel presente*, 201, 233. It was probably not built by him since the architectural style of the house predates his establishment in the port in the 1880s.
[105] Federico Cresti, "La mosquée du Sayh Hammali à Massaoua," *PICES 10* (Paris, 1994), Vol. I, 303-315.

families accummulated enough wealth, basic type houses could grow into more elaborate compounds. These consisted of adjacent houses, a courtyard (Ar. *ḥush.* or several connecting to each other), a kitchen-room, and floors could be built over the original dwelling unit, sometimes with open terrace roofs where members of the family slept in the hot summer nights.[106] Large households dwelled in large compounds consisting of three-four-five separate houses organized around the paternal unit and surrounded by a wall and connecting to each other by bridging corridors. In this way several married children could live in the same compound.[107] Non-kin members of the household such as slaves and servants slept in the courtyard or in specific quarters within the compound. Sometimes the ground floor was transformed into shops facing the street and warehouses for storing goods.[108] If wealth permitted, beautiful wooden carved *rawshāns*, or casement windows jutting out into the street (called also *mashrabiyahs*) were constructed on the second or third floors, enabling to catch breezes and ensure privacy.[109]

The higher the status of the family and the wealthier it was, the closer it could attain the ideal domestic arrangement of the Muslim household with a clear distinction between public and private spaces, and the separation between men and women's entrances to the house and living quarters within it.[110] In the 1920s and 1930s some houses of rich Massawa merchants were so well known that they became urban landmarks, as if they were public monuments of the town's topography. Colonial "tourist guides" produced in the Fascist period identify the houses (Ar. *bayt* such and such; It.

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[106] Ferronato, 'La città di Massaua', 220-221; Greenlaw, *The Coral Buildings of Suakin*, 22-3.
[107] Ferronato, 'La città di Massaua', 222.
[108] Matthews, "The Red Sea Style," 62.
[109] On the *rawshans* see Greenlaw, op. cit. 21 and Matthews, op. cit. 64-6. In the court records the existence and positioning of *rawshāns* were often clearly specified in house or shop transactions.
[110] Greenlaw, *The Coral Buildings of Suakin*, 17-20. See also Cerbella, "La diffusione in Eritrea," 292-3.

casa such and such) of the Bā Ṭūq, al-Ghūl, Bā Ḥamdūn, Bā Mushmūsh (or Bā Mishmūs), Bā Zar'a, Hilāl, Ṣāfī and Shīnītī families.[111]

"One Big Family": Marriage Patterns

The success or failure of families dedicated to commerce usually depended on their ability to reproduce and expand networks that connected them with brokers in the port's vicinities, producers, caravan operators, small retailers, influential political, religious and other merchant families in Massawa, and also merchants from abroad. In practice it was often done through various alliances, patronage, and often through networks of marriage. My informants' expressions like "Massawa is one big family" or that it is "like a big chain" are not only a figure of speech. Such statements reflect the social homogeneity of those mercantile urban dwellers who had family names, who possessed some form of religious prestige, and who shared a sense of common destiny as a culturally superior group positioned in between the sea and the "inferior" mainland. It was a "big family on an island," in more than one sense. A family integrated through family ties, marriage connections and shared economic interests.

Marriage in Muslim societies is a central religious and social institution. It is an important strategy for achieving family aims. In her study of family in Ottoman Aleppo, Margaret Meriwether noted that "the importance of marriage as a social strategy was particularly true for the elite. Marriage was fundamentally a relationship between families rather than between individuals. Considerations of property, status, and honor meant that much was at stake in contracting a marriage and creating a relationship between

[111] L. V. Bertarelli, *Guida d'Italia del Touring Club Italiano: Possedimenti e colonie, isole Egee, Tripolitania, Cirenaica, Eritrea, Somalia* (Milano, 1929), map between 600 and 601, 604-5. Also *Guida dell'Africa Orientale, Italiana, Consociazione Turistica Italiana* (Milano, 1938), 178-9.

families."[112] As in other such settings in the Muslim world, this seems also to be valid in the case of Massawa, where a considerable degree of family control was exercised over marriage choices among high status families.

From the examination of several dozen marriage cases registered in the second half of the 1860s a first visible pattern is the frequency of cousin marriages. Eight cases, that is 21%, are recordings of in-family unions.[113] Marriage among *sādah* and families of high religious status was also unsurprisingly frequent. Examples include unions between 'Aydarūs and Ṣāfī, Ṣāfī and Masāwa, and Ḥabūna and Ja'far.[114] The last example is particularly interesting in that both families were linked by their high religious status even if from distinctively different origins (Saho-Assaworta and Hadhrami). Other cases also followed this pattern. An alliance was recorded between the *sādah* Turkī family and a girl from the Dankalī family, and a similar type between *Sayyid* Abū Bakr Ja'far and Maryam b. 'Umar Nāṣir.[115] Marrying with non-*sādah* or *ashrāf* required careful scrutiny. One informant of a *sādah* family pointed that before giving one's daughter, a father had to enquire thoroughly about the other family's origins: "one had to make sure that they are "clean" (no slaves). The rule was three "clean" grandfathers in order to give one's daughter."[116] High status families who wanted to acquire religious prestige were sometimes able to marry into pious families. The daughter of 'Alī Afandī Yaḥya thus married a *khalīfa* of the holy 'Ad Shaykh family based in Embereme on the mainland. An

[112] Meriwether, *The Kin who Count*, 112.
[113] Examples include: Diḥli: MICR 14/3g (, 14/4k; Ṣā'igh: 14/7f, Ja'far: 14/9a; 'Adūlāy: 14/4f, Nāti: 14/2i, Karani: 14/4i; Dankali: 14/7i.
[114] 'Aydarūs and Ṣāfī: MICR 14/8f; Ṣāfī and Masāwa: 14/8d; Ḥabūna and Ja'far 14/9b.
[115] MICR 14/2f, 14/3j.
[116] Interview with *Sayyid* Ibrāhīm Muhammad Ibrāhīm *al-Sayyid*, Massawa, 26 April 2000.

informant of the Afandīs candidly observed that by forming the alliance his family became directly related to the Prophet.[117]

There is also a trend of families who claim or are designated by others as sharing the same origins to create family unions through marriage. It was common practice among several families of Hadhrami origins, particularly the *sādah* discussed above. The register also points to a union between the Mīyā and Hindī families, who are believed to originate in the India (14/6a), and the union between the Fāris and Sa'dūy families, both of the *Bayt* Shaykh Maḥmūd and primarily based in Hirgigo (14/4j). These cases reveal a certain inclusivity that would gradually dissipate in following decades and into the twentieth century. Yet another significant pattern that can be identified is marriage connections among the elite regardless of origins and/or religious status. In these cases one pivotal attribute of high status, or common business interests, were sufficient to favor the alliance among the families. This phenomenon is particularly significant in revealing linkages between families who originally came from beyond the area (eg. Hadhramawt and Hijaz) with families whose origins were from the inland coastal and lowland regions. In other words, it may unveil the mechanisms of what is termed as "assimilation," or the creation of Massawan identity. A marriage between two such families could almost automatically offer access to a new web of networks (land or seaborne), and could also confer social and cultural capital through the association with a family having high religious status. Examples include Mantay and 'Abbāsī (14/1f), Turkī and Dankalī (14/2f), and Mantay and Masāwa (14/7d).

Marriage alliances extracted from the court registers together with data drawn from interviews and family genealogies – from later periods, up to the middle of the

[117] Interview with Muḥammad Sālim Afandī, Asmara, 31 July 2001.

twentieth century - confirm some of these patterns over a longer term.[118] Evidence from the court records clearly shows the dense web of interconnections among Massawa's high status families. The interweaving of families with different bases of prestige, social power and authority straddling commercial and religious networks from the inland, through the urban arena, and abroad, epitomizes the group cohesion of Massawa's urban community. On the basis of the records it appears that most Hadhramis preferred – to some extent - marrying with other Hadhrami families. The 'Aydarūs, Ṣāfī, Hayūtī, Nahārī families were always closely linked in marriages. Sometimes several siblings from one family were married to opposite siblings in another family (eg. Nahārī and Ṣāfī). It also seems that newly arrived Hadhrami migrants benefitted from a sense of solidarity among Hadhrami families who have already been in Massawa for several decades or more. Examples include Bā Ṭūq and Bā Ḥubayshi, and Bā Ṭūq and Bā Zaham.

Hadhrami families also married out of their own families or other Hadhrami families, permitting them to extend their networks into the inland (or throughout the archipelago). The first Nahārī to settle in Massawa in mid-century, 'Abd al-Raḥīm, married Fatma 'Umar Danbar of a potent Balaw lineage, enabling direct access to regional networks. The Nahārīs, as it has been noted above, had perhaps achieved the greatest degree of wealth in the town's history to this very day. Interviews confirm that in the twentieth century exogamous marriages became much more common. To some extent in a contradictory way, they also show that in the colonial period some merchants, entrepreneurs, or sailors, usually (but not always) of Arab origins who had settled in

[118] In the twentieth century marriage alliances became more inclusive. As they became increasingly assimilated, the second and third generations of certain Hadhrami and Egyptian families married more easily into 'Eritrean' families. If this practice was also pervasive in the late nineteenth century among

Massawa, sometimes went back to the Arabian Peninsula to select and take wives from Yemen or the Hijaz. Aḥmad *Afandī* al-Ghūl brought a woman from the Hijaz; the father of 'Abd Allāh Sharīf (a sailor) brought a woman from Yemen in one of his trips; Aḥmad 'Alī *Afandī* took a woman from Ṭā'iz; Ṣāliḥ Muḥammad Bā Ṭūq married 'Aysha Sa'īd from the Hijaz; and 'Alī Nahārī took a Yemeni girl, among many other examples. The "Eritreanization" of Massawa might have been perceived by some of the town's Arab or assimilated elite as a threat on their ways of life. Taking women from the other shore of the Red Sea was one way of responding to sociocultural change.

Marriage and divorce cases from the first half of the 1880s also provide information on matrimonial practices among lower class individuals and non-Massawans in the port in the heyday of the Egyptian period. A first observation reveals a relative frequent occurence of marriage between Egyptian officials, officers and soldiers, with women, most often of low status including recently manumitted slaves. One example among others was that of Aḥmad *Afandī* Aḥmad, *Mulāzim awwal* (1st Lieut.) of the Egyptian Army in Massawa and Turanjī al-Habashiyya who was a slave liberated six days prior to her marriage in early 1299 H. (1882) by *Sayyid* Muḥammad Ibrāhīm from Massawa. Another fairly similar union took place later that year between Maḥmūd Rizk, engineer on board the steamship "Khartum," docked at the port of Massawa and 'Ajmī b. 'Abd Allāh al-Ḥabashī. She was a slave only recently manumitted (Ar. *ma'tūqa*) by *sayyid* Ḥasan b. al-*sayyid* Aḥmad Abū Sha'rayn. He gave the bride a dowry (Ar. *mahr*) of 10 Riyāls. Muḥammad Sulaymān, a simple sailor on board the "Kharṭūm," married Fāṭma

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families sharing high religious status, the circle of families slightly expanded throughout the 20th c. The geographical integration of Eritrea also influenced these patterns.

b. Ḥusayn b. Aḥmad Falawī a month earlier.[119] Several other marriages that reflected the more or less similar patterns appear in the court registers.[120]

But there were also marriage links between Egyptian appointed officials and Massawans of both high and low status. Ibrāhīm 'Abd al-Samīḥ, *muftī* of Massawa, married two women of low status in 1883 and 1884: Salāma b. 'Abd Allāh, who was formerly a slave liberated by 'Alī b. Abū Bakr Nakhray, and Khadīja b. Khiyyār "*al-ḥabashī*."[121] Some Egyptian officers were linked in marriage to women from the Saho-speaking groups inhabiting the port's vicinities. In 1881 Shams al-Shāmī, the carpenter of the irrigation canals employed by the Egyptian administration at Massawa, divorced Sa'īda b. Adam Muḥammad *al-Sihāwī* (Ar. the "Saho"); Aḥmad al-*afandī* Wazan divorced Fāṭma b. Muḥammad Ḥāmid from Zula, and Diyāb 'Abd al-'Azīz divorced Amna Ḥasan *al-Sihāwī*.[122] Divorce cases also signal marriage alliances between non-urban dwellers of the Massawa region, among themselves, or with town dwellers – and often of low status, as the lack of family names suggests. Couples came to the town's court to register marriage and divorce. Thus, for example Ṭāhir b. 'Umar Adhanna al-Galab from the village of Zaqa (Zaga) divorced his wife Fāṭma b. 'Alī Wāriāy (Waria group); Ibrāhīm 'Alī Ḥamad from Zaga divorced Zaynab b. 'Umar Adam from Omkullo; Muḥammad b. *ḥājj* Ḥabīb from Massawa divorced Jum'a b. Ḥarzāwī of the 'Ad Tamaryam; 'Abd Allāh from Zula divorced Khadīja b. Sulaymān, and Aḥmad Ṭalūl of the Bayt Khalīfa divorced Mas'ūda b. Muḥammad Limūnat of the Assaorta.[123] There were

[119] MICR 8/13b (28 Muḥarram 1299), 8/37d (27 Dhū 'l-ḥijja 1299), 8/34a (15 Dhū 'l-qa'da 1299).
[120] MICR 8/11b (2 Muḥarram 1299), 8/21b (16 Jumāda I 1299), 8/42a (9 Rabī' I 1300), 8/90b (19 Jumāda II 1301), 8/115a (4 Ṣafar 1302), 8/117a (20 Ṣafar 1302).
[121] MICR 8/53a (7 Rajab 1300), 8/83a (22 Jumāda I 1301).
[122] MICR 8/1c (3 Rajab 1298), 8/9b (17 Dhū l'qa'da 1298), 10/13b (14 Jumāda II 1302).
[123] MICR 8/1a (1 Rajab 1298), 8/20d (29 Rabī' II 1299), 8/94a (4 Rajab 1301), 10/31b (26 Shawwāl 1302), 10/34b (23 Dhū 'l-ḥijja 1302).

also links between very low status individuals, some of whom were manumitted slaves or servants from the Abyssinian or Sudanese regions. Some examples include Khadra b. Aḥmad Maḥmūd Babīl who divorced Faraj Jād al-Sūdānī; Fāṭma Negasī who divorced Muḥammad Nūr al-Ḥabashī; and Sarah b. Aḥmad from Shandī who divorced Muḥammad b. 'Uthmān from Kassala.[124]

The law court records also shed light on female domestic slaves who were concubines. Concubinage was a legal institution in Muslim society and men had sexual access to female slaves who were part of their property. But concubines had clearly defined rights within the framework of the institution of concubinage. The most important was that their children were considered free and equal to other offspring of her owner. Once she had a child she was granted the status of *umm al-walad* (Ar. mother of the child) protecting her from being sold, pawned or given away. On the death of her master she was to be freed automatically.[125] An example from Massawa involves Dawa who had a daughter, Sa'īda, with her owner 'Alī Faqīh, and on his death in 1881 was freed by the court in accordance with Islamic law.[126] It is interesting to note that the *qāḍī* of Massawa, Shaykh 'Alī 'Abd al-Karīm *al-Maṣrī* (Ar. "the Egyptian") married the daughter in question, Sa'īda b. 'Alī al-Faqī, twelve days after her mother's manumission. The *mahr* (dower) that was agreed upon was 10 riyāls, 8 to be paid immediately and 2 riyāls remained at her credit.[127] It is customary in the Hanafi legal school to pay part of the *mahr* immediately (*muqaddam*) and defer payment of the rest. The remaining part of the dower (*mū'akhkhar*) is thus held to the credit of the wife and should be paid to her in case of

[124] MICR 8/22e (9 Jumāda II 1299), 8/31a (27 Sha'bān 1299), 10/35a (14 Muḥarram 1303).
[125] Shaun Marmon, "Concubinage, Islamic," in Joseph R. Strayer et al. (eds.) *Dictionary of the Middle Ages* (New York, 1983), Volume 3, 527-529; Schacht, *An Introduction to Islamic Law*, 127.
[126] MICR 8/1b (2 Rajab 1298).

death of one of the spouses or in the case of repudiation (after consummation).[128] But the marriage held only over a year and they appeared back in court for their divorce in early shawwāl 1300 (1883).[129]

Marriage patterns in Massawa in the second half of the nineteenth century demonstrate the centrality of the institution of the family in a society dedicated to trade. Marriage among Massawa's commercial elite was a carefully calculated and regulated social strategy aimed at preserving, reproducing and expanding business networks. As such, marriage strategies offer valuable insights to the mechanisms of creating communal cohesion, solidarity and boundaries. It also shows the ways by which migrants coming from across the sea and local potent families linked their networks through marriage alliances enabling them to perform commercial mediation between the African interior and business partners across the seas.

Wedding Customs: In Town and Out of Town

The diversity of peoples and customs in the Samhar region – nomads, pastoralists, townsmen – was also reflected in their wedding customs. Most ethnographic accounts of marriage ceremonies in the nineteenth century describe the customs of Saho and Tigre peoples, the nomads, or Beduins. Descriptions of urban elite family weddings are more rare; Europeans had easier access to Saho and Tigre-speaking non-urban communities outside Massawa. Observers often generalized and attributed what they witnessed as the common and most widespread practices not always aware to variations founded on locality, culture and status.

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[127] MICR 8/2a (14 Rajab 1298).
[128] Schacht, *An Introduction to Islamic Law*, 167; John Esposito and Natana J. DeLong-Bas, *Women in Muslim Family Law* (Syracuse, 2001) (2nd ed.), 24.

In the 1830s Combes and Tamisier suggested that the inhabitants of Massawa did not fully follow orthodox Islamic customs in matters of marriage. They wrote that unlike in Arabia and in Turkey, Massawan men insisted upon meeting their fiancées prior to the wedding celebration.[130] The statement undoubtedly reflects the state of religious and cultural syncretism of the region's inhabitants. Even after the process of Islamization (very recent in that context), local cultural practices were deeply entrenched among pastoralist and nomadic communities. In the 1850s Munzinger provided a detailed ethnographic account of marriage customs among the non-urban Beduins, with some useful comments as to the differences between town and countryside practices. Marriages, he observed, were pre-arranged by parents or legal guardians, aiming at forming family or clan alliances. First, a marriage pledge was made by the young man to the girl's father, after which a decision had to be taken as to the nature and amount of the engagement gift to be given by the by the pledger. The youngster also had to give (or purchase) gifts and nice clothes to the girl. But after the marriage all was given back to the man in cows. If for any reason the marriage did not take place – all the gifts were returned to the young man.[131]

In the villages, Munzinger's descriptions add, no union could be made without prior consultation of the village sorceress. If troubles were predicted, a marriage could be canceled. Weddings usually took place a year after the marriage pledge (always in winter), but in Massawa, "where old customs are fading away," weddings were celebrated at any time of the year. Among the nomads boys could marry at the age of 16, girls at 12, but in town usually later. As the wedding day approached young men usually

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[129] MICR 8/58b (4 shawwāl 1300).
[130] Combes and Tamisier, *Voyage en Abyssinie*, I, 102.

went to see the Muftī, who talked to them about the responsibilities of marriage. On the day of the wedding guests were welcomed to the groom's parents' house; they were offered hydromel, coffee, cooked rice, meat and sweets. Singing and dancing went on throughout the day; the entire wedding celebrations lasted three days. Guests offered gifts: silver ear and nose rings, silver wrist and ankle bracelets, hair combs, and other jewels. Married women of a certain wealth in Massawa thus sometimes wore 200 thaler worth of jewels, while Beduin married girls often had much less - as low as ten thalers worth. Clearly, in town marriage was an expensive business – young men often had to wait long years before they accumulated enough capital enabling them to get married.[132]

In the late 1860s Hormuzd Rassam provided useful observations on a wedding celebration that he attended in Massawa. Most interesting was the notable difference in the meanings of money in the specific period and in the urban setting. Clearly, we find ourselves in a setting of more widespread and enhanced monetization and commodification. Money, wealth, and power gained new meanings in the urban mercantile environment of business and consumption in the heyday of the commercial boom. Rassam describes how money gifts were given to the groom and how donors' names were carefully registered. He describes a system in which marriage gifts were taken almost as loans. Money gifts were placed to the credit of donors and on their own marriage, the same amount given by them was repaid by those first married. This provided young married men a small capital to launch business enterprises. Furthermore, Rassam added that "sometimes, when a man is in prosperous circumstances, he not only repays the sum he had received, but advances something more to be repaid at a future

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[131] Munzinger, *Studi sull'Africa orientale*, 116.
[132] Ibid., 117-118.

time to himself or to his son." Collections among the wealthier classes often exceeded 1000 thalers; Rassam once witnessed a total gift amount of 3000 thalers.[133] Attending a marriage among notable families in late nineteenth-century Omkullo, Victor Buchs also noted this system, undoubtedly reflecting the strong influence of town practices on the inhabitants of the outer elements of the conurbation.[134] In the atmosphere of a commercial boom and the struggles over wealth and power, competition for giving large sums was current among the elite and the wealthy. Giving generously could also foster patronage ties, useful in extending business networks.

In the 1880s Traversi attended a middle-level elite family's wedding. The young groom was beautifully dressed and hosts arranged *angarebs* (type of cordstrung bed common in Massawa and the Nile Valley) covered with elegant textiles in the courtyard for the guests. The women were separated from the men in another room where they chanted. There was also a performance by two women dancers. The men sang too - undoubtedly performing the *dhikr* or another Sufi ritual: "they do not only emit a voice and clap their hands, but they clap their feet according to the rhythm, they move their head and are all agitated up to rapture (ecstasy), until exhaustion."[135] Ecstatic Sufi dances and ceremonies were also described by Buchs in *fin de siècle* Omkullo. After the procession has made its way to the mosque and the two witnesses sent by the *qāḍī* to the bride's home to confirm her virginity returned with the crucial (much-awaited) 'yes', all congratulated the young groom. In the evening, back in the groom's parents' house more festive dances, chanting and *dhikr* ceremonies pursued into the night.

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[133] Rassam, *Narrative of the British Mission*, 15.
[134] Buchs, "Voyages en Abyssinie," 41-2.
[135] Traversi, "Usi e costumi africani in Massaua," 372-4.

> There follows endless chanting and the ceremony ends with a singular prayer. Those present stand and continuously and with increasing rapidity repeat the word 'Allah', God, in a guttural and raucous voice, that soon enough, becomes inhuman, until one of them exhausts himself and falls unconscious. It is obviously a sign that the prayer was agreable to God; it is certain that since it came not from the lips but from inside the man, from his stomach, it is a real expression of the believer's faith.[136]

Ilario Capomazza, undoubtedly one of the more informed Italian colonial officials in matters of Islam and Eritrea's Muslim populations, published a monograph in 1910 devoted to Ḥanafī Muslim customs of Massawa.[137] Capomazza's detailed account takes the reader step by step from the first moments of engagement until the birth of offspring well after the marriage. But once again, as in all the above descriptions, the crucial question remained "who exactly was getting married?" Which culture (status) is the description depicting? Did practices diverge from community to community? Central to the administering of wedding ceremonies in Capomazza's account is the Saho-speaking holy clan Bayt Shaykh Maḥmūd, having their principal seat in Zula. The question remains who exactly was served by them, who they represented (other Saho-speaking groups) and more importantly, who contested their religious authority.[138]

Concluding Remarks

This chapter argued that during the period between roughly the 1850s and the 1880s several broad political, commercial and migratory processes were critical to the

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[136] Buchs, "Voyages en Abyssinie," 42.

[137] In early colonial Eritrea two colonial officials stand out as "specialists" of Islam and Eritrea's Muslim societies: Dante Odorizzi (Mantova 1867- Mersa Fatma Heri [Eritrea] 1917) and Ilario Capomazza (Pozzuoli 1875-Merca [Somalia] 1932). Odorizzi, the higher ranking of the two, served as *commissario regionale* of Massawa from 1908 to 1915. Both published valuable monographs and dictionaries related to Islam, customary law, and the Tigre, 'Afar, and Saho-speaking peoples of the colony. Puglisi, *Chi e?*, 67, 222.

[138] Capomazza, *Usanze islamiche hanafite*, 34ff.

development of the social and cultural constructions of identity of Massawa's leading strata. Those processes formed, enhanced and revitalized a sense of urban and urbane, Arabized and Islamic identity that Massawans pride themselves with to this day. To be Massawan meant to be part of an urban culture that perceived the town as an idealized and superior site of refined civilization, culture and religious piety. Such conceptions translated into owning a family name, residing in a coral stone house, holding Arabic and Arab culture in high esteem, and cultivating a strong sense of connection to the wider Muslim *umma*.

The forceful thrust of Egyptian imperialism in northeast Africa and the Red Sea region beginning in the 1820s gradually replacing the dwindling Ottoman dominance in the region was one pivotal factor. Egyptian imperial ambitions resulted in the effective occupation and adminstration of Massawa for several years in the late 1840s and between 1865 and 1885. The Egyptian occupation of Massawa transformed some of the town's local institutions and commercial life, and influenced culture and language.

The spectacular waves of migration to the port of a number of merchants and entrepreneurs - especially from the Arabian Peninsula and the Middle East - was another process that contributed to the development of specific socio-cultural constructions of identity. Some entrepreneurs were able to accumulate impressive wealth very rapidly. They subsequently became the town's leading elite, controlled some of its urban institutions, and enjoyed privileged relations with the authorities. Marriage and business alliances with the local 'native' elite offered both parties access into commercial webs of networks in the hinterland and across the seas, thus enabling them to perform their role as commercial mediators. The result was the creation of a tight-knit community that defined

itself and protected its privileged role in the mercantile milieu through the construction of communal boundaries by imposing their conception of Massawan citizenship. The patrilineal family was the critical institution embodying and articulating this process through the use of family names, the importance of family homes and through the fashioning of marriage alliances as a carefully calculated social strategy.

CONCLUSION: CONSTRUCTING A RED SEA SOCIETY

This study has focused on several critical decades in the making of a complex Red Sea urban coastal society in the second half of the nineteenth century. From a reduced and dormant island-port town with not more than a handful of coral stone buildings and a multitude of disorderly thatched huts in the first decades of the nineteenth century, Massawa transformed into a thriving and vibrant cosmopolitan Red Sea hub with extended urban spaces on the mainland, a small but visible class of very wealthy citizens, and a strong sense of local urban yet worldly identity in the closing decades of the century. Massawa was certainly not a new port town in the Red Sea – its foundation probably dates back a millennium. But as other seaports around the world its days of prosperity and decay fluctuated in accordance with the flow of a host of global, regional and trans-regional political and economic determinants. Such fluctuations may lead to the disappearance and emergence of ports but Massawa's advantageous geographical position as an accessible maritime gateway for the northeast African interior with its natural deep-water harbor secured its continued existence even through its lowest periods of stagnation, such as in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries.

In general, the historical development of towns and cities is a multi-layered process involving a host of factors and variables. However, some historical contexts have been intense periods of change and redefinition, catalyzing and accelerating the usually long and gradual processes of cultural and social formation. In a very central sense this work focused precisely on the reconfiguration, re-creation or "re-invention" of Massawa in the best part of the nineteenth century. The period opens windows on crucially

formative processes in the development of society, culture and senses of identity in a Red Sea port, whose results have carried well into the twentieth century and that in some way constitute the modern and distinctive kernel of the town's cachet. The conjuncture of commercial transformation, migration, religious influences, urban development and other processes from mid-century onwards not only *made* a "new" town but also created a new consciousness and new – one could say 'modern' - self-perceptions among its inhabitants. Social, cultural and religious concepts gained new meanings and values in this context. This dissertation attempted to unveil some of the complex webs of relationships, loyalties, alliances, dependencies and networks involved in the creation of a complex Red Sea society. It also showed how a set of common commercial interests, existential experiences and unifying cultural factors created a community whose members developed a distinct sense of being Massawan.

This study has also demonstrated that the features that made Massawa a distinctively Red Sea town, deeply influenced by Islamic and Middle Eastern Arab culture, as well as the various cultural discourses and self-designations of its inhabitants in the era of my concern, does not invalidate in any way its growth and development out of and within its own African environment. I have argued that it was the interaction of inland peoples and peoples from abroad (or sometimes only ideas) who met on the coast and made what I am calling a Red Sea society. But the commonalities that make Red Sea societies in al-Mūkha, Sawakin, Jiddah or Massawa are on a level that does not preclude the particularity of each one of these port-towns in accordance to their own development in specific historical and geographical contexts. Each of these towns developed within a distinctive geographic environment, political history, and with different peoples,

commodities and political economies in its hinterlands. I have argued how in Massawa local traditions and documentary evidence demonstrate the pivotal role of inland Tigre and Saho-speaking peoples in the establishment and development of religion, culture and society in Massawa. Processes of Arabization were never totally pervasive and in this context (as elsewhere and in other periods) one could still creatively and pragmatically manage and juggle different identities in different situations and contexts or in different localities. On a broader level, following the end of Italian colonial rule in 1941 and during the middle decades of the twentieth century, the sense of Arabism – that in many ways developed and crystallized in the period of this study – was politicized in the process of the development of Eritrean nationalism. The establishment of a local cultural association in Massawa as well as a political party - the National Moslem Party of Massawa - in the 1940s reflects the practical realization of a sense of consciousness with which the community, or parts of it, was imbued.[1] It also comes without surprise that some of the champions of the idea of Eritrea's Arab identity during the early part of the Eritrean national struggle were from Massawa and Hirgigo, the best example is undoubtedly 'Uthmān Ṣāliḥ Sabbi.[2] These issues, which might "complete," in a way, my nineteenth-century story, deserve to be further researched.

A pivotal relevant point that this study has not developed enough and that necessitates further treatment is the important role of the Tigre language in the greater Massawa area and its co-practice alongside Arabic, as well as other languages. As much

[1] As mentioned in the introductory chapter *Sayyid* Muḥammad 'Uthmān Ḥayūtī (1901- late 1990s) and Yāsīn Maḥmūd Bā Ṭūq (1914-1967), served as editors of *Ṣawt al-Rābiṭah al-Islāmiyya al-Iritriya*, newspaper of the Muslim League, in the 1940s.

[2] In the 1940s this was also true with others from Hirgigo, such as members of the Kurdī and Kekiya families, who emphasized their Arab identity and their attachment to Arab culture. Ṣāliḥ Aḥmad Kekiya opened an Arabic school in Hirgigo in 1944 while the prominent businessman Ḥasan Idrīs Kurdī – I recall while sifting through the British Military Administration's archives in Asmara – constantly referred to himself in official correspondence as an "Arabian merchant."

as Arabic was the literary and religious language in Massawa, most of the inhabitants of the conurbation used Tigre in day-to-day life, in the household, on the streets, and in the markets. Tigre-language was thus also one of the vehicles integrating, both migrants from abroad (Haḍramis, Egyptians, Hijazis, etc.) and from the hinterland (Saho and Afar-speaking families), into the original cultural community that developed in Massawa.[3]

Muhammad Ali of Egypt's successful campaigns against the Wahhābis in the Hijaz in the 1810s marked the beginning of a new relatively stable political order under the domination of one omnipresent power in the Red Sea region. Indeed, Egypt dominated the large majority of the Red Sea – both informally and formally - up to the early 1880s when European imperial powers carved out their Red Sea possessions during the Scramble for Africa. The introduction of steamship navigation to the Red Sea since 1829 heralded a revolution in transportation resulting in the rapid impetus of commercial enterprise, the reconfiguration of port hierarchies and the general intensification of movement of people, goods and ideas across the region and beyond it. Like other towns such as Jiddah, Hudaydah and Sawakin, Massawa was one of several Red Sea port towns whose fortunes rose as a result of these transformations, leading to a veritable commercial boom lasting from the 1850s to the 1880s. In this study I have attempted to show how in this specific historical and geographical context a configuration of larger political and economic forces has determined and deeply influenced the formation of the mercantile system that emerged in Massawa and its region in the second half of the

[3] Some sources – that await further scrutiny on my part - point to a distinct Massawa Tigre dialect. I am indebted to Fu'ād Makkī for his invaluable comments on the linguistic dimensions of the issue.

nineteenth century. This process defined and shaped the particular social and cultural make-up of Massawa's complex urban Red Sea society.

One of the salient aspects of the reconfiguration of Red Sea port hierarchies in mid-century involved the adjustment and re-arrangement of Arab and Indian commercial networks to the new mercantile landscape of the region. These networks dominated the trade of particular commodities, specific navigation routes, the means of transportation or the organization of credit relations by establishing socio-commercial webs linking ports ranging from the Indian region to the eastern Mediterranean Sea. More specifically this process resulted in an enhanced wave of migration to Massawa of a growing number of merchants, entrepreneurs, brokers and agents from Egypt, the Arabian Peninsula, the Indian region and beyond, from the 1850s onwards.

The transformation of the Red Sea in the middle decades of the century also had a deep impact on the hinterlands of ports and on the structure of relations between ports and their interior. Together with the change in port hierarchies and the resulting new wave of migration, all these processes combined led to the re-fashioning of Massawa's mercantile community. One of the central issues analyzed in this work is precisely some of the complex social and cultural mechanisms and strategies by which Massawa's mercantile elite shaped a janus-faced society enabling it to perform and protect its role as a community of commercial mediators. In the process, it developed a distinct cultural community.

From mid-century a group of families – some of whom only recently migrated to Massawa from abroad, others who were potent families of local origin constituting the traditional coastal elite - were able to accumulate much power on the local urban scene.

Some were also rapidly enriched through trade in textile, hides, ivory, civet, gold, slaves, and the lucrative marine products of the Dahlak archipelago. They benefited from the lack of an imposing ruling authority in Massawa resulting from Ottoman-Egyptian rivalries of mid-century over the Red Sea territories. They were able to hold central positions and control key urban institutions such as the Islamic court, the professional guilds and Massawa's Islamic institutions. This group of families shared certain material, political, social, and religious bases of power and authority granting its members high status and convertible social capital. It developed ideal values such as a keen sense of urban sophistication and superiority, a staunch devotion to Islam, a sense of connectedness to the wider *umma* of believers, and a distinctly 'Arab' cultural orientation. Even though Massawa has always been connected to the Arab and Islamic world in one degree of intensity or another, both the Egyptian occupation between 1865 and 1885 and the effects of the Islamic revival had a tenacious impact on the specific features of these values. This particular sense of identity defined Massawan citizenship and prescribed porous yet protective communal boundaries in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The institution of the family was central to Massawan society. Families were organized in patrilineal households, possessed family names, and resided in coral stone homes in marked contrast with non-urban surrounding societies. Business alliances between families, but even more so marriage patterns, clearly demonstrate how carefully thought out marriage strategies could offer access into commercial webs of networks both in the hinterland and across the seas. This process epitomizes the social and cultural mechanisms at work in the formation of a mediating community and joins the strong

refutation of perceptions of alien-ness and foreign-ness (or alternately 'Arabness') regarding the complex nature of western Indian Ocean port towns.

But the predominantly Muslim mercantile society in Massawa was soon challenged by several external and internal agents of transformation that eventually required it to re-define itself once again. The opening of the Suez Canal in Egypt in 1869 signaled impending change. Europeans began exploring the Red Sea coasts with a greater eye for economic exploitation. Many merchants – including Greeks, Armenians, Syrians, and Italians – began to settle in Massawa and other Red Sea ports, posing a genuine threat to Arab and Indian trading networks. In 1875 and 1876 the Abyssinians defeated aggressive Egyptian forces attempting to conquer Abyssinia. The Mahdiyya revolt in the Sudan in 1881 marked a decisive blow to Khedivial Egypt, which was taken over by the British in 1882. In 1885 an Italian force took Massawa, leading to the establishment of the *Colonia Eritrea* in 1890. Early Italian colonial authorities favored the Muslim community – perceived as more "civilized" - and granted it a special juridical status among the colony's subjects. The authorities also developed a relationship with the Khatmiyya *ṭarīqa* resulting in the officialization of the Eritrean branch of the Sufi brotherhood as the privileged representative of the colony's Muslims. The growth of its power and its influence over recently urbanized Tigre and Saho-speaking migrants to the conurbation also posed a challenge to Massawa's urban elite.

Massawa served as capital of the colony from 1890 to 1899. Major urban works were conducted during the period but soon enough the Italians transferred the impetus of urban growth and development to the new capital Asmara in the highlands. Massawa became the port of a colony, confined by an artificial space, with limited hinterland

markets. The turn of the century also signaled a renewed reconfiguration of port hierarchies in the Red Sea. Sawakin was abandoned in favor of the newly built Port Sudan, and the creation of Djibouti in 1896 replaced Zayla and Tajura in the Gulf of Aden. The building of the Addis Ababa – Djibouti railroad between 1897 and 1917 made Djibouti the shortest way to the sea for central, western and southern Ethiopia.

Massawa's mercantile community continued to adapt to changing conditions. Migration into the port continued in the latter part of the 1880s and 1890s; some Hadhrami laborers and entrepreneurs came in search for work and economic opportunities. Some such as a number of Hindu Banyans returned to India, or relocated to other ports such as Aden. The transformations and challenges brought about by colonial rule led to a diversification of occupations. But some also continued to own and operate import/export business firms and even opened offices in Asmara. Others served in clerical positions in the Italian administration, and yet others established agricultural concessions in the Semhar region (For example in Dogali and Weqiro). Some were able to make big money by supplying the Italian army and subsequently invest in real estate in Massawa and Asmara. Yet other Massawans provided maritime transportation services (to the Muslim pilgrims to Mecca, for example). In the early twentieth century some prominent Massawan merchants had an instrumental role in organizing the early Muslim community in Asmara and funding the construction of its institutions. As the world changed around them Massawans continued to adjust to new conditions with inventiveness and enterprise.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: **Massawa [Island] Families and Claimed Origins, 1910**

(Source: Odorizzi, D., *Il Commissariato Regionale di Massaua al 1° Gennaio 1910*, Asmara 1911.
Note: Spelling is left as in Italian original)

Constantinople
Bet Effendi
Bet Hèdar
Bet Silàgi

Tambièn
Bet Scek Adam Burcoi (Barkoi)

Hamasien
Bet Mustafa
Bet Samaeddin
Bet Goscio
Bet Burgi
Bet Haggi Mahbub

Galla
Bet Iacot
Bet Serur

Tzaura
Bet El Nati
Bet Cadadai
Bet Bisciàrai
Bet Margiuc

Hadendoa
Bet Mantai

Assaorta
Bet Zacari
Bet Habona
Bet Sciahàbi

Adulis
Bet Hadolài

Ad Temariam
Bet Carràni

Asfada (Habab)
Bet Carrar

Rassamo
Bet Dini

Dancalia
Bet Helàl
Bet Dàncali
Bet Hummoda

Mensa
Bet Mensaài

Balau (Belu)
Bet Scineti
Bet Dambàr
Bet Helu
Bet Iunes
Bet Saba
Bet Minni
Bet Naib Amer

Ad Cai (Habab)
Bet Abbàcar
Bet Dirscioi

Isola di Dohol
Bet Doholi

Egitto
Bet Hamdàn
Bet El Ghul

Bocàra (Iran)
Bet Càpili
Bet Bocàri

India
Bet Saiek
Bet Mia
Bet Hindi
Bet Cheireddin
Beet Hascem

Hadramaut (Yemen)
Bet El Sàfi
Bet Batuc
Bet Bahamdun
Bet Bamuscmusc
Bet Bacauàsa
Bet Bazahàm
Bet Bahaddàd
Bet Bahubesc'
Bet Babièr

Mecca (Arabia)
Bet Meccaali
Bet Massaua
Bet Scialabi
Bet Hassan

Bet Hascim

Medina (Arabia)
Bet Abbasi

Hodeida (Arabia)
Bet Nahàri
Bet Bani Bela
Bet Heidara
Bet Chehèl
Bet Ezzi Ahmed

Loheia (Arabia)
Bet Mohaggeb
Bet Mehri
Bet Said Ahmed Scerif
Bet Abdallah Ridèni

Zebid (Arabia)
Bet Hassan Iemàni

Bet El Faghi (Arabia)
Bet El Faghi

Gedda (Arabia)
Bet Sambul
Bet Labban
Bet Finghir
Bet Saluti
Bet Helàl

Tarim (Arabia)
Bet Said Mohammed Abdu
Bet Haioti
Bet Giafer

Abu Harisc (Arabia)
Bet Abu Ellama
Bet Heggi

Ahdel (Arabia)
Bet Abu Sciaren

APPENDIX 2: **Families of Hirgigo, Hitumlo, and Omkullo, 1910**

(Source: Dante Odorizzi, *Il commissariato regionale di Massaua al 1° gennaio 1910*, Asmara 1911)

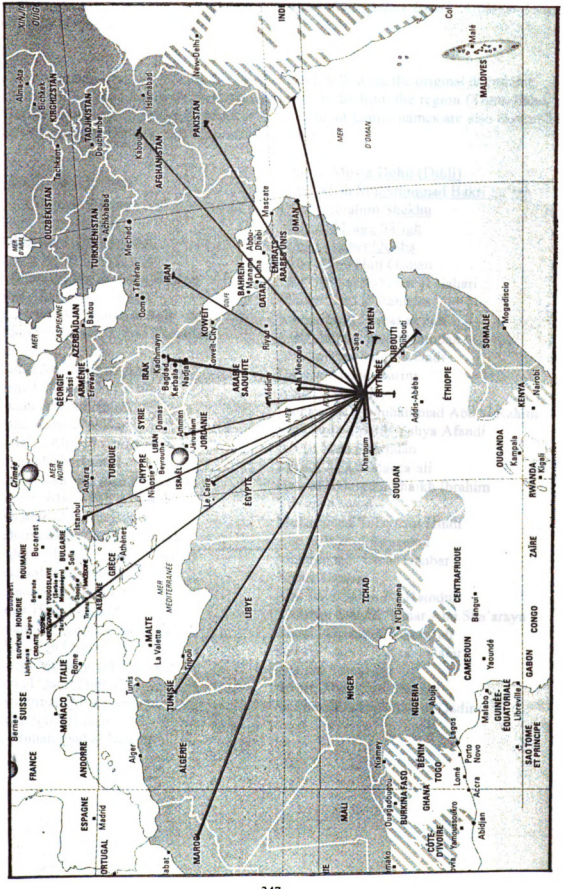
HIRGIGO	**origins**
Belew Bayt Hassan	Belew (tenant of *Na'ib*'s office)
'Ad Cicani	'Idda. (Founding tribe of Arkiko)
Bayt Shaykh Darwish	from Kassala
Bayt Sharaf	from *ashraf* tribes
'Ad Shawish	from "Arabia.
'Ad Sardal (Sirdar)	Belew
'Ad Shagarai	Belew
'Ad Hummad Fekak	Belew
'Ad Hamidoi	Belew
'Ad Shineti	Belew
'Ad Hassaballa	Belew Bayt Nafe'
'Ad Gimel	Belew Bayt Nafe'
'Ad Harak	From Adulis region (Saho-speaking)
'Ad Shaykh Mahmud	From Adulis region (Saho)
'Ad Galedda	From Adulis region (Saho)
'Ad Shaykh Da'ud	Meshalit (Tigre-speaking)
'Ad Soodgu	"Arabian coast
'Ad Sa'igh	"Arabian coast
'Ad Yamani	"Arabian coast
'Ad Hindi	India
'Ad Shawish Berhatu	Albanian origins
'Ad Bashnac'	Bosnian origins
'Ad Saloo	Turkish origin
'Ad Sharafay	Turkish origins

OMKULLO	**origins**
Bayt Hashim	from Massawa
Belew Bayt 'Usman Bayt Amir	Arkiko
Bayt Shineti	Arkiko
Bayt Sama Eddin	Arkiko
Bayt Nafe'	Arkiko
Bayt Holu	Arkiko
Bayt Shaykh Muhammad 'Usman	Embereme
Bayt Hadgoi	'Ad Asker (Tig.)
Bayt Wariai	Uaria (Tig.)
Bayt Shimo	Teroa (Saho)
Bayt Elghedenai	'Ad Sciuma (Tig.)
Bayt Ahmad Margiuk	Tzaura (Tig./Saho)
Bayt Shaykh Mahmud	'Ad Muallim (Tig.)
Bayt Darki	From Adulis region (Saho-speaking)
Bayt Hababay	Habab (Tig.)
Bayt 'Azaban	"Arab"

HITUMLO	**origins**
Bayt Fashat	Mashalit (Tigre-speaking)
Bayt Cotal	Mashalit

Bayt Hellik	Mashalit
Bayt 'Abd al Hay	Mashalit
Bayt 'Ali Desh	Mashalit
Bayt Hassan Iabat	Mashalit
Bayt 'Amir Gulai	Arkiko
Bayt Sa'igh	Arkiko
Bayt Shineti	Arkiko
Bayt Hola	Arkiko
Bayt Shalal	From Adulis region (Saho-speaking)
Bayt ''Adulai	Afar
Bayt Dankali	Afar
Bayt Shaykh Adam Barkoi	Tambien (in Tigray province)
Bayt Hejji	"Arab"
Bayt Mantai	"Arab"
Bayt al-Nati	"Arab"
Bayt Yaqut	"Arab"
Bayt Abu Sha'arayn	"Arab"
Bayt al-Safi	"Arab"
Bayt Ba'alawi (*ashraf*)	"Arab"
Bayt Sayyid Hussayn (*ashraf*)	"Arab"
Bayt 'Abbasi	"Arab"
Bayt Hindi	Indian
Bayt Mia	Indian
Bayt Abu 'Ilama	Tunisian (*qadi* is from this family)
Bayt Adantalib	Afflanda (Tigre-speaking)

APPENDIX 3: **The World of the Massawans (claimed places of origin)**



APPENDIX 4: **Muslim Merchants of Massawa, 1901**
(Source: *Archivio Storico Diplomatico Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Archivio Eritrea*, 349, fasc. 37 [3 January 1901]).

Key:
1. The most important merchants are noted in **bold**, following the original document.
2. Merchants whose family origins are confirmed to be from the region (Tigre, Saho, or 'Afar-speaking) are underlined . Most of those without family names are also assumed to join this category but have not been underlined here.

Al Na'ib Idris Hassan
Al Na'ib Idris Osman
'Abdu Idris Habona
Muhammad Tahir Shineti
Hassan Na'ib Idris Osman
Mohammad Na'ib Idriss Hassan
'Abd Allah Bakri Sa'igh
Al Seyyd 'Abd Allah al Safi
Al Seyyd Hassan 'Umar Ramadan
'Ali Yahya Afandi
Ahmad Muhammad Abassi
Ahmad 'Ali Minni (Menni)
Hassan Ahmad Haioti
Aman Aidarus al Bar
Al Na'ib Ahmad Abd al Karim
'Abd al Nabi Kabuli
'Abd al Rahman Akil Massawa
Ahmad 'Abd Allah Al Ghul
Muhammad Salim Batok
Muhammad b. 'Abdu Hamuda
Ibrahim Ahmad Sciallal (Shalal)
Mufarrah Said Mantai
Ahmad Said Hamidoi
'Umar Hoduk al Nati
Osman Muhammad Salih Yaqut
'Abd Allah Osman 'Adulai
Ahmad Muhammad Shineti
'Abd al Qadir Hamidoi
Muhammad Ali Zaccari
Giafar Nafi' Hadad
Ali Muhammad al Nati
Ahmad Mussa Dohli (Dihli)
'Abd Allah Muhammmad Bakri Sa'igh
Osman Ibrahim Shekhu
Mahmud Hagg Sa'igh
'Umar Giaber Qubba
'Abd Allah Hajj Osman
'Ali 'Abd al Rahman al Nahari
'Umar 'Abd al Rahman
Muhammad 'Umar al Safi
'Abd Allah Ahmad Hamdan
Muhammad Salim Afandi
Hassan Abd al-Karim
Abdal Aziz Mihri
Osman Na'ib Muhammad Abd al Rahim
Muhammad Salih Yahya Afandi
'Umar Bakri Hamdan
Shaikh Adam Macca'ali
Hamed Suleiman Shaikh Ibrahim
Yussuf Ahmad
Muhammad Sulayman Hindi
Abd al Wahid Ramadan
Muhammad 'Umar Danbar
'Umar Danbar
Abu Bakr Salim Ba Hamdun
'Uthman Sayyid 'Umar Abu Sha'arayn
Ahmad Hummad Macca'ali
Sayyid Husnai Yaqub Ja'afar
Ibrahim Sulayman
'Umar Abdal Jalil Hassan
Al Shaikh Adam 'Abd al Qadir

APPENDIX 5: **Textiles, Hides, Pearl and Mother of Pearl merchants in Massawa, 1912**

(Source: *Elenco dei commercianti, industriali, negozianti, imprenditori, appaltatori o fornitori, e degli esercenti professioni, arti e mestieri inscritti nel ruolo dei contribuenti della Colonia Eritrea (Esercizio 1912-13)*, Colonia Eritrea N. 58, Asmara 1913, 40-47).

Textiles	**Hides**	**Pearls and Mother of Pearls**
Danbar	Hamdan	Nahari
Ba Mushmush	Bashir	Ba Hamdun
Qabuli	Minni	Dossal
Nahari	Ba Zara'a	Dremshi (Ban.)
Abassi	Dali	Safi
Bashir	'Ubayd	Ba Tuq
Ba Hamdun	'Atiq	Nangi (Ban.)
Minni	Nahari	
Al Ghul	Ba Junayd	
Ba Zara'a	Nangi (Ban.)	
Dali		
Ismail		
Hilal		
Safi		
Ba Tuq		
Ubed		
Shamsaddin		
Shineti		
Bedawi		
Salim		
Faqih		
'Abd Allah		
Atik		
Ba Junayd		
Sharif		
+ many Banyans		

APPENDIX 6: **Muslim Notables (*a'yān*) of Massawa (1880s-1890s)**

(Sources: MICR Volume 8 (1880-1885) and ASDMAE, MAI, 34/1 [1886] and ASDMAE, AE 178 'Elenco dei Notabili di Massaua' [1893])

A.

'Alī *Afandī* Yaḥya
Muḥammad 'Abdu Aḥmad Ḥammūda
Aḥmad Sa'īd Ḥamdūy
Muḥammad Nūr al-Shīnītī (dec.)
Shaykh Muḥammad Sa'īd al- Shīnītī
Shaykh Muḥammad 'Uthman al-Shīnītī
Sayyid 'Abd Allāh al-Ṣāfī
'Abd Allāh al-Ghūl
Aḥmad *Afandī* 'Abd Allāh al-Ghul
Sayyid Abū Bakr 'Aydarūs
Shaykh Muḥammad 'Abbāsi
'Abd Allāh 'Umar Bā Junayd
Muḥammad 'Umar Bā Zara'a
'Abd Allāh Sirāj Abū 'Ilāma
Muḥammad Sālim Bā Ṭūq
Mūsā 'Umar Mantay
Muḥammad Ṭāhir Shīnītī
Sayyid Hāshim al-Mighranni
'Alī Aḥmad Banibala

B. (Roles, occupations and responsibilities in Early Italian Massawa, 1893)

Aḥmad *Afandī* al-Gul	Landlord of property, merchant, assistant judge in court, municipal commissioner, member of chamber of commerce.
'Abd Allāh Bā Junayd	Landlord, merchant, assistant judge in court.
Muḥammad 'Umar Bā Zara'a	Landlord, merchant, assistant judge in court, municipal commissioner, member of chamber of commerce.
Muḥammad Ṣālih Bā Tuq	Landlord, merchant, member of court of arbitration.
Shaykh Muḥammad 'Abbāsi	*waqf* administrator, judge in court.
Mūsā 'Umar Mantay	Merchant, municipal commissioner.
Muḥammad Ṭāhir Shīnītī	Landlord, merchant, member of [?]
'Abd Allāh Sirāj Abū 'Ilāma	Mufti, judge in the court.
Sayyid Abū Bakr Sa'īd 'Aydarūs	Qadi of Massawa.
Sayyid Hāshim al-Mīrghani	Holy man (It. *santone*, descendant of Prophet).

APPENDIX 7: ***Sādah* (*Sayyid*) Families in Massawa, 1860s-1880s**
(Source: MICR Volumes 8, 9, 11, 14, 16)

Ṣāfī
Hāshim
Ja'far
Bā 'Alawī ('Aydarūs)
Nahāri
Abū Sha'rayn
Turki
Maghribī
'Alī Salām
Shalabī
Adam Burkūy
Bāqir
Barakāt
Shakhray
Ramaḍān

APPENDIX 8: **The al-Ghūl Family**
(according to 'Alī Yūsuf 'Alī al-Ghūl b. 1937)

Yūsuf

|

Aḥmad

|

'Abd Allāh
(came to Massawa ca. late 1850s, from Egypt or Jiddah
ca. 70 years old in 1887)

|

Aḥmad *Afandī*
(b. Jiddah 1854-1919)
m. w. from Jiddah, Zaynab b. Yūsuf Dakhakhni
Had 17 children with several w.

|

'Alī -------- Ibrāhīm --- Muḥammad --- Ṣālih
(1^{st} w. Egyptian. 2^{nd} w. Eritrean =
'Aisha Sālim (Tigre, from Massawa/Hotumlo)
Had 5 children

|

Yūsuf --- Ṣulḥa
(1909-1964)
had 4 w.
m. Eritrean from Hamasien. Also m. Yemeni w.
Had 17 or 18 children

|

'Alī
(b. 1937 in Asmara)
Had 14 children. 5 died. In 2000 had 9 children

APPENDIX 9: **The Family of 'Ubayd Aḥmad Bā Ḥubayshī**

(according to Anīs 'Ubayd Bā Ḥubayshī and Aḥmad Muḥammad Bā Ḥubayshī)

Aḥmad

|

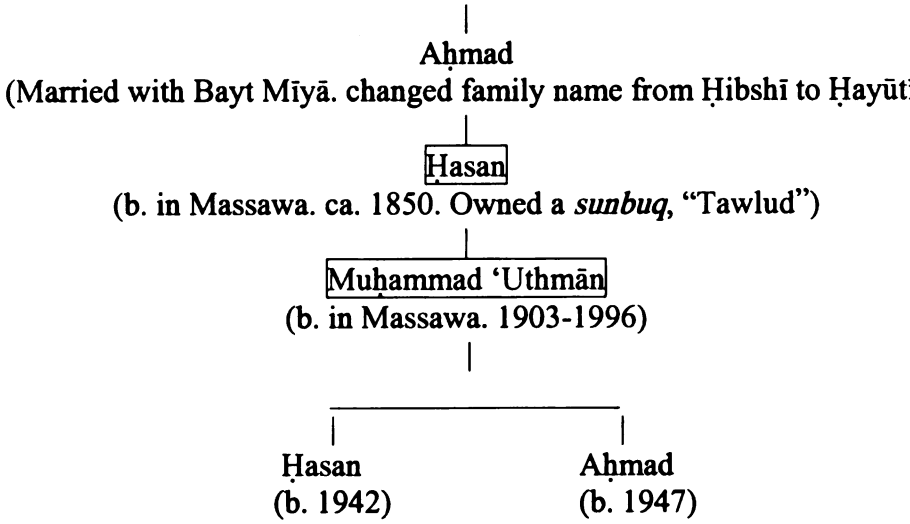
'Ubayd Aḥmad Bā Ḥubayshi
(1871-1934)
Came to Massawa from Da'wān, Hadhramawt in 1886
m. Fāṭma Adam

|

Aḥmad (1900-1959) (21 children from 6 wives)	Muḥammad (2 ch.)	Sa'īd (30 ch.)	'Umar (14 ch.)	Sālim (14-15 ch.)	Maryam	'Alīya	'Aisha

APPENDIX 10: **Pedigree (*nisbah*) of the Ḥayūtī Family**
(Source: MS. owned by Ḥasan Muḥammad ʻUthmān Ḥayūtī and Aḥmad Muḥammad ʻUthmān Ḥayūtī (Hadhrami origins).

Al-*muqaddam* Muḥammad
|
ʻAlī
|
Ḥasan
|
Muḥammad
|
Aḥmad
|
ʻAlī
|
ʻAlawī
|
ʻAlī
|
Abū Bakr al-Ḥibshī
|
ʻAlawī
|
ʻAlī
|
Aḥmad al-Quṣqī (died in Zaylaʻ)
|
ʻAlī
|
Ḥusayn
|
Shaykhān
(Believed to have emigrated to Massawa in 960H/1552)
|
ʻAlī
|
Aḥmad
|
Ḥasan
|
ʻAbd Allāh
|
Ḥasan



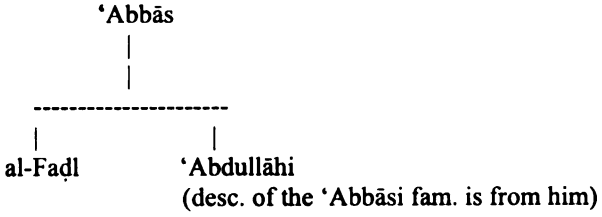
***Sayyid* Hassan Ahmad Haioti** was born in Massawa around 1850. He was the son of Sayyid Ahmad Hassan, a merchant in Massawa. He was employed by the Egyptian authorities and was sent to Asmara as the secretary of a mission to meet Ras Alula in 1884 in order to coordinate the liberation of Egyptians who were held in Kassala by the Mahdist Dervishes in accordance to the application of the Hewett agreements. After the Italian occupation of Massawa (1885) he was the agent of the company of Sayyid Hassan Mussa al 'Akkad Pasha, a rich Egyptian merchant exiled in Massawa (until 1913). He was involved in the construction of buildings in Massawa. After 1913 he had his own trading company.

***Sayyid* Muhammad 'Uthman Hassan Haioti** was born in Massawa in 1901. He graduated from the Bi-lingual (Arabic-Italian) school "Ferdinando Martini". He worked with the Italian authorities in various offices and also for several trading companies in Eritrea and Arabia (between1921-1936). In 1937 he accompanied the Gasparini mission to Yemen as a translator in order to renew friendship treaty dating from 1926. He was interested in Eritrean history and was one of the men who knew best the genealogies (family trees/origins) of the old families in Massawa and local historical events. He co-edited (with Yassin Mahmud Ba tuq) the Muslim League's newspaper Sawt al Rabitah al Islamiyya al Iritriya . He was member of the waqf council (since 1941). He was member of the Massawa landlords association (since 1942) and secretary of the Massawa schools committee (since 1942). He was among the founders of the Muslim League and president of its Massawa section between 1946 and 1949. He received the title of Afandi in 1937. He died in 1995

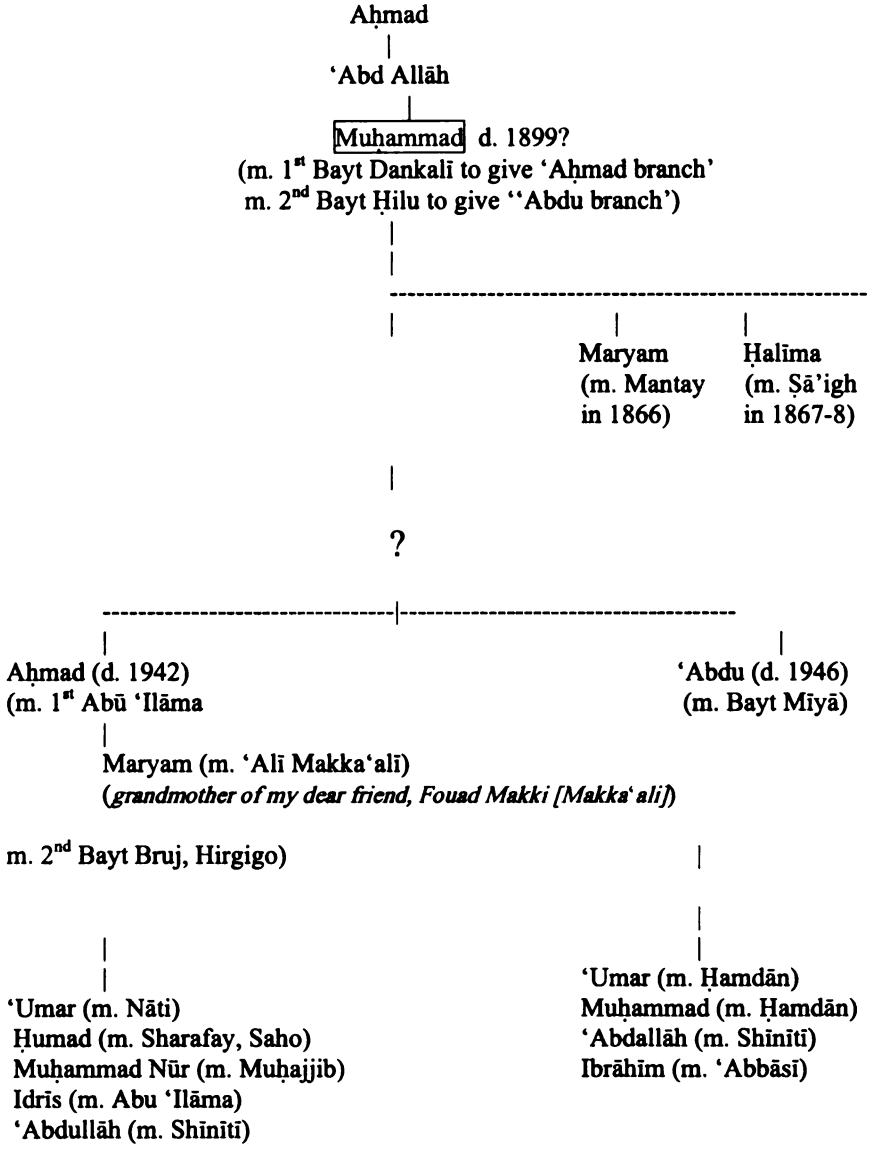
[Src. Puglisi, G., *Chi e? dell'Eritrea*, p.163, 209].

APPENDIX 11: **The 'Abbāsi Family**
(according to members of the family)

Distant origins in the Hijaz:



Since late 19th century (in Massawa):



APPENDIX 12: **The Nahārī Family**
(according to Maryam 'Umar al-Nahārī)

'Abdallah
(in Yemen)
|
|
'Abdalrahim al-Nahari (m. Fatma Umar Danbar [Below])
(came from al-Hudaydah (Yem.) to Dahlak. Later moved to Massawa. *Sada* family. Was *qadi*.)

|
|
'Abdulrahman --- (m. Amna from Harar, Ethiopia)
(d. in 1288/1870 Hamad/Muhammad 'Abdu Hammoda becomes legal guardian of children, [1 jum 1289 (1872), *MICR* 11/23e])
|
|
Ali — **'Umar**
b. in Massawa, ca. 1850-60. 4 Wives — (liberates slave, Sa'adallah al Sudani on 24 Rajab 1300. MICR 8/54a)
Wealthy pearl and mother-of-pearl merchant.
Gives power of attorney to Abdallah b. Sa'id Haidara
for purchasing house in Massawa from the heirs of Ali Muhammad al-Karani
[*MICR* 8/61b (5 hujj 1300/1883); 8/73a (4 Rab. I 1301/1884)]

ALI NAHARI – WIFE 1:

Ali ----- (m. Fatna al-Amin Danbar) (Below.from Massawa)

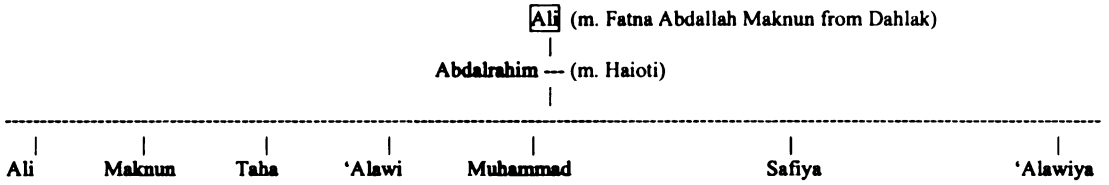
|
|

Muhammad (1st. m.Nahari)	**'Izz ad-Din** (1st.m. Ba Tuq)	**Abdulrahman** (m. Sa'igh)	**Taha** (m.Shineti)	**Maryam** (m.Nahari)	**Hawa** (m. Safi)	**Halima** (m. Safi)	**'Asha** (m. Ba 'Alawi)
	'Awad		Umar	Zaynab	Nur	Safiya	
	(2nd. m. Safi)		Fatna	Fatna	Taiba	Salha	
	Abdalqadir, Hassan, Muhammad		Yussuf	Nur	Zayna	Fatma	
	Ali, Sharifa, Hussayn		Muhammad	Abd Allah	Khadija	Alawiya	
			Maryam		Muhammad	Ahmad	
					Abd Allah	Muhammad	
						Ali & Husayn	

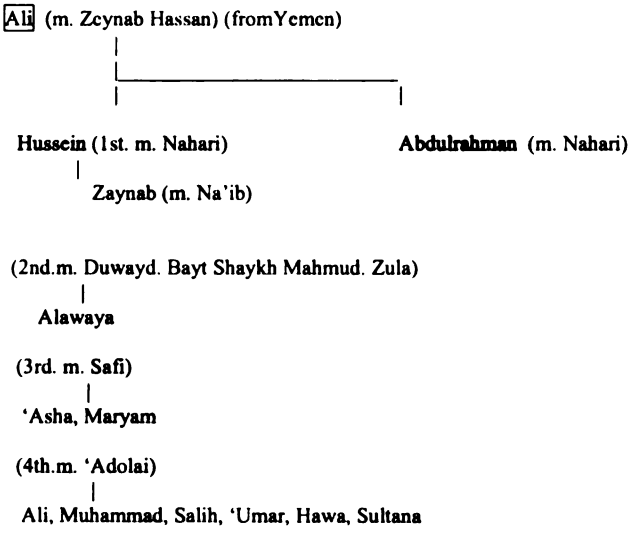
Ali (m. Safi)	Umar (m. Nahari)	Fatma (m. Safi)

(2nd. m. Nahari)
|
|
Musa, Hafsa, Zakiya, Mahmud, Taha, Abdalrahman

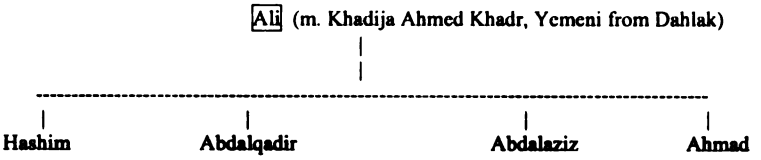
ALI NAHARI – WIFE 2:



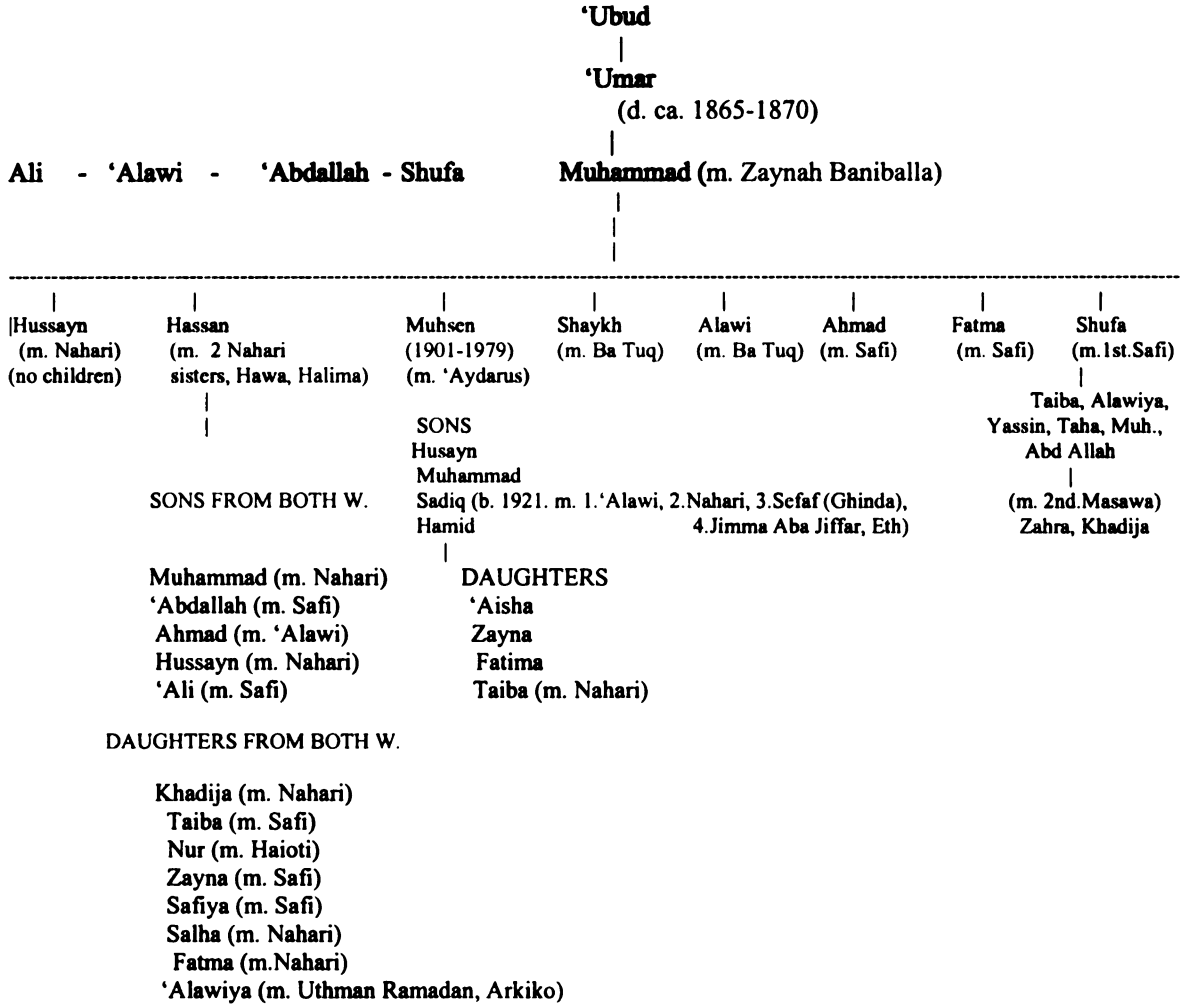
ALI NAHARI – WIFE 3:



ALI NAHARI – WIFE 4:



APPENDIX 13: The Ṣāfī Family



APPENDIX 14: **The Bā Ṭūq Family**

(according to Muḥammad Yāsīn Bā Ṭūq, b. 1948)

Muhammad Salim
(ca.1843-1935)
Egyptian Mother. Hadhrami father. Came to Massawa from Jiddah
m. 1st. Zaynab 'Abd al Nabih al Qabuli
Ita. honorary title *Cavaliere*

Mahmud (m. Ba Tuq) | **'Ali** (m. Ba Tuq) | **Salim** (m. Ba Hubayshi) | **Salih** (m. 'Aisha Sa'id from Hejaz) (d. 1995) | **Bahiya** (m. Ba Tuq) | **Zakiya** (m. Ahmad 'Ubay Ba Hubayshi) | **Maryam** (m. Idris 'Ali from Af'abat. 2nd. m. with jabarti) | **'Abdallah** (?)

Yassin
(1914-1967)
(m. 'Aisha 'Ali Ba Tuq
daughter of 'Ali, see above)

Muhammad – (brother) –(sister)—(sister)
b. 1948

2nd. wife

Muhammad Salim
m. 2nd. Fatma ?

Hassan
(1909-1997)

3rd. wife

Muhammad Salim
m. 3rd. Bayt Masawa

Safiya (m. Ba Tuq) | **Rugaya** (m. Hussayn Muhammad Hilal)

Muhammad Salim Ba Tuq born in Jiddah ca. 1843. Follows his Egyptian mother to Massawa in 1855. From a young age he trades in textiles. With Ahmad Beik al Ghul, he provided imported bovine and colonial products to the Italian troops in Massawa. He traded in coffee and cereals with Ethiopia. In 1908 he obtained an agricultural concession of 906 Hectares near Weqiro. In 1915 he bought 20 *sanabik* (boats) for transporting pilgrims to Jiddah. The service was recommended by the Italian official authorities as well as those of the Hejaz. In 1935 he terminated this service. He constructed in Massawa ca. 40 buildings and ca. 60 in Asmara. Received many honorific titles from the Italians. From 1908 he was the president of the *waqf* committee for Eritrea. Died at Massawa October 2, 1935.

Yassin Mahmud Ba Tuq was born in 1914 in Massawa. He attended a qur'anic school, then "Andreoli" school, and finally the bilingual (Arabic-Italian) "Ferdinado Martini" school in Massawa until 1926. He carried on studying Islam with the elders at Massawa. He was interested in Arabic literature and Islamic history. He studied journalism by correspondence at the Fayek al Jawhari Institute of Cairo. He then became correspondent for *Corriere dell'Impero* (Arabic section) in Massawa. From 1932 to 1936 he managed with his grandfather, Muhammad Salim, the family agricultural company at Weqiro. From 1937 to 1944 he is an independent merchant. He becomes president of the schools committee of Massawa. He was one of the founders of the Muslim League in 1946. In the late 1940s he was also co-editor (with *Sayyid* Muhammad 'Uthman Haioti) of the Muslim League's newspaper, *Sawt al Rabitah al Islamiyya al Iritriyya.* Was member of the Eritrean Assembly. From 1957 to his death in August 31, 1967 he was the mayor of Massawa. He wrote a history of Massawa (manuscript lost). His father **Mahmud** was a very rich merchant (wealthier than his father, **Muhammad Salim**).

Hassan Muhammad Salim Attends "Ferdinando Martini" school. From 1920s administers family business. Manages agricultural concession in Weqiro. Official transporter and leader of Eritrean pilgrims to Mecca in Italian era.

[Src. Puglisi, G., *Chi e? dell'Eritrea*, p. 163, 166, 210.

APPENDIX 15: **Sample of Marriage Linkages among Families in Massawa, c. 1850s-1950s**

(Sources: MICR, Interviews 1999-2000 and Letter from Fu'ād Makkī, 30 July 2004. The lists are representative, not comprehensive).
[in alphabetical order]

'Abbās	Dankali, Hilu, Abu 'Ilama, Burij, Mia, Nati, Sharafai, Muhajjab, Shineti Hamdan, Sa'igh, Mantai, Mansai, Doholi, Maka'ali
Adam Burkūy	Maka'ali, Dankali, al-Ghul
'Adūlāy	Mantai, Maghribi, Hamdan
Afandī	Hammoda, Shineti, 'Abbasi, Mia, Nati , 'Ad Shaykh family
Bā 'Alawī	'Aydarus, Safi, Damrik
Bā Ḥamdūn	'Ad Shaykh (Tig.)
Bā Ṭūq	Ba Hubayshi, Qabili, Hilal, Masawa, Safi, Nahari, Ba Zaham, Idris 'Ali (Tig.), Jabarti man
Bā Zaham	Ba Tuq, Ba Hubayshi, Ba Samad, al-Amudi
Dankalī	Turki, Shineti, Abbas, Adam Barkoi
Al-Ghūl	Kurdi, Sanusi, Hanbuli, Sakira, 'Antabli, Salim, 'Adulai
Ḥayūtī	Safi, Mia, Nahari
Hindī,	Faqih, Sahay, Mia
Ja'far	Habuna, Nasir
Khayr al-Dīn	Nati, *Bayt* Shaykh Mahmud (henceforth BSM), 'Adulai, Mihri
Maka'alī	Adam Barkoi, Yaqut, Mia, 'Abbasi, Hashim, Minni
Mantay	Belew, Masawa, 'Abbas, 'Adulai, 'Ali Salam
Nahāri	Danbar, Maknun (Dah.), Zaynab Hassan (Yem.), Khadr (Yem.), Safi, Sa'igh, Shineti, Ba 'Alawi, Haioti, Nahari, Ba Tuq, BSM, 'Adulai
Nāti	Afandi, Hamdan, Khayr ad-Din, Abbasi, Hindi, Sa'igh, BSM, Sefaf (Ghinda)
Qūlāy	Turki, Mantai
Ṣāfī	Banibala, Nahari, Haioti, Masawa, Shalabi 'Aydarus, Bayt Qadi (Zula), Ba Tuq, Ramadan (Ark.), Hamdan
Shīnītī	Afandi, 'Abbas, Nahari, Dankali
Turki	Abu Sha'rayn, Dankali, Qulay
Wahhāb al-Bārri	Suri, Ba Hamdun, Hilal, Nakhrai, Nabab (Tigre)

APPENDIX 16: **Main Line of Descent of the 'Ad Shaykh Family (Semhar and Sahel, excluding Barka)**

'Uthmān b. Muḥammad

(came from Mecca via Sawakin to the eastern Sudan)

|

'Āmir

|

Maḥmūd

|

Naf'ūtay

(b. in Kassala d. Galab Tsagla)

|

Ḥāmid

(Began conversions of Bayt Asghede in Sahel. With his son al-Amīn, he opened quranic schools, mosques and religious centers)

|

Al-Amīn

(Gained widespread reputation in Sahel, especially among the Bayt Asgede, in early 19th c. His sons became leaders of the 'Ad Shaykh in the Sahel and Semhar, while others moved to the Barka region in the western lowlands. Some sources claim he met Shaykh Muḥammad 'Uthmān al-Mīrghani, founder of the Khatmiyya *ṭarīqa*, who appointed him *khalīfa*. Died at Rehib in Ḥabab area. *Ziyāra* to his tomb near Nakfa or Afabat? [Shalab, south of Mai Adarde?, Odorizzi, 174, says near Taklay in Sahel])

|

'Alī

(Preached among the Bet Asghede. d.1838-9 in Tahra, 'Ansaba region)

|

Muḥammad

(c.1795-1877. Spent 12 years in Arkiko, then settled in Emberemi ca. 1840. Important yearly *ziyāra* to his tomb in Emberemi on 13 *ṣafar*. Among his sons were 'Umar, Muḥammad 'Uthmān*, 'Abd al-Qādir, Mālik, Ḥummad, Yāsīn and Muḥammad. Most lived in Semhar).

|

I

'Umar - **'Abd al-Qādir**

(d.1885-6) (was chief of Emberemi. d. 1899)

|

Al-Amīn |

(d. 1893-4)

| **al-Amīn 'Abd al-Qādir**

'Āmir (chief of Emb. in 1910. b. 1872)

(d.1933-4. chief of 'Ad Shaykh dependant on Keren *commissariato* in 1910)

* Muḥammad 'Uthmān lived in Hotumlo. He had much cattle in Saati, Sabarguma, Ghinda and among the 'Ad Tamaryam. Perini, R., *Di qua al Mareb (Marèb-Mellàsc)*, Firenze 1905, 287. On 14 April 2000 I visited his *ḍarīḥ* (tomb) in the northern part of Hotumlo [*Hotumlo superiore*]. Odorizzi notes that he died in 1898. He also notes that the *ziyāra* to Muḥammad 'Uthmān b. Muḥammad b. Alī's tomb is performed on the first day of the Islamic year together with another local (Hotumlo-centered) *ziyāra*, to Shaykh Aḥmad al-Najāsh's tomb. Odorizzi, *Il commissariato regionale di Massaua*, 169-170.

APPENDIX 17: **The Khatmiyya *ṭarīqa* in Eritrea**

Muḥammad 'Uthmān al-Mīrghani

(1792/3-1852)

(3 trips through Eritrea , c.1817-1830s)

|

Muḥammad Sirr al Khatm	al-Ḥasan	Ja'far	**Hāshim**
(d. Mecca 1855)	(d. Kassala1869)	(d. Mecca 1860-61)	(chief of *ṭarīqa* -Eritrea, 1885-1901) d. Hotumlo 1901
|		|	|
Muḥammad 'Uthmān Tāj al-Sirr (influential in Semhar, Sahel, Akkala Guzay late 1860s-1885) m. to sharīfa Maryam b. Hāshim. See here. d. Sawākin 1903		Abū Bakr	**Alawiya** **Maryam**
		|	
		Ja'far (chief of *ṭarīqa* in Eritrea, 1903-) d. Keren 1943 ?	

APPENDIX 18: **Mosques of the Massawa Conurbation**

(Sources: Dante Odorizzi, *Il commissariato di Massaua al 1o gennaio 1910*, Asmara 1911, 119-120, 160-1, 169. Ibrahim al-Mukhtar Ahmed 'Umar, *al-Jami' li-akhbar jazirat Badi'*, (Unpublished Manuscript), Completed in Asmara, 1958, 57, 59-61).

Odorizzi (1910)

al-Mukhtar (1958)
(only additional mosques noted)

MASSAWA-ISLAND
(*including 'Abd al Qadir Peninsula and Shaykh Sa'id island*)

(in stone)
Shaykh Hammal al-Ansari *
Abu Hanifa ("Jami' al-Hanafi") * w
Jami' Al-Shafi'i * w
Shaykh 'Abd Allah al Mahdi Awmudui ∅ w [b]
Al-Dhahab li-Abu 'Ilama w • [c]
Adubash ∅ • w [d]
Sayyid Darwish ∅
Macca'ali ∅ •
'Abd Allah Sa'ad al-Yafi'i ∅ w [e]
al-Ashraf
Shaykh Muhammad 'Uthman al-Mirghani ♠
'Abd Hamid ∅ [f]
Shaykh Ibn 'Ilwan ∅ [g]
Hussayn Basha ∅ w [h]
Shaykh Sa'id al-'Amudi ∅ [i]
'Abd al Qadir (al-Jilani?) ♣ [j]

Muhammad Masawa • [a]
Adam 'Abid
Al-Zayla'i
Muhammad Sabah ∅
Ibrahim wa-l-Shaykh Salih ∅
Muhammad 'Umar ∅
Khawajat Safar al-Rumi ∅ w [k]

HIRGIGO

(in stone)
al-Jami' (Jami' al Shaykh Hamid) *w
al-Mirghani ♠
Shaykh *Hajj* Ahmad
Shaykh 'Abd al-Qadir ♣
Shaykh 'Abd al Kamil
1958)♠
Abu 'l-Hassan al-Shadhili ♥
Shaykh Isma'il Hadhrami
Shaykh Abu Shanba
Shaykh Ahmad al-Badawi
(in wood)
al-'Alawi
(in straw)
Sayyid Muhammad Burij •
Sayyid Muhammad 'Uthman al-Mirghani ♠
Bayt Shaykh Mahmud
Bayt Shaykh Da'ud
Ibn 'Iluan
Shaykh 'Abd Allah Sa'ad (al-Yafi'i?)

al-Sharqiyya
Faqih Ahmad ad-Din *al-Minifirawi*
Sayyid Idris
al-Sawi (Issawi?)
Sayyid Ja'afar al-Mirghani (stone, in

al-Rifa'i

'Abd al-Wahid
Shaykh Ahmad al-Najash ♣?
Shaykh Muhammad Hamid *Minifirawi*
Ahmad Din
Sayyid Tahir
Sayyid Dirhawi
Al-Mirghani ♠
Bayt Zubayr
Shaykh Muhammad Jabir •
Shaykh Muhammad 'Ali

OMKULLO

(in stone)
Sayyid Mahjub Mirghani ♠
Na'ib Idris 'Uthman
(in straw)
Sayyid Ja'afar al-Mirghani ♠
Hashim 'Ali
Shaykh Mahmud Muhammad Salih
Hashim *al-Sayyid* Musa
Shaykh Mahmud Tisha? (in wood)
Shaykh Hamad Muslim

HITUMLO

(in stone)
Shaykh Abu 'l-Hassan Shadhili (*Jami'* in 1958) *♥
Sayyid Ja'afar al-Mirghani ♠
Khalifa al-*Naqib* 'Umar
Shaykh Adam Burkoi •
Sayyid Masawa •
(in wood)
Shaykh Muhammad Argubba
(in straw)
Sayyid Hashim al Mirghani (in stone in 1958) ♠
Shaykh Adam Ishaq
Sayyid Hassan 'Ali (in wood in 1958)
Shaykh Muhammad Khiyyar (in wood in 1958)
Shaykh Ahmad al-Najash ♣?
Shaykh Mahjub Malik
Bayt Mantai •
Bayt Sa'igh •
Shaykh Ahmad Shalal •
'Ad Darqi
'Ad Darqi (*al-thaniya*)
Darwishawi
Muhammad Khawaza
al-Ashraf
Muhammad Ibrahim al-Amin
Shaykh Hamid
Najash b. Muhammad 'Ali
'Abd al-Rahim 'Aqid Massawi •
'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani (in stone) ♣
Muhammad 'Umar Yaqut •
Danani Ab?

AMATERE

Sayyid Muhammad 'Uthman al-Mirghani ♠
Shaykh Muhammad b. 'Ali
Sayyid Muhammad b. Idris
Shaykh 'Uthman Habuna •
Al-Shadhili ♥

EDAGA BA'RAI

Jami' al-*Sayyid* 'Abd Allah al-Mahjub * ♠
'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani ♣

Sayyid Muhammad Hashim al-Mirghani ♠
Abu Hassan al-Shadhili ♥
Sayyid Muhammad 'Uthman al-Mirghani ♠
Sayyid Muhammad 'Uthman al-Mirghani (2nd) ♠
Shaykh 'Uthman 'Alawi Shaykh Buri

KEY:

∅ Mosque names followed by this sign are noted as "inexistent/not in use" by Ibrahim al-Mukhtar in 1958.

* Friday mosque (Ar. *Jami'*)

♠Mosques associated with the Khatmiyya *tariqa*.

♣ Mosques associated with the Qadiriyya *tariqa*.

♥ Mosques associated with the Shadhiliyya *tariqa*.

• Mosques with prominent local family names, or associated with families of the Massawa conurbation.

w Mosque possessing endowment/s (Ar. sing. *waqf*) acc. to MICR (1860s-1880s)

[a] Building existent but not in use currently. Located near the Hanafi Friday mosque. Sayyid Muhammad Masawa (d. ca. 1869) was a noted *sharif* in Massawa where he served as qadi some time in the 1840s or 1850s.

[b] Was located where the *ma'had al-dini al-islami* is located today. Mentionned in *waqfiyya* document in 1868.

[c] Building existent but not in use currently. Mentioned in *waqfiyya* in 1871 (the *wakil* is identified as Isma'il Idris Habuna). Odorizzi noted that this mosque was dedicated to Shaykh Muhammad Nur Abu 'Ilama (from Abu Arish in Arabia).

[d] According to Odorizzi this mosque was the property of the 'Adulai family. Mentionned in *waqfiyya* in 1870.

[e] Mentioned in *waqfiyya* in 1870.

[f] Also known as Hamid 'Abid. The mosque is currently not in use. It is located opposite the main entrance of the Shaykh Hammal complex. This mosque followed the Maliki *madhhab*.[1]

[g] Was located in the current port area.

[h] Was located where 'Hotel Torino' is located today until it was destroyed in the 1921 earthquake. Mentionned in *waqfiyya* in 1870.

[i] Located on the islet know by the same name. Dedicated to Shaykh Sa'id al-'Amudi from Jaydun in Hadhramawt.

[j] *Mazar* of the Qadiriyya tariqa, founded by 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani (1077-1166)

[k] One source noted that Khawajat Safar al-Rumi died in this mosque in 953/1536 (al-Mukhtar, *al-Jami'*, 47). Mentionned in *waqfiyya* in 1870.

[1] Interview with Nafi' 'Ali Khaydar, Hirgigo, 20 March 2000.

APPENDIX 19: **Qāḍīs and Muftīs of Massawa, c. 1603-1960s.**
[The table is incomplete. Dates should be taken with caution].
(Source: Ibrahim al-Mukhtar, *Al-Jami' li akhbar jazirat Badi'*, (MS) Asmara 1958 and Abdu Ali Habib, 'History of Massawa in the nineteenth century' B.A. Thesis, HS I University, Addis Ababa, 1973)

1. Ahmad *Afandi* al-Faqih Badir *al-Harqiqawi* (1012/1603)
2. Muhammad b. Ahmad al-'Abbasi *al-Massawi* (1013/1604)
3. Ahmad 'Abd Badir *al-Harqiqawi* (1133/1720)
4. *al-Faqih* Sulayman Muhammad al-'Abbasi *al-Massawi* (n.d.)
5. Ahmad 'Abbas *al-Massawi* (1187/1773)
6. Rajih (?) 'Abbas *al-Massawi* (1202/1787)
7. Mahmud b. Muhammad Sa'id Nasir (1220/1805)
8. Qadi Da'ud (n.d.)
9. al-*Sayyid* Muhammad Masawa (al-'Alawi) (n.d.)
10. Muhammad b. Ahmad Sadwa (1274/1857)
11. 'Umar b. Mahmud al-Baduri *al-Harqiqawi* (1279/1862)
12. 'Abdu b. Muhammad Ba Alawi b. Abu Bakr al-'Aydarusi alati? (n.d.)
13. Darwish Tahir *al-Shankiti* (?) (1280/1863)
14. Ahmad Bakr Hamdan *al-Massawi* (1281/1864)
15. Ibrahim b. 'Ali Harib *al-Ta'ifi* (1281/1864)
16. Mahmud b. Nur b. Nasir (*al-Sihawi*?) (n.d.)
17. al-*Sayyid* Adam Isma'il *al-Harqiqawi* (n.d.)
18. 'Abd al Qadir Hussayn *al-Sawakini* (n.d.)
19. 'Ali Yassin *al-Sudani* (1298/1880)
20. Abu Bakr al-Aydarus b. 'Abdu b. Muhammad Ba 'Alawi (1300/1882)
21. 'Ali 'Abdalkarim *al-Masri* (1303/1885)
22. 'Abd Allah Siraj 'Ali Abu 'Ilama (from 1304/1886)
23. Muhammad Nur 'Abd Allah Siraj Abu 'Ilama (1318/1901)
24. Hassan 'Uthman *al-Harqiqawi* (1341/1922)
25. 'Umar Mahmud al-Assaortawi *al-Sihawi* (Saho) (1360/1942)
26. Hamid Muhammad Nur Abu 'Ilama *al-Massawi* (1361/1943)
27. Idris Adam Fakak *al-Mariyawi al-Maliki* (1374/1956)
28. Mahmud 'Ali Fa'id (?) *al-Maliki* (1374/1956 until his death) (from Keren area)
29. Al-Amin Taha al-Amin *al-Maliki* (from Massawa)
30. 'Ali 'Umar 'Uthman *al-Assawortawi al-Sahawi al-Hanafi* (1383/1965) (from 'Addi Keyh)

Muftis
1. Mufti 'Ali Abu 'Ilama Muhammad Nur (served c.1860s. d. 1866)
2. Mufti Ahmad Khalil (?-1882)
3. Mufti Ibrahim 'Abd al-Samih (1882-1883)
4. Mufti 'Abd Allah Siraj 'Ali Abu 'Ilama (1884 or 1886-1901) [served as qadi before)

APPENDIX 20: **Demographic Figures for the Massawa Conurbation, 1886 and 1910**

A. Estimate and Break-up of Massawa (old town) Population, 1886

(Source: Survey conducted by Lt. Brengola of the IIIrd Battaglione d'Africa. Published in *L'Esplorazione commerciale*, Fascicolo II, febbraio 1886, p. 38)
Note: the designations have been left as published.

Massawans	3302	(63.2% of total)
Saho	468	(8.9%)
Arabs	358	(6.8%)
Danakils	346	(6.6%)
Sudanese	275	(5.2%)
Abyssinians	235	(4.5%)
Banyans	62	(1.2%)
Greeks	51	(1%)
Italians	45	
Indians	30	
Turks	25	
Armenians	15	
French	11	
Maltese	2	
Germans	1	

TOTAL:5226

B. 'Population of Massawa, Edaga Be'rai, Ela Ghul and Ad Aflanda: 'Colonial Subjects' and 'Assimilated', 1910 (excluding Europeans and excluding Hotumlo, Umkullo and Arkiko)

(Source: Odorizzi, D., *Il Commissariato regionale di Massaua al 1o Gennaio 1910*, Asmara 1911, 125).

Colonial Subjects (*The ethnic typifications are left as in the original document*)		
Massawan families resident in Massawa	495	
Saho Tribes	138	
Abyssinians from Eritrea	317	
Italian Somalis	14	
Afflanda and Meshalit	315	
Sahel tribes	216	
Beni Amer	97	
Other tribes of Eritrea	114	
	Total: 1706	
"Assimilated"		
Arabs (Yemen, Hadhramawt, Jidda)	878	
Indians	148	
Egyptians	46	
Sudanese and Takruris	659	
Galla and Swahili	159	
Ethiopian subjects	261	
Somalis of Nogal	3	
British Somalis	22	
	Total: 2176	TOTAL: 3882

APPENDIX 21: **Sample of Slave Manumission in the Sharī'a Court, 1868-1885**

(Source: MICR 8, 10, 11, 14)

F = female, M = male

MICR	YEAR	MANUMITTED	MANUMITTER
11/19a	1286/1868-9	Faraja (F)	Abu Bakr Mantai
11/26a	1290/1872-3	Sa'ida (F)	Yussuf Muhammad and Mahmud Baho
14/10a	1290	Bilal *al qallawi* ('Galla') (M)	Yussuf b. Ibrahim b. Muhammad Safin
14/10b	1290	Khadar *al qallawiya* (F)	*Hajj* Ahmad Khalil (future Mufti of Mass.)
14/10c	1290	Barli *al qallawiya* (F)	Ahmad Muhammad Sa'igh
14/10d	1290	Silla *al shanqalawiya* (F)	Ahmad Muhammad Sa'igh
14/11a	1290	Sa'ada *al shanqalawiya* (F)	'Abd al Karim b. 'Abd al Rahim Na'ib
14/11b	1290	? *al shanqalawiya* (F)	'Abd al Karim b. 'Abd al Rahim Na'ib
14/11c	1290	Madina *al bariyawiya* (F)	'Ali Ahmad Muhammad al Sumali
14/11d	1290	Jamila *al bariyawiya* (F)	'Ali Ahmad Muhammad al Sumali
14/19b	1290	Bakhita *al shanqalawiya* (F)	Muhamamad 'Abd Allah 'Abbas
14/19c	1290	Sa'ada *al habashiya* (F)	Muhamamad 'Abd Allah 'Abbas
14/19d	1290	Sa'adia (F)	Muhamamd 'Abd Allah 'Abbas
14/20b	1290	Bakhita b. 'Abd Allah *qallawiya* (F)	*Sayyid* Muhammad from Istanbul
14/20c	1290	Hassina *al qallawiya* (F)	*Sayyid* Hafiz b. Muhammad from Istanbul
14/20d	1290	Zaynab b. 'Abd Allah *al habashi* (F)	Faraj *Afandi* Abd al-'Al *Bikbashi*[1]
14/20e	1290	Hawi b. 'Abd Allah *al sudani* (F)	Faraj *Afandi* Abd al-'Al (al-Hal?) *Bikbashi*
14/20f	1290	Fatma b. 'Abd Allah *al sudani* (F)	Faraj *Afandi* Abd al-'Al (al-Hal?) *Bikbashi*
14/21e	1290	Baraka *al shanqalawiya* (F)	Muhammad b. Ahmad Janbaqu (Harqiqu)
14/22a	1290	Zaynab *al qallawiya* (F)	Egyptian officers
14/22b	1290	Salama *al qallawi*yya (F)	Shaykh 'Abd Allah 'Ali *Afandi*
14/22c	1290	Faraj al bariyawi (M)	'Issa b. 'Abd al Rahman Daqdaq (Harqiqu)
14/22d	1290	Khadija *al qallawiya* (F)	'Issa b. 'Abd al Rahman Daqdaq (Harqiqu)
14/23a	1290	Dak *al shanqalawiya* (F)	'Ali 'Abdu Faqih
14/23b	1290	Sa'ida *al shanqalawiya* (F)	'Ali 'Abdu al Faqih
14/23d	1290	Baraka *al qallawiya* and her son Sa'id	-
14/23f	1290	Daq *al shanqalawiya* (F)	'Abd Allah 'Umar 'Ali 'Adulai
8/8a	1298/1880-1	Faraj (M)	Muhammad Al Amin from Darita in Abyss.
8/10a	1298	Dara (F)	Mahmud Isma'il from 'Asus
8/10b	1298	Muhammad *al habashi* (M)	Mahmud Isma'il from 'Asus
8/12a	1299/1881-2	Turanja *al habashiya* (F)	Sayyid Muhammad Ibrahim from Massawa
8/12b	1299	Fala (F)	Sayyid 'Abdallah Shalah from Harqiqu
8/13a	1299	Fadl Wasi' (M)	'Abdallah Yussuf Sa'igh (Massawa)
8/15a	1299	Za'afran *al habashiya* (F)	Serur Ahmad Aga
8/15b	1299	Awwal Khayyr (M)	Muhammad Al Amin Danbar
8/18a	1299	Faraj 'Abdallah (M)	Muhammad Khaydar
8/20a	1299	Amna *al habashiya* (F)	Egyptian Authorities in Massawa
8/20b	1299	Warakay (M)	Egyptian Authorities in Massawa
8/22b	1299	'Abdallah *al habashi al aswad* (M)	Egyptian Authorities in Massawa
8/23a	1299	Turanja *al habashiya* (F)	Egyptian Authorities in Massawa
8/23b	1299	'Aisha 'Abdallah *al habashiya* (F)	Egyptian official
8/23c	1299	Nasib (M)	Egyptian Authorities in Massawa
8/24a	1299	Turanja *al habashiya* (F)	Egyptian Authorities in Massawa
8/24b	1299	Sa'ada (F)	Egyptian Authorities in Massawa
8/25a	1299	Bahta Diro *al habashiya* (F)	Abdallah Bey al Ghul, ch of *majlis Mass.*

[1] Battalion commander

8/25b	1299	Salam (M)	Egyptian Authorities in Massawa
8/25c	1299	Baraka (F)	Egyptian Authorities in Massawa
8/25d	1299	Shamo *al habashi* (M)	Egyptian Authorities in Massawa
8/28b	1299	Halima (F)	Zaynab b. 'Ali Tajin, from al-Fayyum (Egy)
8/28c	1299	Sabr Jamil (M)	Egyptian Authorities in Massawa
8/29a	1299	Almaz *al habashiya* (F)	Shaykh Mahmud Adam Muhammad
8/31b	1299	Jawhar *al habashi* (M)	Hassan Bey 'Azmi
8/34b	1299	Turanja *al habashiya* (F)	Egyptian Authorities in Massawa
8/37a	1299	Bahr al Nil (F)	Hassan *Afandi* Rashid (Egy. officer)
8/37b	1299	Serur *al 'abd* (M)	Khurshid Bey, Hukmdar (Egy. Governor)
8/37c	1299	Aman *al habashiya* (F)	'Abd al Nabi Qabuli from Massawa
8/38a	1300/1882-3	Fadl Al Karim (M)	'Abdallah Bey
8/38b	1300	Muhammad Bashir *al habashi* (M)	Egyptian Authorities in Massawa
8/42c	1300	Faraj *al habashiya* (F)	Shaykh 'Abd al Rahman
8/42d	1300	Turfa (F)	Bulos *al Tajir* (the trader), Massawa
8/44a	1300	Nassib *al habashi* (M)	Egyptian Authorities in Massawa
8/44b	1300	Halima *al Sudaniyya* (F)	*al sayyid* Barakat
8/45a	1300	Barli *al habashiya* (F)	'Ali *Afandi* Fahmi, the doctor
8/45c	1300	Faraj *al habashi* (M)	Mitwali *Afandi* (Hafif?)
8/46a	1300	Aman (F)	'Abd al Rahman Muhammad *al habashi*
8/48a	1300	Halima *al habashiya* (F)	Shaykh 'Abdu Faqih
8/49a	1300	Faraj (?)	Hamid Aia
8/51a	1300	'Aisha (F)	'Ali 'Ali al ?
8/54a	1300	Sa'adallah *al Sudani* (M)	*al sayyid* 'Umar Muhammad al Nahari
8/56a	1300	Zaynab *al habashiya* (F)	Mussa *Afandi* Ibrahim
8/57b	1300	Labah (?)	'Abd al Fatah *Afandi*
8/66a	1301/1883-4	6 slaves	Rashid *Basha* Kamil
8/69b	1301	Koronfal *al shanqala* (F)	Muhammad Fawdha *Afandi* Nur Basha
8/76a	1301	Bakhita *al sudaniyya* (F)	Muhammad *Afandi* Hilal
8/86a	1301	Madina Adam *al sudaniyya* (F)	Muhammad *Afandi* ?
8/89b	1301	Jamala (F)	'Ali *Afandi* Hussayn
8/90a	1301	Nashassour ?	Bekita ?
8/91a	1301	Sabah *al habashi* (M)	Amin *Afandi Basha*
8/92a	1301	Sa'ida *al habashiya* (F)	Lt. Sha'aban *Afandi*
8/93a	1301	Khayrmanna?	'Abd al 'Aziz Ahmad Yahya from Jiddah
8/94c	1301	'Abdallah from Tanbien (Tigray)(M)	'Abd al Qadir b. Muhammad *al habashi*
8/102a	1301	Sa'adia b. Adam *al habashiya* (F)	Shaykh Muhammad Nur Ahmad al Nati
8/106a	1301	Faraj *al habashi* (M)	Shaykh Ibrahim Salih ?
8/110b	1301	Jawhar (?)	'Abdalqadir 'Ay, from Jiddah
10/2a	1302/1884-5	Daftara (F)	Nicola Batagi Greek of Alexandria, merch. in Mass.
10/10b	1302	Faraj (M), Za'afran (F), & Khadija (F)	Hassan Mussa al Akkad
10/23b	1302	Jamila *al habashiya* (F)	Hassan Mussa al Akkad
10/26c	1302	Fatma (F) and Faraj (F)	*Hajj* Hussayn b. Muhsin
10/27a	1302	Sara *al habashiya* (F)	Hassan Mussa al Akkad
10/32b	1302	Faraj (M) and Faris (M) the Abys.	Shaykh 'Abdu 'Ali Faqih
10/34a	1302	Serur (F)	Hassan Mussa al Akkad
10/34c	1302	Husna (F) and Fayruz (F)	Hassan Mussa al Akkad

APPENDIX 22: **Real Estate and Moveable Property Transactions of Shaykh 'Abd Allāh b. 'Umar b. Sa'īd Bā Junayd and Shaykh 'Alī Aḥmad Bā Junayd in Massawa, 1868-1888**

B.J. = Bā Junayd

MICR	YEAR	BUYER	SELLER	PROPERTY
16/40b	1285/1868	'Abd Allah B.J.	Ali b. Ahmad Muh. Abu Bakr al Somali	building
16/41a	1286/1869	'Abd Allah	*Mazad*- estate of Muhammad Masawa	2 shops
16/41b	1286/1869	'Abd Allah	*Mazad*- estate of Muhammad Masawa	shop
16/42a	1286/1869	'Abd Allah	Muhammad b. Ahmad b. Salih 'Adulai	shop
16/42b	1286/1869	'Abd Allah	Muhammad b. 'Abdu Hammoda, Al-Amin Danbar & Abdal-'Aziz Damrik	3 shops
16/43a	1286/1869	'Abd Allah	'Umar b. Abu Bakr Mantai	2 shops
16/43b	1286/1869	'Abd Allah	'Ali Ibr. Shafiq & wife, Mas'uda b Ahmad 'Adulai	shop
16/43c	1286/1869	'Ali Ibr. Shafiq & Mas. b. Ah 'Adulai	'Abd Allah B.J.	shop
16/53b	1287/1870	'Ali Ahmad	heirs of 'Uthman b. Mussa 'Adulai	land
16/58a	1287/1870	'Abd Allah	Sh. Adam Barkoi & Yussuf 'Ali Mansur	2 shops
16/58b	1287/1870	'Abd Allah	'Abdu 'lwan	leases land + 4 shops
16/64a	1287/1870	'Abd Allah	Sh. 'Umar Muhammad Maka'ali	2 shops
16/67b	1288/1871	'Abd Allah	'Ali Ahmad Ba Junayd	land
16/69c	1288/1871	'Ali Ahmad.	---	*waqf* of shop to water-well on route to Hitumlo
16/70a	1288/1871	'Abd Allah	Muhammad b. Hamid Sa'igh	4 shops
16/70b	1288/1871	'Ali Ahmad B.J.	'Abd Allah B.J.	land & shop
16/70c	1288/1871	'Ali Ahmad B.J.	?	land
16/71b	1288/1871	'Abd AllahB.J.	?	land lease
16/77a	1289/1872	'Ali Ahmad B.J.	heirs of Jaber Yamani	shop
16/80a	1289/1872	'Abd Allah B.J.	heirs of Ibrahim Hamdan	3 parts of a house
16/82b	1289/1872	'Abd Allah b. Umar al Safi	'Abd AllahB.J.	2 pts. of *rawshan*
16/85b	1290/1873	'Abd Allah B.J.	Abu Bakr Hamdan	?
16/95a	1290/1873	'Abd Allah	Muhammad Nur b. Amin Hamad Shineti	land
16/100a	1291/1874	'Abd Allah	*Hajji* Mussa Shineti	half shop
16/103a	1292/1875	'Abd Allah	Arakil *Bey*, Governor of Massawa	land on Tawlud
16/103b	1292/1875	'Abd Allah	Muhamad Ahmad Salih 'Adulay	large *sunbuk*: 'Fath al-Barri'
16/107a	1292/1875	'Umar b. 'Abd Allah Ah. B.J.	Muhammad *Afandi* 'Izzat, *wakil* and off. of the Governorate	*sunb.* Shaykhud
16/107c	1292/1875	Ahmad 'Ayyad 'Umar 'Abd Allah from Jiddah	Ahmad B.J.	*sunbuk*
16/109b	1293/1876	'Abd Allah B.J.	Muh. b. Ahm. Salih 'Adulai	2 *sanabik*: 'Fath al Karim'& 'Mas'udi'
16/117b	1294/1877	'Abd Allah	heirs of 'Ali 'Adulai	land
9/36a	1297/1880	Sh. Muh. 'Abd Allah Ahmad 'Abbasi	'Umar Ahmad Sa'id Ba Zara'a *wakil* of 'Ali Ahmad B.J.	shop

9/53a	1297/1880	Muh. 'Abd Allah B.J.	Ahmad Muh. Omar Makka Ali	shop
8/59a	1300/1883	'Abd Allah B.J.	heirs of Dankali	3 parcels of land
8/107b	1301/1884	Ahm. *Afandi* al Hassani the "avvocato" (lawyer)	'Abd Allah B.J.	power of attorney
10/7a	1302/1885	'Abd Allah B.J.	heirs of Mahmud Nasir	shop
10/20a	1302/1885	'Issa ibn Ali Nakhrai	'Abd Allah B.J.	land
12/49a	1305/1888	Hamed Hassan Kantibai	'Abd Allah B.J.	stone house

LIST OF INFORMANTS

LIST OF INFORMANTS

Massawa

1. Aḥmad Shaykh Ibrāhīm Faras (3 March 2000).
2. 'Alī Yūsuf al-Ghūl (26 February, 4 March, 8 March 2000).
3. *Sayyid* Ibrāhīm 'Abd Allāh Sharīf (2 March 2000).
4. Muḥammad Qa'aṣ (21 February, 25 February, 10 April 2000).
5. *Sayyid* Ṣādiq Muḥsin al-Ṣāfī (8 March, 14 March, 16 March, 18 March, 19 March, 2 April, 15 May, 19 May 2000).
6. Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ Aḥmad Afandī (13 March 2000, [Asm.] 31 July 2001).
7. 'Abdu 'Alī Sa'īd Ṣūrī (27 April 2000).
8. 'Usman Hajji Maḥmūd (16 March, 19 March, 25 April, 28 April, 5 May 2000).
9. Muḥammad Yāsīn Bā Ṭūq (17 March 2000).
10. 'Umar Wahhāb al-Bārrī (16-17 March 2000).
11. Ḥāmid 'Abd al-Bāqi Muḥammad 'Abdu 'Abbāsī (18 March, 20 March 2000).
12. 'Uthmān Ibrāhīm Egal (17.March 2000).
13. Ḥasan Ibrāhīm Muḥammad Sālim (27 September 1999, 20 March, 8 May 2000).
14. Muḥammad Zubūy Ṣāliḥ Mīya Khayr ad-Dīn (20 March, 3 April, 7 May 2000).
15. Ibrāhīm Ḥusayn Mantay (7 May 2000).
16. Muḥammad Aḥmad 'Umar Aḥmad 'Abbāsī (20 March, 29 April, 15 May 2000).
17. Qāḍī Sulaymān Muḥammad Aḥmad al-Ḥanafī, (20 March 2000).
18. 'Abd al-Wahhāb Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ 'Abdu (22 March, 27 March 2000).
19. 'Ādil Muḥammad 'Alī Sa'īd Ṣūrī al-Ṭāhirī (22 March 2000).
20. 'Egebet Negassi G'awg' Ezaz (28 March 2000).
21. 'Abd al-Bāqi Muḥammad 'Abdu 'Abbāsī (27 September 1999).
22. *Sayyid* Ibrāhīm Muḥammad Ibrāhīm (26 April 2000).
23. Muḥammad 'Abdu Bakri Ḥijjī (5 May, 16 May 2000).
24. 'Abd Allāh Yūsuf Ṣā'igh (5 May, 6 May 2000).
25. Ibrāhīm Muḥammad Nūr Mantay (7 May 2000).
26. Muḥammad Abū Bakr al-Nātī (8 May, 16 May 2000).
27. Sulaymān 'Abdu Hindī (16 May 2000).
28. Tāhā Ja'far Dankalī (16 May 2000).
29. 'Abd al- Qādir Hindī (20 March 2000).
30. 'Abd al-Laṭīf Aḥmad Hindī (20 March 2000).

Asmara

31. *Sayyid* Ḥasan Muḥammad 'Uthmān Ḥayūtī (9 Oct., 27 Nov. 1999, 31 July 2001).
32. *Sayyid* Aḥmad Muḥammad 'Uthmān Ḥayūtī (31 July 2001).
33. Muḥammad Sa'īd Shūmay (30 November 1999).
34. Anis 'Ubayd Bā Ḥubayshī (10 March 2000).
35. Aḥmad Muḥammad Bā Ḥubayshī (10 March 2000).
36. Salma Ṣāliḥ Bā Ṭūq (25 March 2000).
37. Jamāl Wahhāb al-Bārri (11 March 2000).
38. Jamāl Muḥammad 'Umar Bā Bikhayr (24 March 2000).
39. Maryam 'Umar Ṭāhā al-Nahārī (26 March 2000).
40. Ismā'īl Ḥājjī Maḥmūd (2 May 2000).

41. *Ustādh* Muḥammad 'Umar (12 June 2000).
42. Muḥammad Sa'īd Nāwad, Founder of the Eritrean Liberation Movement (ELM)
43. Fū'ād Makki (27 July 2001).

Emberemi

44. 'Abd al-Qādir 'Alī Alamin (24 April 2000).
45. Muḥammad Shaykh Muḥammad 'Alī Shaykh Alamīn (17 May 2000).
46. Ibrāhīm Shaykh Ḥusayn Shaykh al-Amīn (17 May 2000).
47. Khalīfa Shaykh Ḥasan Shaykh al-Amīn ('Ad Shaykh *Khalīfa*) (17 May 2000).
48. Shaykh Alamin 'Uthmān al-Amīn, Asmara and Embereme, (22 September 1999, 17 May 2000).
49. 'Abd al Qādir Yūsuf 'Alī Aḥmad al-Ghūl (17 May 2000).

Hitumlo

50. *Khalīfa* 'Uthmān *Khalīfa* Ṭāhā, Head of the Khatmiyya center (14 April 2000).

Ghinda'

51. Shaykh Maḥmūd Ḥummad Ḍarir (4 May 2000).

Hirgigo

52. Nāfi' 'Alī Khaydar (7 March 2000).
53. Ṣāliḥ 'Abd Allāh Zubayr (6 March, 7 March 2000).

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