The Somali Conquest of the Horn of Africa

I. M. Lewis

The Journal of African History / Volume 1 / Issue 02 / July 1960, pp 213 - 230
DOI: 10.1017/S0021853700001808, Published online: 22 January 2009

Journal of African History, 1, 2 (1960), pp. 213–229.

THE SOMALI CONQUEST OF THE HORN OF AFRICA

By I. M. Lewis

One of the most sustained and in its effects far-reaching movements of population in the recent history of North Eastern Africa is the expansion of the Hamitic Somali from the shores of the Gulf of Aden to the plains of Northern Kenya over the last ten centuries. Although written historical evidence is available for only a few periods, oral tradition is so abundant, and from a variety of sources both inside and outside Somaliland, so much in agreement, that it is possible to reconstruct much of this Somali migration, at least in broad outline, with what I believe is a fairly high degree of probability.

This conclusion requires some comment. Some recent examinations of tribal tradition by social anthropologists[1] have emphasized the extent to which tradition, like legend, is a medium readily adjusted to contemporary conditions rather than an unequivocal historical record. And whether this applies equally to all tribal societies certainly a full understanding of their contemporary social structure is an essential pre-requisite for a just evaluation of their traditions. In Somaliland as far as oral evidence is concerned the traditional records of tribal movement usually bear little relation to contemporary social relationships and cannot therefore be discounted as mere rationalizations of the present. Moreover, for those periods where reliable documentary evidence is available there is generally a good measure of agreement between the written and the verbal record. I am not claiming of course that there is no mythological element in Somali traditions and legends. For myth certainly becomes important in those legends and traditions which connect particular Somali groups to noble Arabian families, but this is a sphere which though related to tribal movement is not directly concerned with it.

But although it is thus possible to uncover the main trends of Somali movements and their general chronological sequence, Somali origins remain obscure. Indeed the ethnic name 'Somali' itself is not recorded until the fifteenth century, by which time the migrations I outline here were well under way. Nor are studies of Somali physical characters very helpful here. They suggest, and I include the results of recent blood group research,[2] a blend of African and Arab or Asian characters. Thus despite their

[1] See, for example, I. G. Cunnison, *History on the Luapula* (Oxford, 1951); J. van Velsen, 'Notes on the history of the Lakeside Tonga of Nyasaland', *African Studies* (1959), 105–17.

[2] See K. L. G. Goldsmith, *The Blood Groups of Somali Tribes with special reference to Anthropology* (1959, MS).

generally higher stature and often darker colour in comparison with Arabs, Somali physical features nonetheless bear the firm imprint of the long contact of Somaliland with Arabia. But it is impossible to determine yet whether the Somali are to be regarded as an independent Hamitic stock, or whether rather they are to be considered as a heavily Arabicized segment of that other great branch of the Eastern Hamites, the Galla, with whom they are also closely connected historically. In any event, whatever their true ethnic origins, today all Somali ultimately trace descent patrilineally from noble Arabian lineages. At the same time they are inordinately proud of being Somali and their claims to Arabian origins, whatever their truth or falsity, have to be understood in the light of the passionate attachment of Somali to Islam. It is at this point as I have indicated that historical tradition merges into myth and legend and sets a difficult problem of interpretation. I shall examine and attempt to interpret a few specific traditions of this kind later.

I

Today the Somali number at least two and a half million[3] and dominate the Red Sea and Indian Ocean coasts of Ethiopia, from the Gulf of Tajura in French Somaliland to the Northern Province of Kenya. They are essentially a pastoral people, as they have been for centuries, following a restricted nomadism in which the average pastoralist moves widely but with a certain regularity with his herds of camels, flocks of sheep and goats, and in suitable regions, cattle. Agriculture is most developed and has a tradition going back several centuries in the more favourable regions between the Shebelle and Juba Rivers of southern Somalia. Here it seems to have been adopted by nomadic Somali settlers from their Bantu predecessors. In northern Somaliland, while there are indications that terraced agriculture was practised in the past near what are now ruined towns, here in its present form cultivation, chiefly sorghum, is recent, restricted mainly to the west of the British Protectorate and Harar Province of Ethiopia, and the techniques involved have been directly borrowed from the neighbouring agricultural Galla of Ethiopia.

Thus there is a general geographical division between the dry north and the better watered areas of southern Somalia. To some extent the primary division of the Somali nation into two great congeries of clans—the Samāle or Somali proper, and the Sab, coincides with this geographical division. Most of the Samāle are pastoralists moving over the arid terrain of northern and central Somaliland, but also spilling over into the scarcely less hostile

[3] French Somaliland has a population of about 28,000 Somali (as well as 26,000 'Afar or Danakil, a closely related Hamitic people); the British Protectorate has an estimated 640,000 Somali; Harar Province of Ethiopia about 500,000 Somali; Somalia has between a million and a quarter and two million Somali; and the Northern Province of Kenya about 80,000. Other immigrant Somali populations are found elsewhere in East Africa and in Aden.

conditions of Jubaland and the Northern Province of Kenya. The Sab on the other hand are chiefly cultivators and occupy the more fertile regions between the Juba and Shebelle Rivers in southern Somalia.

Each community is divided by patrilineal descent into a number of large agnatic groups which may conveniently be called 'clan-families'. These range in population from about a quarter of a million to one million persons. The Samāle, who considerably outnumber the Sab, have four main clan-families—the Dir, Isāq, and Hawiye, and the Dārōd who strictly are only related to the others on their maternal side. The Sab, with a total strength of about half a million, comprise only two clan-families—the Digil, and Rananwīn. I mention these groups here by name since it will be necessary to refer to them individually in the account which follows. Each clan-family, whether of Samāle or Sab, is further segmented into what can only be described as a vast series of clans and lineages. And it is necessary to point out here that every Somali group has a genealogy which has some historical content, and which also represents the way in which contemporary groups combine and divide in the present political structure of Somali society. I do not discuss the historical content of genealogies further here or the way in which they appear to be foreshortened over the generations since no extensive use of genealogical chronologies is made in this paper.[4]

The Samāle and Sab communities differ not only in economy and technology but also in culture and social organization. In language their speech differs perhaps to much the same degree as French differs from Italian. In their social organization and social values the Samāle pastoralists can be loosely characterized as democratic almost to the point of anarchy; they have clan-heads, often styled 'Sultan', but these have little authority and there is no formal hierarchy of chiefly offices—in short no instituted government. The southern cultivating Sab, on the other hand, are less bellicose and have a more hierarchical political organization in which there is respect for authority. Again, the political units of the Sab are generally founded on territorial interests and geographical propinquity, while amongst the pastoralists the lineages which are their political units are not rigidly associated with specific localities, but widely dispersed in the pastures and only mobilized when they are threatened by hostile groups. These differences, indicated here very generally, can be seen to conform to the contrasting environments in which the two communities live. They also reflect the ethnic history of Somaliland and its different characteristics in the two areas.

In Somaliland as a whole there have been three distinct ethnic movements. Before the incursions from the north of the Hamitic Galla and Somali, southern Somalia, at least between the rivers, was occupied by a mixed negroid or Bantu population which seems to have contained at least

[4] On this point see my 'Force and Fission in Northern Somali lineage structure', *American Anthropologist*, (December 1960).

two main cultural elements and which was known to the early Arab geographers as the 'Zengi' (Blacks). The major element consisted of negroid and partly Bantu cultivators living as sedentaries along the Juba and Shebelle Rivers and in fertile pockets between them. They figure in Galla and Somali traditions, especially in the folk traditions of those Digil and Rahanwīn peoples who entered this area from the north and settled amongst the 'Blacks' as an aristocracy. Something of their life and social organization is preserved in a late Arabic compilation (The 'Book of the Zengi') found in the possession of the Kadi of Kismayu in 1923 and recently published by Cerulli.[5] This document, the work apparently of a series of hands at different periods, is probably also largely based on folk-traditions but provides more detailed information than the latter today offer. These sources are confirmed by more tangible evidence. Remnants, partly Swahili-speaking, reinforced by ex-slaves from further south, survive today in five distinct communities along the Shebelle River and in two on the Juba. Others today are found at Baidoa in the hinterland between the rivers, and also in Brava district: indeed in the ancient town of Brava itself a Swahili dialect, Chimbalazi, is still spoken.

The second pre-Hamitic population, less numerous than the riverine cultivators, was a hunting and fishing people living an apparently nomadic existence. Their present-day descendants, much modified by Hamitic influence, survive in scattered hunting groups in Jubaland and southern Somalia where they are generally known as Ribi (or WaRibi) and as Boni (or WaBoni). Physically it has been suggested tentatively that they contain Bushman-like elements. But their physical characteristics have not been intensively studied.[6] They appear to have been politically and economically linked to the Bantu sedentaries, and still today small hunting communities of this stock are found living under the tutelage of more powerful negroid groups in southern Somalia.

Today the descendants of this mixed Zengi population contribute some 80,000 persons to the population of Somalia and are in no sense an insignificant element. It is impossible, however, to estimate their numbers before the Galla and Somali invasions. Nor is it possible to determine their early distribution with any accuracy. By about the tenth century it seems that these pre-Hamites did not extend north of the Shebelle, and were there in contact with the Galla who in turn were under pressure from the expanding Somali concentrated in the north-east part of the Horn. This distribution deduced from oral tradition finds support in the records of the early Arab geographers who refer to the Hamitic peoples of the north by the classical name Berberi, and distinguish them in physical features and culture from the Zengi to their south.

[5] See E. Cerulli, *Somalia I* (Rome, 1957), 231–357.

[6] For a recent discussion of the racial affinities of the Boni see V. L. Grottanelli, 'Note sui Bon Cacciatori di bassa casta dell'Oltregiuba', *Annali Lateranensi* (1957); and R. Battaglia, 'I Bon di Hola Wager nell'Oltregiuba', *Annali Lateranensi* (1957).

II

Before following the great Hamitic advance south which displaced much of this earlier Zengi population, and led eventually to the present distribution of peoples in Somaliland and in part to those in Ethiopia, it is necessary to refer briefly to the early phases of Arab settlement on the Somali coast. This is essential since Arab colonization introduced a more diversified technological culture; a more centralized system of government which, however restricted its influence, nevertheless made itself felt even in nomadic areas; and finally and most importantly brought Islam, the unifying force which played such an important part in the conquest of Abyssinia by scattered and disunited nomads in the sixteenth century. And indirectly if not directly the absorption of Arabian settlers stimulated the movements of expansion of the Somali and Galla.

There can be little doubt that Arabian penetration along the northern and eastern Somali coasts began at a very early period. Certainly here and in the south shortly after the *hejira* (622 A.D.) Muslim Arabs and Persians were developing a string of coastal settlements, many of them probably a legacy from Himyarite times. From their condition today, from traditional sources, and from such documentary evidence as is available it is clear that in these towns Arab traders and proselytisers settled as local aristocracies bringing the faith, to a varying degree marrying local Somali women, and eventually giving rise to a mixed Somali-Arab culture and society. This new culture, by no means uniform throughout the coastal ports, is the Somali counterpart to the much more extensive Swahili culture of the East African coast.

Typical of these centres of Arab settlement in northern Somaliland are the ancient ports of Zeila and Berbera. Zeila first appears in the record of the Arab geographers at the end of the ninth century when it is mentioned by al-Yaqūbī, and later writers describe it in increasing although never very extensive detail. Berbera, which conserves the name given in classical times to the northern coast as a whole, is probably of at least similar antiquity although the first Arab author to mention the port is Ibn Sa'īd, writing in the thirteenth century. Thereafter beyond the fact that the port was sacked by Saldanha in 1518, little is known of its history until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries— at least from documentary sources. The case is much the same with Mait, another centre of considerable antiquity, lying to the east on the coast of what is today the Erigavo District of the British Protectorate. I mention this port here because it is one of the most important centres in the history of Somali tribal movements and its ruins, which are extensive and have not yet been excavated, urgently require archaeological examination.

Of these northern ports most is known of Zeila. This town was politically the most important of the Arab settlements in the north and owed its economic prosperity to its geographical position as one of the chief ports

of early Abyssinia in the trade with Arabia and the Orient. Through Zeila local Somali produce, consisting chiefly of hides and skins, precious gums, ghee, and ostrich feathers, and slaves and ivory from the Abyssinian hinterland, was exported; and cloth, dates, iron, weapons, and chinaware and pottery imported. Politically Zeila was originally the centre of the Muslim emirate of Adal, part of the state of Ifāt, which lay in the plateau region of eastern Shoa. From the period at which the port enters Islamic history it had apparently a mixed Arab, Somali and 'Afar population. The last-named people, known to Arab writers from the time of Ibn Sa'īd as Danakil, are closely related ethnically to the Somali and today make up about half the population of French Somaliland. In the course of time, no one knows exactly when, these three elements fused to form a distinctive Zeila culture and a Zeila dialect which was a blend of Arabic, Somali and 'Afar. No doubt other minor ethnic elements also contributed; certainly Persians and Indians settled in the port at an early period, but the main elements in the Zeila culture are Arab, Somali and 'Afar. The Zeila community preserved its identity and much of its culture until late in the nineteenth century. At that time the construction of the railway between the Abyssinian hinterland and Jibuti in French Somaliland and the steady rise to prosperity of this new outlet for Abyssinian trade led to the final collapse of the ancient port. Today Zeila is deserted, an empty place of crumbling mosques and saints' tombs, and its ancient population has almost completely disappeared.

While these northern coastal centres were developing between the seventh and tenth centuries, Arab settlers were opening a similar series of ports in the south. Of these the largest and most important were Mogadishu (today capital of Somalia), Brava, and Merca—all commercial centres dependent for their prosperity upon the entrepôt trade between Abyssinia and Arabia and the markets of the East. The evidence of the early Arab geographers and local inscriptions and documents discovered by Cerulli[7] establish that by the first half of the tenth century Arab and Persian colonizers had settled in Mogadishu in considerable numbers, thirty or forty years before the foundation of Kilwa further south. There is similar evidence to show that Merca and Brava are of about the same antiquity. Thus by the tenth century a ring of coastal centres had been established largely by Arab settlers (the position further inland is less clear), and through these ports Islam and Arab trade had gained a firm foothold in Somaliland, and the ground had been prepared for Muslim expansion in the area.

III

About the tenth century when these coastal centres were developing it will be recalled that much of southern Somalia was still occupied by the pre-Hamitic Zengi while to the north lay the Galla and Somali. It has

[7] See E. Cerulli, *Somalia I* (Rome, 1957).

generally been assumed that the Galla occupied much if not all of northern Somaliland prior to the Somali. And recent research has lent firm support to this view. The best evidence for this depends upon Somali oral tradition, upon the presence today of residual pockets of Galla amongst the northern Somali—especially in the west and Ogaden region, and the fact that a number of place-names in the British Protectorate are almost certainly of Galla origin.[8] It appears, however, that by about this time the Dir Somali—universally regarded as the oldest Somali community—were already established as a small Somali nucleus along most of the northern coastal strip and were pressing upon their Galla neighbours inland.

But the first major impetus to Somali migration which tradition records is the arrival from Arabia of Sheikh Ismā'īl Jabartī about the tenth or eleventh century, and the expansion of his descendants, the Dārōd clan-family, from their early seat in the north-east corner of northern Somalia. It is impossible to date this movement absolutely but from subsequent events it seems most likely that it should be ascribed to this period. This was followed, some two centuries later, by the arrival, also from Arabia, of Sheikh Isāq, founder of the Isāq Somali who settled a little to the west of the Dārōd in what is today Erigavo District of the British Protectorate. Sheikh Isāq made his capital the ancient city of Mait where his domed tomb stands today, and, like his predecessor Sheikh Dārōd, married with the local Dir Somali. Today in Northern Somaliland the Dir, although in contact with the Isāq on their western fringes, have little effective contact with the Dārōd, yet the affinal connexions of the three peoples are preserved in their genealogies. It is also possible to establish some sort of chronological relationship between Isāq and Dārōd from the fact that the founding ancestors of some Dārōd clans married daughters of Sheikh Isāq and this evidence corresponds well with a gap of about two centuries between the two Sheikhs.

The folk traditions describing the life and works of these two founding ancestors, today venerated as saints, have been collected with hymns in praise of them in a number of manuscript and published hagiologies. This is not the place to discuss these in detail. It is sufficient to say here that they embroider the folk traditions considerably and, with a wealth of unlikely circumstantial detail, link Dārōd and Isāq with Arabia. Indeed, one recently published Dārōd hagiology claims a connexion between Dārōd and a well-known Arabian saint which is almost certainly false, and which since the Arabian saint in question died in 1403 contradicts the burden of oral tradition on the chronological precedence of Dārōd over Sheikh Isāq. No Arabist, I think, would accept the particular pedigrees claimed for Dārōd and Isāq, at least not as set forth in their published hagiologies. Yet the fact remains that Arabians such as Isāq and Dārōd did over the centuries settle in Somaliland and found local Somali lineages. As the matter

[8] The evidence is discussed in I. M. Lewis, 'The Galla in Northern Somaliland', *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici* (1960), xv.

stands at present I believe that the Dārōd and Isāq legends, however doubtful their precise historical content, nonetheless represent the growth and expansion of the Dārōd and Isāq peoples about the time claimed for the arrival of their founders in Somaliland.

If this is accepted we can conclude that about the twelfth century the Dir and Dārōd, and later the Isāq, were pressing upon their Galla neighbours and the great series of movements which finally disestablished the latter can be said to have begun. Folk tradition today offers little information as to the causes of this Somali movement. One can conjecture that climatic conditions—a series of severe droughts, for example—may have stimulated a general movement in search of new pastures. Almost certainly also increased immigration from Arabia was a contributory factor. For in an arid country where there is always a very precarious balance between sufficiency and famine, small increases in population can exert a marked effect. But however uncertain the causes of this migration are, there can be no doubt of its general direction. An analysis of clan traditions shows that in their advance south the Somali followed two main routes, moving either down the valley of the Shebelle River and its tributaries, or along the line of coastal wells on the Indian Ocean coast.

This Somali movement immediately led the Galla to push westwards towards Ethiopia where, as Huntingford[9] suggests, they seem to have already begun their penetration of the Harar Highlands in the twelfth century. An Arabic chronicle of the rulers of Zeila[10] makes it possible to refer a local tradition of Somali conflict with the Galla in the Hargeisa region to the same century. Thus at this time it appears that the Galla still occupied much of the hinterland in the centre of what is today the Protectorate. And from similar traditions of conflict with the Dārōd, the Galla were still also in the east of northern Somaliland, but in both areas losing ground to the militant and recently converted Muslim Somali.

In their turn the Dir vacated north-eastern Somaliland, leaving there the few residual minority communities which provide evidence of their earlier occupation. They moved westwards behind one flank of the Galla, always according to tradition struggling with them, and eventually established themselves in the west of the Protectorate and French Somaliland where the 'Ise and Gadabūrsi clans are their strongest representatives today. Further evidence for this reconstruction of their movements comes from the distribution of the graves of the 'Ise and Gadabūrse clan ancestors. These lie close to Sheikh Isāq's tomb at Mait in Erigavo District, several hundred miles from the grazing areas of the two clans today. Folk tradition also records the movement of other Dir groups from the east into the

[9] See G. W. B. Huntingford, *The Galla of Ethiopia* (1955), 19.

[10] There are several versions of this chronicle; one has been published by Cerulli, *Documenti Arabi per la Storia dell'Etiopia* (Rome, 1931), 4–15. The document refers to Sheikh Aw Barkhadle, one of the ancestors of the Walashama' dynasty of Ifāt who settled near Hargeisa teaching Islam. He is regarded as one of the Fathers of Somali Islam and his tomb is a famous place of pilgrimage.

Harar-Jigjiga region of Ethiopia where they are today. Other Dir thrust south. This general movement seems by the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to have proceeded to a point where the Dārōd and Isāq had taken over much of northern Somaliland and the Ogaden Province of Ethiopia. So that almost certainly by the seventeenth century the distribution of clans and peoples in northern Somaliland had become much as it is today.

In step with these Somali movements in the north the Galla were increasingly thrust westwards and south and ultimately into Ethiopia where, however, their main invasion was delayed until the sixteenth century.[11] As they withdrew, their predecessors, the negroid Zengi, were thrust further into Kenya. At the same time, the Somali were continuing their drive south, in the early stages, to some extent by-passing the established Galla.

We owe most of our knowledge of this southerly Somali expansion to the painstaking research of Dr Enrico Cerulli.[12] According to Cerulli's examination of folk traditions in the south, the earliest Somali to enter this area were the Jidu, who having pressed south settled for a time on the Shebelle River, and then thrust across it towards the coast near Merca. When this took place is not clear. Tradition in the Mogadishu-Warsheikh area refers to the arrival of the first Somali settlers from the north in three waves: first the Jidu, then the Ajuran, and finally the Abgal. The last two clans are of the Hawiye clan-family or closely associated with it. The Arab geographer Ibn Sa'īd records that in the thirteenth century the land lying round the Arabian settlement of Merca was occupied by Hawiye, so that although it is impossible to deduce the time of their arrival or of their predecessors, the Jidu, it seems that by this century the local distribution of peoples was as follows: the Hawiye Somali in the coastal region between Itala and Merca; further south and towards the interior the Jidu; and finally to the west the Galla.

In this area local tradition has most to say of the Ajurān, a group tracing descent patrilineally to a noble Arabian immigrant on the same pattern as the Dārōd and Isāq and derived maternally from the Hawiye. Under a hereditary dynasty which may have had its seat at Meregh[13] the Ajurān consolidated their position as the masters of the fertile reaches of the lower Shebelle basin and established a commercial connexion with the important port of Mogadishu. It seems likely that the commercial fortunes of the Ajurān sultanate and Mogadishu were very closely intertwined, and that the Ajurān reached the peak of their power in the fifteenth century when the evidence from local inscriptions and documents indicates that Mogadishu had reached her greatest prosperity.

[11] This Galla migration is well documented from contemporary sources, the main record being Bahrey's *History of the Galla*, written about 1593.

[12] This is collected together in E. Cerulli, *Somalia I* (Rome, 1957).

[13] Meregh lies almost half-way up the coast from Itala towards Obbia. See G. Benardelli, *Somalia d'Oggi* (Jan.–Feb., 1957), 28–35.

IV

Before, however, pursuing the further advance of the Somali, of whom a medley of clans now made their presence felt in the south, it is necessary to return briefly to events in northern Somaliland, and to the struggle for supremacy between the Muslim emirate of Adal and the expanding Abyssinian kingdom. Here there are written records available for the reconstruction of the past, though many are not so much contemporary accounts as later compilations of oral tradition.[14] These show that by the thirteenth century the Muslim state of Ifāt, which included Adal and the port of Zeila, was ruled by the Walashma', a dynasty then claiming Arab origins. By this time the rival ambitions of the Muslims and Christians had reached a point where serious strife was inevitable. The initiative was first taken by the Muslims. Early in the fourteenth century Ḥaq ad-Dīn, Sultan of Ifāt, turned the sporadic and disjointed forays of his predecessors into a full-scale war of aggression and, according to an Arab chronicle of Zeila in my possession, for the first time couched his call to arms in terms of a religious war against the infidels.

At first the Muslims were remarkably successful. Christian territory was invaded, churches were razed, and Christians forced to apostatize at the point of the sword. In 1415, however, the Muslims were routed and the ruler of Ifāt, Sa'd-Dīn, was pursued and eventually killed in his last stronghold on the island off the coast of Zeila which to this day bears his name. From this period Arab chroniclers refer to Adal itself as the 'Land of Sa'd ad-Dīn'. This crushing defeat and Sa'd ad-Dīn's martyrdom, for his death soon came to be regarded in this light, took place in the reign of the Abyssinian Negus Yeshāq (1414–29), and it is in songs celebrating his victories over the Muslims that the name 'Somali' is first recorded.

The Abyssinian victories and the occupation of Zeila virtually extinguished the Muslim kingdom of Ifāt; Sa'd ad-Dīn's sons fled to Arabia where they sought refuge with the King of Yemen. They were able, however, to return a few years later, and the Walashma' dynasty then took the title of kings of Adal and transferred its capital to Dakar, a centre probably situated to the south-east of Harar further from the threat of Abyssinian attack. These consequences of Sa'd ad-Dīn's defeat are clear. The effects of the Abyssinian victories on the Somali, however, can only be conjectured. It seems likely that the 'Ise and Gadabūrse clans which by this time were in the vicinity of Zeila felt some effects from the conquest, especially since a local Gadabūrse chronicle refers to the clan's founding ancestor Imām 'Ali Si'id (d. 1392) as one of the Muslim leaders fighting on the Western flank of Sa'd ad-Dīn's armies.[15]

[14] Much of this material has again been collected by Cerulli, one of the most important sources being his *Documenti Arabi per La Storia dell'Etiopia* (1931). The available evidence is discussed fully by J. S. Trimingham in his *Islam in Ethiopia* (Oxford, 1952).

[15] I shall discuss this chronicle, the work of several hands at different periods, more fully elsewhere.

Of greater importance as far as the Somali movements of expansion are concerned were the campaigns of the sixteenth century when after more than a hundred years of fairly peaceful relations with Abyssinia Adal had recovered sufficiently to re-enter the conflict. It is possible, as has been suggested, that some impetus for the new Muslim onslaught came from a Somali movement of expansion at the time. However likely, this is impossible to establish; what is clear is that in Imām Aḥmad Ibrāhīm al-Ghāzī (1506–43) the Muslims had at last found the charismatic leader they lacked.[16] Resounding Muslim victories were won, and the Imām's armies, equipped with cannon imported from Arabia through Zeila, penetrated into the heart of Ethiopia after a series of savage battles the memory of which is still preserved today.

Somali forces contributed much to the Imām's victories. Shihāb ad-Dīn, the Muslim chronicler of the period, writing between 1540 and 1560, mentions them frequently.[17] The most prominent Somali groups in the campaigns were the Geri, Marrehān, and Harti—all Dārōd clans. Shihāb ad-Dīn is very vague as to their distribution and grazing areas, but describes the Harti as at the time in possession of the ancient eastern port of Mait. Of the Isāq only the Habar Magādle clan seem to have been involved and their distribution is not recorded. Finally, several Dir clans also took part. The effective participation of these pastoral nomads, renowned 'clutterers of roads', in the Muslim victories indicates something of the power of leadership, spiritual as well as temporal, of the Imām; for the Somali were certainly unaccustomed to joining together in common cause and did not take easily to military discipline on so wide a front. Certainly there can be few occasions in Somali history when so many disparate and hostile clans combined together, even for a short time, under one banner.

This extraordinary outburst of Muslim enterprise, as might be expected, was not long sustained. In 1542 the reigning Emperor of Abyssinia Galāwdēwos, with Portuguese support, routed the Muslims near Lake Tana. The Imām was killed and Galāwdēwos' victory marked the final extinction of the Muslim threat and decided the fate of Abyssinia in favour of the Christian kingdom. Although the Muslims, with Harar as their new headquarters, continued the struggle, hoping to reverse the Christian gains, they were unsuccessful and the glorious victories of the Imām were never repeated. Adal declined rapidly, and from Harar the capital was transferred in 1577 to the oasis of Aussa in the scorching Dankali deserts where it was thought to be secure from further Abyssinian attack. Here, however, it was regularly harried by the Galla and ultimately overthrown by the nomadic Danakil, its ancient dynasty disappearing towards the end of the seventeenth century.

[16] The Imām is known popularly to Somali as Aḥmad Guray (in Amharic, Granhe)—Aḥmad the left-handed. His origins are virtually unknown, and both the Ethiopian and Arab chroniclers throw little light on his ancestry. In Somali tradition he is often confused with one of his Somali generals also called Aḥmad Guray.

[17] *Futūḥ al-Ḥabasha*, ed. and trs. R. Basset (Paris, 1897).

Adal's confines have thus a shifting and fluid history and although Somali played an important part in the sixteenth century conquest of Abyssinia it is not yet clear to what extent they formed part of the Muslim state at other periods. Here it is important to note that Zeila, Berbera, and Mait were not the only Muslim towns associated with Adal. At least twenty other Muslim centres flourished in the hinterland of what is today the British Protectorate and Harar Province of Ethiopia, and it seems, that in the sixteenth century at any rate, formed part of the state of Adal. The excavation of these sites, some of which include the remains of extensive waterworks, is urgently required, not only for the light this should shed on Somali history and tribal movements but also for its contribution to the fuller understanding of Ethiopian history. A preliminary survey of the majority of the ruined towns made some twenty years ago by Curle[18] led to finds of pottery, beads, and coins which have been dated and which show that these Muslim centres flourished in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries at the time when Zeila also reached her greatest prosperity.

V

Aḥmad Granhe's victories and their reversal by Galāwdēwos had at least two important effects for the movements of the Galla and Somali in the Horn of Africa. Aḥmad's attacks led to a concentration of Abyssinian forces in the north and apparently to a corresponding weakening of Abyssinian resistance in the south-west where the Galla, pressed by the Somali, were able to penetrate in very large numbers early in the sixteenth century. Subsequently, the recovery of Abyssinia appears to have closed the gateway to further Somali expansion in the north-west, and to have led the Somali to press increasingly upon the Galla in southern Somalia, thus maintaining the Galla thrust into south-western Abyssinia. By this time, however, according to oral tradition certain Dārōd groups which had formed part of the Imām's armies had already established themselves in the Harar-Jigjiga regions where they are today. So that despite the ultimate failure of the Muslim cause the movement of the Imām's armies was accompanied by some new Somali expansion in the north-west.

In the south as the Galla withdrew, northern Somali settlers gathered in increasing numbers. New groups of Hawiye immigrants found their way to the Shebelle and began to challenge the ascendancy of the Ajurān, eventually overthrowing them. Hawiye oral traditions collected by Cerulli connect the defeat of the Ajurān with the penetration of Mogadishu by new Hawiye settlers and the collapse of the city's Mudaffar dynasty. A provisional date of 1624 can be assigned to the latter event since it is recorded in a letter written by the Jesuit missionary Father de Velasco, who in that year visited Pate and Malindi.[19] This suggests that the Ajurān lost their influence in southern Somalia to new Hawiye settlers early in the seventeenth

[18] A. T. Curle, 'The ruined towns of Somaliland', *Antiquity* (Sept. 1937), 315–27.
[19] See Cerulli, *Somalia II* (Rome, 1959), 249–51.

century. It appears however from local tradition that at that time the zone between the Shebelle and Juba Rivers to the south of Bur Hacaba was still in the hands of the Galla.

About the same time, again from the evidence of tradition, the Rahanwīn Somali who had descended from the north down the valley of the Shebelle began to make their presence felt in these regions. They thrust into the Baidoa plateau, overcoming its previous occupants, and began to press north-westwards towards the Galla at Bur Hacaba. Thus it appears from the folk traditions of this area that early in the seventeenth century the regions from the coast near Mogadishu westwards in the direction of the present Ethiopian frontier were occupied first by the Hawiye, then by the Galla, and finally by the Rahanwīn. This inferred distribution is confirmed by a Portuguese document of 1625 describing the caravan route from Mogadishu to Abyssinia.[20]

The Rahanwīn continued their progress and apparently before the end of the century had dislodged the Galla from their stronghold at Bur Hacaba, forcing them to withdraw to the south-west and eventually over the Juba River to its right bank. This brought further Galla pressure to bear on the Zengi whose traditional capital, Shungwaya, was in the seventeenth century, according to the 'Book of Zengi', in the Juba region.[21] Thus by the end of the seventeenth century, the Galla, whose strength must have been very considerably reduced by their great thrusts into Ethiopia, had lost to the Somali all their former territory as far south as the Juba. But they left behind them secure evidence of their former presence in the many Galla minority groups today found amongst the Rahanwīn and Digil Somali of the Shebelle and Juba regions.

Finally, groups of Dir Somali, whose displacement from northern Somaliland by the Dārōd and Isāq was by this time almost complete, reached the south. The most important of these new immigrants were the Bīmāl clan who came into conflict with the already established Digil, conquered them, and eventually settled near Merca where they are today. Thus by the eighteenth century southern Somalia as far south as the Juba River had assumed its present ethnic composition.

But the Somali advance did not stop at the Juba. Dārōd from the north and the Ogaden continued to push south in spite of considerable opposition from those clans which had preceded them.[22] Eventually they reached the Shebelle and began to press upon the Digil early in the nineteenth century. They were halted, however, by the Rahanwīn under the strong leadership first of the Gassar Gude, stationed at Lugh Ferrandi[23] on the Juba, and, from about 1840 onwards, of the Gelēdi based on the Shebelle.

[20] See Cerulli, *Somalia I* (Rome, 1957), 67. [21] Ibid. 254–5.

[22] Much light on these movements has been thrown by Sir Richard Turnbull's examinations of local traditions in Jubaland and the Northern Province of Kenya. I am grateful to Sir Richard for access to articles published locally in Kenya and to some of his unpublished material.

[23] See U. Ferrandi, *Lugh, Seconda Spedizione Bottego* (Rome, 1903).

This forced the new Dārōd immigrants to move up to the Juba and brought them into contact with the Galla on the right bank of the river. Although they had lost so much territory, the latter were still fighting a rearguard action, and from their centre at Afmadu made occasional raids across the river into Somali territory. Even the religious settlement of Bardera, founded in 1820, on the middle reaches of the Juba, was occasionally threatened. Thus the Dārōd were faced with a formidable neighbour whom at this stage they found it more expedient to appease than to provoke. Having gained their protection, parties of Dārōd managed to cross the river as clients and allies of the Galla who at the time were subject to occasional attacks from the Akamba to their south-west and the Masai to their west, and welcomed Somali support.

Further Dārōd immigrants entered the area, sought alliance with the Galla, and crossing the river joined their kinsmen there. Some of these had come by sea in dhows from northern Somaliland. This situation of Dārōd-Galla alliance lasted for some time, and is that described by Guillain when he visited the southern Somalia coast in 1847.[24] About 1865, however, the Galla were stricken by an epidemic of smallpox, and this provided an opportunity for the new Dārōd immigrants to turn the tables upon their Galla masters. In fact almost immediately the Galla were attacked from all sides and suffered very heavy losses. The few who survived fled southwards; and by the turn of the century most of the southern Galla had been cleared from the area, maintaining a foothold only at Wajir and Buna. The Somali pressure continued—partly stimulated by Ethiopian military expeditions in the Ogaden—and in 1909 groups of Dārōd reached the Tana River with stock estimated to number as many as fifty thousand head.

In 1912 when administrative and military posts were opened by the British in the area the situation was still fluid. The Dārōd were still on the move and now seeking the complete domination of the region from Buna in the west through Wajir to the Tana River in the south-east. Many of the pre-Hamitic WaBoni who survived had become serfs to the 'Abdalla Dārōd, and most of the Warday Galla had to be moved across the Tana to prevent their extinction by the Somali. A good number, however, remained amongst the new Dārōd immigrants as their clients, thus completely reversing the earlier position when the Galla dominated the river. To the west the once powerful Ajurān, who had earlier, about the seventeenth century, been forced south by later Somali immigrants, were being infiltrated by the Digodia Somali, and the southern Galla Boran were being increasingly driven to the north-west. By 1919 feeling between the Dārōd and those Warday Galla who had been moved across the Tana and those who had remained amongst the Dārōd reached such a pitch that it was again necessary for the Kenya government to intervene. This led to the Somali-Orma (Galla) agreement which allowed the Galla who remained with the Dārōd

[24] C. Guillain, *Documents sur L'Histoire, La Géographie, et Le Commerce de L'Afrique Orientale* (Paris, 1856), III, 179–80.

on the left bank to choose between accepting the formal status of serfs or moving across the river to join their free kinsmen. Those who opted to cross the Tana were obliged to leave behind them with their Somali patrons half the cattle which they had acquired during their bondage. In fact, however, few of the Warday Galla moved.

About twelve years later there was further unrest amongst the Galla subjects of the Dārōd on the Tana and a rumour that the Somali were about to disregard the 1919 agreement gained wide currency. Whether as a direct result of this, or from other causes, about eight hundred Galla dependents with about ten times that number of livestock made a singularly unsuccessful bid for freedom, moving towards the Tana River at the height of the dry season. Nearly half their number are thought to have perished, and the remainder were ignominiously returned to the left bank of the river. In 1936 the agreement ended and the government of Kenya tacitly recognized that except for those on the right bank of the Tana, the Warday Galla had been finally absorbed by the Somali.

VI

Thus, although the establishment of administrative posts in Jubaland, about 1912, marked the final stages of the great Somali migrations which had lasted almost ten centuries, Somali infiltration southwards still continued and still continues today. Now, however, the movement is more peaceful, and as merchants and traders Somali immigrants have penetrated as far south as Tanganyika, and in a few cases even reached the Rhodesias and the Union of South Africa.

Those movements had of course far-reaching social repercussions. They led to the present distribution of peoples in the Somalilands and contributed to the Galla invasion of Ethiopia, where today Galla make up perhaps half the total population. Similarly the pre-Hamitic Zengi peoples were driven south into the East African coastlands except for the few residual communities which still survive in southern Somalia and in the Northern Province of Kenya. At the same time the Somali themselves were profoundly modified in the process. All the immigrants from the north were nomadic pastoralists, but when they reached the more fertile regions of southern Somalia some adopted cultivation and to varying degrees combined it with pastoralism. Through intermixture with negroid and Galla peoples in southern Somalia, the present Digil and Rahanwīn confederations emerged with their distinctive characteristics. From the negroid sedentaries they adopted cultivation, and from the Galla temporarily copied their system of age-grades as the Jubaland Dārōd also did later and also finally discarded. From their mixed origins and new economy the Digil and Rahanwīn evolved their hierarchical political system which differs considerably from that of the northern pastoral Somali. And while their new political system was not that of a state, it does bear some resemblance to the Hamitic conquest states of East Africa.

In northern Somaliland the Somali seem to have been little affected by contact with the Galla and it is only recently, and not as a direct result of their former migrations, that they have in the west begun to borrow items of Galla culture associated with the adoption of agriculture. In the south the mixture of peoples was more heterogeneous, and the residual Galla and negroid communities, while contributing to the new culture and social organization of the Digil and Rahanwīn, were also themselves profoundly modified by contact with the Somali. The riverine negroids have preserved certain ritual and cultural features of their own, but have adopted Islam, and in most things tend to conform to the ways of the conquering Somali. At the same time the infusion of negroid blood amongst the Sab of southern Somalia has heightened the contempt which the northern pastoralists traditionally exhibit towards cultivators; and people of negroid features are stigmatized as *bon*, subject peoples, not pastoral aristocrats (*billis*). This if anything has strengthened the primary schism in the Somali nation between the sedentary Sab and nomadic Samāle, and has helped to perpetuate a line of division which, despite the strength of pan-Somali nationalism today, is still to some extent reflected in modern party politics.[25]

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Albospeyre, M., etc., *Cahiers de L'Afrique et L'Asie, V, Mer Rouge-Afrique Orientale* (Paris, 1959).

Beckingham, C. F. and Huntingford, G. W. B., *Some Records of Ethiopia*, 1593–1646 (London, 1954).

Benardelli, G., 'Uno scavo compiuto nella zona archeologica di Hamar Gergeb, nel territorio di Meregh durante l'agosto 1932', *Somalia d'Oggio* (Jan.–Feb., 1957), 28–35.

Burton, R., *First Footsteps in East Africa*, Memorial edition (London, 1894).

Cerulli, E., *Documenti Arabi per la Storia dell'Etiopia*, Reale Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Serie vi, IV (Rome, 1931); *Somalia, Scritti vari editi ed inediti*, I (Rome, 1957), II (Rome, 1959).

Colucci, M., *Principi di diritte consuetudinario della Somalia Italiana meridinonale* (Florence, 1924).

Curle, A. T., 'The Ruined Towns of Somaliland', *Antiquity* (Sept., 1937), 315–27.

Dracopoli, I. N., *Through Jubaland to the Lorian Swamp* (London, 1914).

Elliot, F., 'Jubaland and its inhabitants', *Geographical Journal* (1913), XLI, 554–61.

Ferrandi, U., *Lugh, Seconda Spedizione Bottego* (Rome, 1903).

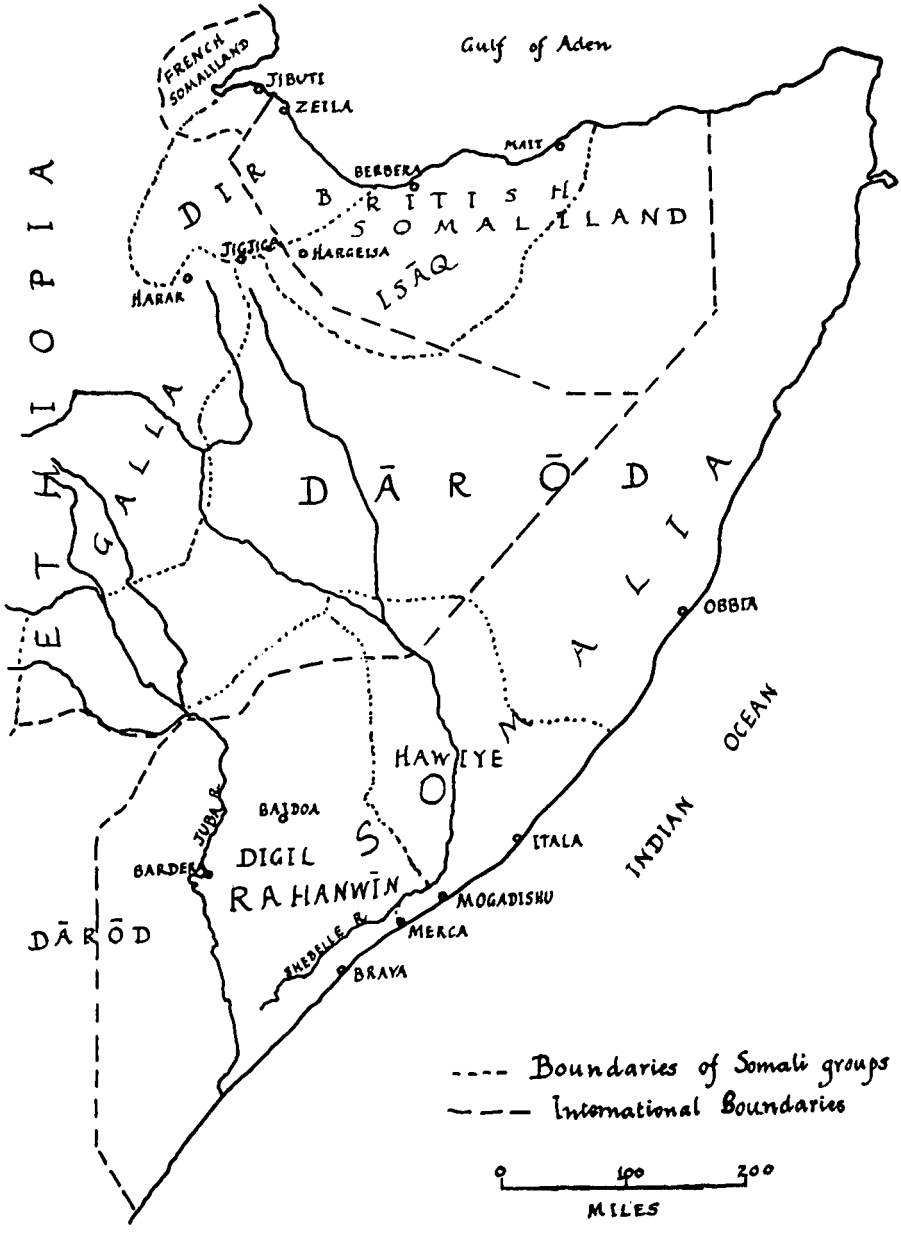
Goldsmith, K. L. G., *The Blood Groups of Somali Tribes with special reference to Anthropology* (MS. London, 1959).

Grottanelli, V. L., 'Note sui Bon cacciatori di bassa casta dell'Oltregiuba', *Annali Lateranensi*, XXI (Rome, 1957), 191–212.

Guillain, C., *Documents sur l'histoire, la géographie, et le commerce de l'Afrique Orientale* (Paris, 1856).

Huntingford, G. W. B., *The Galla of Ethiopia*, International African Institute (London, 1955).

[25] See I. M. Lewis, *Modern Political Movements in Somaliland* (Oxford, 1958).


Gulf of Aden
FRENCH SOMALILAND
JIBUTI
ZEILA
MAIT
BERBERA
DIR
BRITISH SOMALILAND
JIGJIGA
HARGEISA
ISĀQ
HARAR
ETHIOPIA
GALLA
DĀRŌDA
SOMALIA
OBBIA
INDIAN OCEAN
HAWIYE
BAJDOA
JUBA R.
DIGIL
RAHANWĪN
BARDERA
ITALA
MOGADISHU
MERCA
DĀRŌD
JUBBELLE R.
BRAVA
---- Boundaries of Somali groups
— — — International Boundaries
0 100 200
MILES

Lewis, I. M., *Peoples of the Horn of Africa, Somali, Afar and Saho* (London, 1955); *Modern Political Movements in Somaliland*, International African Institute memorandum (Oxford, 1958), xxx; 'The Galla in northern Somaliland', *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici* (1959); 'Force and Fission in Northern Somali Lineage Structure', *American Anthropologist* (December, 1960).

Parenti, R., 'Gli Uaboni', *Rivista di Biologia Coloniale* (1948), IX, 65–90.

Pirone, M., 'Leggende e tradizioni storiche dei Somali Ogaden', *Archivio per L'Antropologia e L'Etnologia* (1954), LXXXIV, 119–43.

Shihāb ad-Dīn, ed. and trs. Basset, R., *Futūḥ al-Ḥabasha* (Paris, 1897–1909).

Swayne, H. G. C., *Seventeen trips through Somaliland and a visit to Abyssinia* (3rd ed., London, 1903).

Trimingham, J. S., *Islam in Ethiopia* (Oxford, 1952).

Zoli, C., *Notizie sul territorio di riva destra del Giuba. Oltre-Giuba* (Rome, 1927).