

The Missionary Factor in Somali Dervish History, 1890-1910

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I. Introduction

The origins, expansion and demise of the Somali Dervish Movement (1899-1920) have attracted a considerable body of scholarship. More has been written about its leader, Sayyid Muhammad Abdille Hasan (1856-1920) than any other individual in Somali history. In his efforts to defeat Ethiopian marauders and repel European colonizers, Sayyid Muhammad articulated an appeal for inter-clan solidarity with an insistence that reformist Islam become an ideological and organizational force for Somalis.

Sayyid Muhammad had traveled across the Islamic world from 1885 to 1895, visiting Mogadishu, Harar, Mecca and Hejaz, home of the Wahabist puritanical movement. Despite doctrinal differences between the Qadariya and Ahmadiyya brotherhoods (*tariqa*), the latter included the radical offshoot Salihya, founded in Mecca by Muhammad Salih which the Sayyid had joined. After 1887, Somali existence was seriously threatened by intrusive Abyssinian soldiers who fanned out into Somali territories after they had conquered Harar and expanded into the Ogadeen destroying *tariqa* settlements. In 1895, the Sayyid returned to the northern Somali Coast and began preaching the Salihya message of austerity and reform in defense of Islam. He abhorred imperialist impositions such as an "entry tax" and new rules about Somali mobility, and was appalled to hear about the death of a *mu'addan* (prayer caller) whose inspired voice apparently "disturbed" an irritable British functionary. Sometime between 1896-99, the Sayyid

adopted the name "Dervish" for his followers. The term refers to any Sufi religious order whose members have taken vows of poverty as a way of life. The Sayyid considered himself a holy man who lived simply, removed from the temptations of the world. Despite his role model status, some have criticized the Sayyid for his personal cruelty and incitement of clan animosities. However, historians still consider his Somali Dervish movement (*Halgankii Daraawiishta*) an armed anti-colonial resistance, a fight for Somali freedom, and an Islamic reformist movement.¹

After his return to Somali land, some chance encounters with young Somalis associated with a Capuchin missionary station in Berbera especially fired the Sayyid's anti-colonial rage and inspired his *jihad* to protect Islam. Aside from minor differences in the well-known stories about the Sayyid's meetings, historians have provided few details about the mission's proselytizing activities. This article traces the origins of the Somali land mission station before 1910 and describes the work of its Capuchin Fathers, drawing on French sources and missionary archives in Lyon and Toulouse. It concludes by comparing the missionaries' impact on Somali religious and cultural life with the material destruction that Abyssinian armies inflicted on Somalis from 1887 to 1910.²

II. Reports of Sayyid's Encounters With Missionary Somalis

British imperialist claims to the northern Somali coast formally date from 1884 when they supplanted the Egyptian authorities who, after nine years there (since 1875), then returned to Cairo to serve in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. Britain considered the Somali Coast a distant territorial adjunct of India that provided livestock supplies for the deep anchorage, south Arabian port of Aden, captured in 1839.³

The first account of the Sayyid's encounters with young mission products seems traceable to 1909. That was when the British government dispatched Sir Reginald Wingate to Somaliland to explore military options when dealing with the Dervishes who had battled the international forces of four imperial expeditions to a costly and deadly standstill. In the course of his six-month investigation (that also considered peace overtures with the Dervishes), Wingate exchanged Arabic letters with the Sayyid. Included among the missives he wrote in 1909, the Sayyid repeated an 1899 original warning he'd made to the Edagalle Habr Garhajis. An emissary from the Sayyid reminded Wingate

that his long-term goal “was to purge the country of Christians whose presence in Somaliland was incompatible with the Moslem religion.”⁴ In his 1923 study of the Dervish Movement, Somaliland official Douglas Jardine claimed the small mission station in Berbera infuriated the Sayyid because it fed and educated orphans while trying to convert them to Christianity. Having encountered one of them after 1895, the Sayyid wrote, “do you not see that the Infidels have destroyed our religion and made our children, their children?”⁵ In his 1965 history of Somaliland, anthropologist I.M. Lewis maintained:

The story goes that Sheikh Muhammad met a boy at the mission school and asked him his name. To his amazement and wrath, the boy replied ‘John Abdillahi.’ Another account relates that the Sheikh *met a party of boys from the mission* who when asked what clan they belonged to – the stock Somali inquiry to elicit someone’s identity, replied ‘the clan of the Fathers’ (in Somali, *reer faddar*), thus apparently denying their Somali identity (many of the boys were actually orphans)...[and] they commemorate encounters with the mission which served to confirm Sheikh Muhammad’s belief that Christian colonization sought to destroy the Muslim faith of his people. This fired his patriotism and intensified his efforts to win support for the Salihiya...⁶ [emphasis added]

In 1982, historian Said Sheikh Samatar repeated a similar version of the incident as follows:

From Berbera in 1897, the Sayyid retired to the interior to start afresh among his maternal Dulbahante kinsmen. On the way, he passed by the French Catholic Mission at Daymoole [sic], a few miles inland on the road to Sheikh. The Catholic Mission was established in the Protectorate in 1891 [sic] and with a skeleton staff of three fathers and three sisters, catered to Somali orphans whom they hoped to Christianize. *According to local tradition*, the Sayyid came upon a party of these orphans who responded to the Somali query of their clan affiliation – the typical Somali query to reveal someone’s identity – that they ‘belonged to the clan of the fathers.’⁷ This *encounter is alleged to have enraged the Sayyid*, confirming in his mind that Christian overlordship in his country was tantamount to destruction of his people’s faith.⁸ [emphasis added]

In his recent dissertation, historian Muhammad Haji Ingiriis recalls the famous encounter as follows:

According to Dervish tradition, on his way from an urban to a rural area, the Sayyid met orphaned boys converted into Christianity by French-speaking Belgian [sic] missionaries. When he asked them to which clan they belonged, the orphans replied that they were the 'clan of the fathers' (in Somali, *Reer Faddar*). This response made him furious because he believed recognizing one's Muslim religion and patrilineal line of descent through *abtirsiinyo* (clan genealogy) was necessary to one's existence and identity as a Somali. The Sayyid wrote in the first letter he sent to a Somali clan [the Edagalle Habr Garhajis] in 1899 thus: 'Do you not see that they have destroyed our religion and made our children their children'?'⁹

No Protestant or English missionaries worked in British Somaliland before 1910, making it perhaps the only possession in the 19th century British Empire with no Anglican missionaries. How was it that the Capuchins, a minor order of the Franciscans, came to Somaliland?

III. Capuchins in Somali Lands

The Capuchins were a 16th century reform movement within the Franciscan Order.¹⁰ They preached Catholicism using basic language, practiced charity, and provided social services. They followed a strict lifestyle, practiced simplicity in clothing and home furnishings, and relied heavily on donations. They advocated a return to strict observance of older Franciscan rules. Proud of their distinctive religious habit, Capuchins wore a long chestnut brown tunic, a large pointed hood (Ital., *capuche*) off their shoulders, and a woolen cord around the waist with three knots. They were also remarkable because they grew long, untrimmed beards. One can imagine what northern coast Somalis 130 years ago may have thought about these unusual looking Europeans.

A Capuchin lives with his brothers in a humble existence that involves considerable daily prayer and contemplation. As missionaries, they trained at a special college in Rome to be approachable and humble. They maintain a strong sense of solidarity with the poor and teach the dignity of every person in an environment where all are deemed equal. Their basic approach to missionary activities enabled

them to work in challenging locations. Out of practical necessity before 1899, they cooperated with British colonial authorities on the Somali Coast.

In 1842, Catholics divided their missionary involvement in northeast Africa between two Apostolic Vicarates: the Lazarist Fathers were assigned to highland Ethiopia and the Capuchins of Toulouse Province (France) were entrusted with missions to the Oromo lands. Under the direction of Vicar Laurent Massaia, new missions opened in Gojjam and the Oromo lands. In 1875, Massaia chose Monseigneur Louis Taurin de Cahagne (1826-1899) as his successor; in 1881, Cahagne assumed leadership of all Capuchins in Oromia.

Cahagne sought to shorten communication links among the isolated stations in northeast Africa. In 1881, he petitioned the Egyptian authorities on the Somali Coast for permission to rent a small house in Berbera. The Egyptians denied his request yet allowed the missionaries to casually tutor a few merchants' sons. In 1882, evidently without approval Cahagne quietly assigned a mission to Zeila.¹¹ From a dilapidated building, Capuchins Père Cesaire and Frère Stanislas ran a small provisions store and classroom. The Capuchins maintained cordial relations with British administrators who replaced the Egyptians in 1884. Cahagne was dismayed to learn the British had little interest in the Somaliland interior; they even welcomed the return of Muslim rule to Harar which placed Christians at risk of attack from the newly installed Emir Abdulahi. The small school at Zeila was considered a failure and closed in 1884. Stanislas was not optimistic about their chances for conversion success among the Somalis, admitting, "we are like a wounded bird on a broken branch."¹²

The animus of some British officials was evident after 1884, especially from Langston Walsh, an abrasive Vice-Consul who disdained missionaries, sneering that "anyone brought up in a Roman Catholic mission is an unfriendly if not active enemy of the English."¹³ He even denied permission for Salvation Army representatives to come from Aden to conduct religious services at Bullaxaar because "we permit no proselytization in Somaliland."¹⁴ In 1887, the Christian Abyssinians reestablished control of historically Muslim Harar, banished the ruling Emir, and replaced him with Ras Makonnen. In June 1891, Louis Lasserre, the Apostolic Delegate for Arabia and northeast Africa, recommended a Capuchin mission station be established at Berbera whose growing population was seasonally estimated at over 5,000.¹⁵

In the late 19th century, its key market months from October to March included the Berbera Fair. Between March and September, however, was a harsh season that Somalis called '*bad-xiran*' (the sea closure), when most Berberans retreated southward to a cooler environment. The increased population of Berbera in 1895-96 may be attributable to the pressures of border raids by the encroaching Ethiopian forces. Similar to the Berbera station, two more new Capuchin missions had been established west of Harar (Bilalou) and at Lafto, southwest of Harar.¹⁶

The first three Capuchins from Toulouse arrived in Somaliland in 1892-93. Few in number, limited in resources, their mobility constrained by British authorities, and greeted with suspicion by Somalis, their initial activities are still considered a symbolic trigger that fired Sayyid Muhammad's revivalist, puritanical struggle to repel all aspects of western colonization. According to Wingate's colonial investigation in 1909, the Sayyid found the Somalis' situation especially deplorable since coastal communities were subject to British rule, while rural lineages and sub clans southwest of Berbera into the Ogadeen were under deadly attacks from Abyssinian armies. To direct the new Somaliland mission, Lasserre chose Père Evangeliste de Larajasse, a former vicar at the Marseilles convent with a personal interest in northeast Africa. Evangeliste replaced his brother Anselme who died suddenly prior to assignment at the Aden mission. Evangeliste arrived at Berbera in September 1892, rented a small house from an Indian merchant, and was joined in December by Frère Bernard de Marles.¹⁷ There is no record of British opposition to the Capuchins, no attempt to expel them, nor any official mention of their presence. Walsh had left Somaliland a few months earlier. The French-speaking Catholics eventually became unpaid adjuncts in the early years of British rule over the Somali Coast.

For several months, Evangeliste and Bernard led quiet lives. They ventured into the local market, offered rice to poor Somalis, and sometimes invited sick beggars into their house where they provided small amounts of medicine. Evangeliste organized a class for a few sons of Arab and Indian merchants. The nationalities clashed in class, attendance never exceeded five, and teaching was halted after one month. Somalis rumored that the Capuchins engaged in slave trading and urged Berberans to avoid all contact with the strangers.¹⁸ While in semi-seclusion, the missionaries carefully gathered materials about the Somali language. Fluency in the local language was indispensable for effective apostolic work. Before they attempted any conversions, the missionaries spent two years interviewing and questioning Somalis who also spoke English or Arabic.¹⁹

In November 1893, Cyprien de Sampont replaced Frère Bernard as Evangeliste's associate. An imposing man over six feet tall, "with a long flowing beard and a certain martial air," Cyprien was dubbed the "great doctor" by Somalis for his treatment of dental and medical issues.²⁰ He served as cook and schoolmaster at the little station. Missionaries had to be jacks-of-all-trades for their own survival and to fulfill the demands of charity towards the people they'd "come to serve." Cyprien tried to teach about ten Somalis some rudimentary English; within a few months, all had deserted the school and presumably returned to rural areas. Despite their isolation and lack of success, after Lasserre visited the mission in December 1893, he decided the outpost still deserved support.

Back in France, Lasserre solicited donations to purchase a larger, more permanent residence on private property, beyond the one-room cabin that served as a dormitory, classroom and sanctuary. Though not opposed to Capuchin activities, the British denied their request to purchase private land. The annual Somali Coast Administration Report for 1893-94 only observed that the "Catholics educate 25 boys [sic]... and the mission school competes with the Government institution [sic] to some extent."²¹ Vice Consul Abud even accused Taurin Cahagne and his Harari-based missionaries of political intrigue with Menelik under the guise of religious work.²² Beyond acknowledging their presence, British sources say nothing about the unusual Capuchins in their long brown garments. This was hardly unexpected since the Fathers led cloistered lives from 1892-94. Even during the torrid summer heat from March to September, local authorities offered them little more than toleration.

The British policy of benign neglect shifted in 1894-95 when drought, famine, rinderpest and Abyssinian incursions forced a thousand starving Somalis into Berbera, dependent on charity. Many ill Somalis flooded the mission station which became a veritable hospital. Evangeliste and Cyprien distributed food, provided minimal shelter, offered amateur medical care, and dispensed surplus medicine donated by departing game hunters. By caring for sufferers, the Fathers relieved some financial obligations of a stringent administration which paid small subsidies directly to the Capuchins for "their good works."²³ Thanks to a sharp increase in livestock exports, the British authorities collected more export fees that, in turn, enabled them to donate larger amounts to the missionaries. John Jopp, the new Aden Resident, supported the Capuchins' classes upon learning that they taught obedience to the laws and civil powers of the British authorities.

By 1896, the British seemed less hostile to mission growth and in February, the administration allowed construction of a newly expanded residence. For reasons of protection, the accommodations were located between the main Somali section of Berbera and the large marketplace, near the Consul's residence in the European section dubbed "the Bakery." That section of Berbera was characterized by some coral and stone houses with flat roofs. The Somali quarter, a half mile away, was composed of a fluctuating number of portable nomadic homes (*aqaal*) made of sticks and woven mats.²⁴ When the new, spacious quarters were completed in June 1896, Evangeliste called it "their first prize and victory."²⁵

Only after living four years in the vicinity of Berbera, did the Capuchins begin to actively look for potential converts. The missionaries sought young Somali boys whom they could feed and clothe at the mission while initiating Christian theology. Evangeliste and Cyprien spoke decent Somali, astonishing Somalis who heard the "Padri" speak their language. Hardly any British administrators or Indian military officers bothered to learn Somali, even though it would have qualified them for a pay bonus. The Capuchins' ability to speak Somali and previous care for the sick evidently reduced suspicions as more young Somalis visited the mission. Before 1896, some of them were sons of Somali merchants who showed no interest in Catholic conversion, but wanted their sons to acquire English language skills.²⁶ Cyprien and Evangeliste faced major obstacles. The chances that Somali "converts" would retain Christian convictions were diminished because in the settled areas of Berbera, most wage paying jobs were held by Indians or Arabs. Significant numbers of Somalis in Berbera came from pastoral backgrounds whose migratory cycles inhibited any steady residence, making them temporary town dwellers. Evangeliste was routinely denied permission to move into the rural areas which were becoming better charted from the maps and travel reports left by European sportsmen.

Runaway Somalis were another perennial problem. Some youngsters stayed around the mission while their families or lineages seasonally grazed sheep and goats nearby or traded items at the annual Berbera Fair. When the youngsters moved south from March to September, Cyprien and Evangeliste were prohibited from following them. Living expenses were high since most foods, except for meat products, were imported. Financial stringency and irregular access to youths hampered the missionaries' efforts to provide a Christian

education for a critical mass of Somalis. The Capuchins constantly sought permission to start an agricultural station, but the Aden Resident denied it on the grounds that such activities would arouse Somali anger. Amidst an erratic period that combined prosperous livestock commerce with widespread poverty, the British agreed to supervise contracts between the Fathers and the few Somalis who sought to reside at the mission. The 1896 regulations stipulated that when Somali parents entrusted their child to the missionaries, the children were obliged to remain there until their eighteenth birthday. This contractual stipulation implied a stationary life nearly impossible to fit into the oscillating pastoralist cycles of grazing requirements.

Family members signed the contract before witnesses. The Somali Coast Consul initialed vouchers with the Aden Residency seal and Evangeliste kept copies. If parents removed their child, they were obliged to reimburse the Capuchins for all expenses incurred, a monthly cost of 10 rupees, a substantial amount for Somali pastoralists. Evangeliste admitted twenty Somalis to the mission and four years later, he claimed every one had become a Christian. He imagined that new catechists might eventually embark as "Somali missionaries," working in rural areas where Capuchin Fathers were not allowed to go.²⁷ While debatable as a practical strategy, it is possible that it was one of these Catholic Somalis whom Sayyid Muhammad encountered away from Berbera sometime before 1899; according to Dervish lore, the converts identified themselves as being from "the clan of the Fathers." The contractual system aimed to provide a stable body of settled Berberans that assured the Capuchins some time for conversion efforts. By 1910, when imperial forces withdrew from the Somaliland interior and expelled all missionaries, Cyprien claimed the Capuchins had converted over 200 Somalis since 1896, an unlikely figure for which no statistical support has been found.

The Fathers predicted that, although few in quantity, the influence of the Somali catechists would exceed their numbers. The colonial authorities and missionaries viewed it as a positive outcome. The Sayyid and his Dervish supporters likely considered them the dangerous tip of a sword, an advanced force of invaders detrimental to the social and religious integrity of Muslim Somalis. The small Somali entrepreneurial class at Berbera may not have objected to the contractual conditions. According to attendance rolls, most mission enrollees were orphans from the Warsangeli, Habr Toljaala, and Dholbante. It's difficult to know for sure, but a burgeoning group of Somalis seem

to have grown wealthy as inland intermediaries thanks to the steady growth in export livestock trading.

Evangeliste assumed that new converts would somehow proselytize among their own lineages and sub-clans. This outcome seems implausible. Doing so would require the boys to have suitable female marriage partners, so they sought orphaned girls as potential catechists and opened a small orphanage next to the school in Berbera. The British still rejected the Capuchins' requests for a post away from the coast, but allowed them limited local movement.²⁸ The missionaries' search for marriage partners to "safeguard the faith" stood in stark contrast to the Islamic practice of polygamous marriages. Evangeliste requested Catholic Sisters as auxiliaries to raise Somali girls as Christians. In November 1896, five Sisters from the Congregation des Tertiaires Régulières de Calais arrived in Berbera. What lines of reasoning they deployed cannot be determined; their sporadic successes angered Somali men. The possible "loss" of their daughters would affect Somali marriages and there were reports of Somali men barring the Sisters from their hamlets.²⁹ By 1899, the Capuchins claimed that fifty boys and girls were enrolled under the contract system, plus housing for a small number of orphans.³⁰ Evangeliste claimed a total of 36 Somalis had converted to Christianity with 10 marriages arranged amongst them. The converts represented a variety of lineages and sub-clans whom the missionaries hoped would facilitate the spread of Catholicism.³¹ The effects on Somali marriages and kin relations suggested how a cultural and religious breakdown, as predicted by Sayyid Muhammad, already affected Muslim Somali life. Learning about arranged Christian marriages and seeing the distinctive clothing worn by such youngsters would have infuriated him.

The missionaries taught different rituals and codes of conduct. Conversion was on an individual basis and presupposed life-long monogamy, some equality between spouses, and the primacy of the nuclear family. Somali marriages were polygamous, divorce more easily effected, and marital stability was protected by bride-wealth. Children belonged to the lineage and sub-clan, not to a nuclear family. Somali marriage was not a contract between two individuals; it was a strategic way of re-aligning lineages for cooperation.³² Unlike the Christian concept, Somali marriage was more than a personal contract. Its corporate character was implied in the bride wealth payments and dowry distributions that were expected to continue throughout the marriage. In the arid environment of northern Somali land, where

human and livestock populations pressed “heavily upon the sparse grazing resources available, there [was] constant competition for access to pasture and frequent lineage strife...the rights and duties of marriage must be viewed...in relation to the importance which patrilineal and matrilineal ties often assume in linking lineages.”³³ In a polygamous pastoralist family, “each wife and her children form a separate socio-economic unit with their own dwelling and small stock (sheep and goats).”³⁴ Somali marriages provided valuable subsidiary connections when families watered livestock or sought access to other grazing lands. Mohamed Haji Ingiriis contends that:

Somali civil wars have shown that patterns and practices of cross lineage or inter-clan Somali marriages that were supposed to lead to safety and security were not universal; at the time of peace, it was fine, but at the time of war it was not. It has been assumed – because of outmoded anthropological research – that interclan relations mediated through cross-clan marriages between Somalis had helped create ‘reciprocal relationships’ between two families from different clans which was supposedly extended to the whole clan...we need to critique and revise outdated anthropological data from over sixty years ago.³⁵

When lineage ties were weak or non-existent, marriages were a way to establish valuable connections between disparate groups. The western concept of marriage advocated by the Capuchins sought to replace the Somali system altogether. For those rare Christian marriages, the individual preferences of converts took preference over traditional social relations. If the Capuchins considered lineage ties, it was at a clan or sub-clan level, such as the marriage of one Warsangeli to another Warsangeli.

Whereas the exchange of gifts among Somalis was a symbolic and material means to establish new family ties, mission-arranged marriages excluded them. The Capuchins removed children from the pastoral, Islamic world of their parents, relocating them to a Christian, sedentary life at the coastal station that weakened kinship bonds and undermined the material bases for marriage. The students and catechists of the Berbera mission, without clear family ties, might have been considered as being as “foreign” as the European authorities. Encountering this phenomenon in the late 1890s enraged Sayyid Muhammad who denounced the Christian colonizers for “stealing Somali children.”

Besides their impressive charitable work during harsh times, the Capuchins made a significant contribution to Somali language studies. Evangeliste and Cyprien systematically arranged their Somali materials, intending to publish them as a dictionary and grammar. Lord Delamere, a wealthy Englishman who frequently went big game hunting in the Somali Peninsula and later settled in Nairobi, learned about their studies and agreed to assume the publication costs for both texts. In 1897, their two books, *Practical Grammar of the Somali Language* and a one volume, *English-Somali and Somali-English Dictionary* were published in London by Routledge and Kegan Paul. Franciscan officials in Paris and Toulouse were dismayed the books were not in French.³⁶ Evangeliste responded to such complaints by suggesting (tongue-in-cheek) they wrote the books in English so that imperial authorities would not fantasize that the Capuchins intended to establish a stealth French colony amidst a British Protectorate! Evangeliste explained that “a missionary loves his country, of course, but not to the point where it may cause him to compromise his work, which is before all else the conversion of souls.”³⁷ Indian Government officials welcomed the publications and allocated funds to purchase forty copies of each. The grammar was the first systematic study of the Somali language, correcting many limitations of Frederick Hunter’s small book with its unclassified vocabulary.³⁸ The missionaries examined most aspects of the Somali language but raised no philological questions. Twenty years later, Cyprien de Sampont published a small book of prayers translated into Somali. In 1918, the Institut de France awarded him the Volney Prize for an updated version of the original text, retitled *Une Grammaire Somali*.³⁹

On October 1, 1898, imperial decision-making for the Somaliland Protectorate was transferred from the Government of India to the Foreign Office, thus ending fourteen years of an indifferent administrative chain of command from Bombay to Aden and onward to the Somaliland Protectorate. The need to deal with an aggressive Emperor Menelik II and increased diplomatic complications with French and Italian empire-builders prompted the shift of imperial control to the Foreign Office. From 1884-1898, the Government of India spent meager funds on functional security and law enforcement. Any concern about Somali education and public health matters was erratic and limited.⁴⁰ The Fathers insisted that an inland station with an adjacent farm producing food would aid proselytization. Foreign Office officials allowed them to briefly visit the Golis Mountains south of Berbera only for

brief respite during the hot summer months, prohibiting efforts to teach agriculture or “interfere with Somali lives.”⁴¹ The late Reverend Adrian Hastings once observed that:

religious conversion, whether of an individual or a group is notoriously difficult to analyze convincingly. Its takeoff point seems often superficial, materially self-seeking, or just the interpretation of some specific incident in terms of an ultimate meaning which appears to be, to the uninvolved, inadequate to bear so great a weight...the power of writing, of the Book, could seem spectacularly impressive...the most characteristic and effective achievement of the nineteenth-century missionary had been to translate the scriptures, hymnbooks and catechisms into a great number of languages.⁴²

Even so, by 1950 there were fewer than 200 Somali Catholics in the entire Somaliland Protectorate, many of whom evidently converted while students at the Marist Brothers school in Aden. This minimal effect on Somali life stands in sharp contrast to the deadly ramifications of imperial Abyssinia.

IV. The Ethiopian Imperialist Impact on Somalis

While symbolically outrageous to the Sayyid, the impact of the missionaries mediated through a handful of Capuchin Fathers, was limited when compared to the predatory, rapacious theft of livestock by Abyssinian troops that spread out across Somali lands from Harar under Ras Makonnen, especially after the Battle of Adwa in March 1896. The term “Abyssinia” refers to a physical entity in the well-watered northern and central highlands, dominated culturally and politically by the Orthodox Christian, Semitic speaking Amhara and Tigre. It was ruled nominally by an aristocratic and ecclesiastical hierarchy based at Gondar after the 17th century. Whatever terminology one uses to characterize Abyssinia before 1890, it was *never* a compact political unit.

From 1876 to 1916, a conjunction of political, diplomatic, military and strategic circumstances enabled Abyssinia to remain independent throughout the imperialist partition of Africa. During his reign as Emperor (1889-1913), Menelik II vastly expanded the frontiers of Abyssinia and created the basis for modern Ethiopia. The military success and political dominance of the Amhara-Tigre depended significantly on their unrestricted access to modern weaponry that was

guaranteed by Ethiopia's exemption from the Brussels General Act of 1890. In essence, Abyssinia survived the European imperialist partition of Africa by annexing Oromo territory and Somali lands, transforming itself into an aggressive imperial participant – Ethiopia.⁴³ The immense destruction of Somali property and livestock cannot be overstated. In a previous article, the author provided eyewitness accounts of the Abyssinian carnage of Somali lives.⁴⁴ As mentioned earlier, the large destitute population of Berbera between 1895-1896 was primarily the result of deadly pressures from the violent Abyssinian encroachments. In 1892, E.V. Stace, the British Consul for the Somali Coast Protectorate reported:

a large Abyssinian expedition has returned from the Ogaden bringing with them as booty thousands of camels and cattle and property of all descriptions. I hear from other sources that they have devastated the people...Many people are dying of starvation and an epidemic said to be cholera but which may be 'starvation fever' has broken out, and carried off numerous victims daily...This state of affairs is attributed entirely to the conduct of the Abyssinian soldiery who eat up everything.⁴⁵

In 1901, Captain R.B. Cobbold was seconded to accompany an Ethiopian expeditionary force across the Ogadeen. Two selections from his diary describe what he witnessed over a three-month period:

June 5th (at Warandad). The soil of the country we passed through today seemed of unusual richness, being of the ruddy colour so prevalent in Harar and the Ogaden. There was much cultivation of dhourra and traces of a large population but now not a village or a sign of humanity was to be seen. All had fled at the approach of the [Abyssinian] army, knowing from bitter experience that to stay behind was to be robbed and possibly killed, certainly ill-treated.

July 11th (at Hanemleh). All this cruel and barbarous treatment which the Somalis undergo at the hands of the Abyssinians and which, being unarmed (thanks to the British government) they have to endure without a murmur, will someday react on the heads of the Abyssinians. Someday a reckoning up will come, and with the Somalis armed the possibility of the downfall of Abyssinia would be within the realm of practical politics. For the Moslems who would rush eagerly to arms to exterminate their hated enemies would run into huge figures. And if ever a war was popular, this one would be so; I think that even women and children would, if permitted, gladly risk their lives in so righteous a cause.⁴⁶

V. Conclusion

The small Catholic missionary presence on the Somali Coast after 1892, despite its erratic efforts to convert a handful of Somali youngsters, lent credence to Sayyid Muhamad's calls to protect and revitalize Islam. Despite minor variations in the details, traditional accounts of the Sayyid's encounters with English-speaking, Christian Somalis are quite consistent. None of the Dervish traditions suggest the Sayyid ever met a Capuchin. The material effects of the Christian Abyssinian military attacks on Somalis and their property vastly exceeded the interventions of the Capuchin missionaries. The late Somali historian Said Sheikh Samatar contended that northern Somalis lost no lands to the British colonizers, were not subjected to forced labor, and suffered few disruptions from the imperial presence, which included the handful of Catholic missionaries. Samatar concluded that the colonizing abuses were "different with respect to Ethiopian encroachment on western Somalia" whereas Ras Makonnen's well-armed hordes attacked Somalis, occupied their lands, pillaged crops and commandeered vast numbers of Somali livestock. Based on his historical interviews with Ogadeen elders, Samatar estimated that between 1890 and 1897, Ras Makonnen "exacted in tribute or seized in raid, 100,000 head of cattle, 200,000 head of camels and about 600,000 sheep and goats from the Ogadeen Somalis."⁴⁷ Geographer Abdi Ismail Samatar reached a similar conclusion:

Although these estimates may be exaggerated, they underline the far-reaching social, economic, and political impact these expeditions had on Somali pastoralists. The ravaging tribute-exacting incursions of Menelik's marauding armies into western Somaliland, reminiscent of pre-capitalist modes of extraction, *contrasted sharply with British colonial involvement in Somaliland.* [emphasis added]⁴⁸

This article urges further research into the missionary impact on northern Somali life, especially in the post-Dervish period from 1920-1960. For instance, were the Somalis affiliated with the Capuchin Mission the children of a western-oriented, emergent merchant class whose members used traditional positions to engage as middlemen in commercial livestock transactions and, of necessity, collaborated with the British Administration? Finally, we still await historical narratives and biographies of important Christian Somalis like Michael Mariano and

his extended family who participated in the Somali struggle for political independence, over sixty years ago.

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Notes

1. Said Sheikh Samatar, *Oral Poetry and Somali Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 108.
2. The author uses the terms Somaliland, Somali lands, Somali coast, and Somali territories to refer to slightly different entities appropriate to late 19th century terminology which hopefully are easy to distinguish.
3. Zaki Hanna Kour, *The History of Aden, 1839-1872* (London: Frank Cass, 1981).
4. Sheikh Jaama 'Umar 'Isse, *Taarrixdhii Daraawiiishta* (Mogadishu: NP, 1973), p. 12.
5. Douglas Jardine, *The Mad Mullah of Somaliland* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1970 edition), p. 48 and pp. 190-192. There never was any mission station at Daymoole as some scholars have assumed, e.g., I.M. Lewis, Said S. Samatar, and Abdul Bernath.
6. I.M. Lewis, *The Modern History of Somaliland* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1965), p. 67.
7. Sheikh Jaama, *Taarrixdhi*, p. 8.
8. Samatar, *Oral Poetry*, p. 107. In 1992, this story was revised slightly by Abdul Bernath as follows: "This anger was further intensified when he met a group of Muslim children on his way from Berbera to his Dulbahante kinsmen. These Muslim orphans attended a Catholic mission at Daymoole [sic] and on being asked to state their clan affiliation (the surest way to denote Somali identity) they replied that they 'belonged to the clan of the Fathers.' On another occasion, he was outraged when a Muslim boy replied that his name was 'John Abdullah.'" Abdul Bernath, "The Sayyid and the Salihya Tariqa; Reformist, Anti-Colonial Hero in Somalia," in Said S. Samatar (ed.) *In the Shadow of Conquest: Islam in Colonial Northeast Africa* (Trenton: Red Sea Press, 1992), pp. 33-47.
9. Mohamed Haji Ingiriis, "Founding, Forming and Formulating a Nation: The Genesis and Genealogies of Modern Somali Nationalism, 1887-1947," (Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Oxford, 2021). Chapter 2, page 8; and quoting CO/535, "Colonial Office and Predecessors, Somaliland (Sir Reginald Wingate's Mission Dispatch 1909)."
10. <https://www.capuchin.org.au/about-us/> and Wikipedia, *Order of Friars Minor Capuchin* [accessed June 1, 2020]. Email communication with Father Robert Barbato, Old Mission Santa Ynez, California [Capuchin and Franciscan] June 29, 2020.
11. Gaëtan Bernoville, *Monseigneur Jarrosseau et la Mission des Gallas* (Paris: Editions Albin Michel, 1950), pp. 48, 67-69.

12. Archives de Couvent Capucin à Toulouse, France [ACCT], Series 2R/238, "Rapport Annual, 1887."
13. FO 78/4260, "Walsh Memorandum," 10 January 1889.
14. Langton P. Walsh, *Under the Flag and Somali Coast Stories* (London: Andrew Melrose, 1934), p. 306.
15. Oeuvres Pontificale Missionnaires [OPM], 1890 Carton, Lasserre to Taurin Cahagne, October 24, 1889, and Archives de Couvent Capucin à Toulouse [ACCT], Series IR/5, "Prefecture Apostolic des Somalis, 1886-1931."
16. Bernoville, *op. cit.*, p. 139.
17. Anonymous, "Relations sur la Mission Catholiques de Berberah (Somaliland) depuis sa foundation: 1892-1903," *Le Petit Messager de St. François*, 84 (mai 1903), pp. 179-81.
18. Anonymous, "Relations sur la Mission Catholiques," *La Petite Messager de St. François*, 88 (septembre 1903), pp. 347-349.
19. Anonymous, "Revue de 'The Somali/English and English/Somali Dictionary,' " *Les Missions Catholiques*, 1476 (17 septembre, 1897), p. 456.
20. Anonymous, "Frère Cyprien de Sampont," *Le Petite Messager de St. François*, 462 (juin 1936), pp. 190-92; and 463 (juillet 1936), pp. 222-224.
21. *Somali Coast Administration Report, 1893-94*, p. 11.
22. India Office Records, *Political and Secret Letters from Aden*/Volume 7, Ferris to Cromer, December 1896.
23. R.P. Evangeliste, "La Mission Somali," *Les Missions Catholiques*, 1391 (31 janvier, 1896), p. 52. *Somali Coast Administration Report, 1895-96*, p. 7.
24. L/P&S/7/301, Harald Swayne, *The Habr Toljaala Survey*, (May 19, 1891).
25. R.P. Evangeliste, "Au Pays de Somalis," *Les Missions Catholiques*, XXXIV (novembre 1902), p. 546.
26. Anonymous, "The Somali Coast Mission," *Illustrated Catholic Missions*, XIV, 158 (June 1899), p. 26.
27. ACCT, IR/5, R.P. Pascal, "Rapport de Somalis," p. 33.
28. ACCT, 2R/234, *Evangeliste à Père Provincial*, 5 mars, 1897.
29. Anonymous, "The Somali Coast Mission," *Illustrated Catholic News*, XIV, 158 (juin 1899), p. 347; and Anonymous, "Relations sur la mission Catholiques de Berberah (Somaliland) depuis sa foundation: 1892-1903," *Le Petite Messager de St. François*, 84 (mai 1903), pp. 179-81; 88 (septembre 1903), pp. 347-49.
30. The Somali word for orphan is *agoon* and *agoonta* means orphans (plural) The term refers to those who have no father. Somalis call *rajay* those whose mother has died, although this is rarely used since more men die than women in Somali wars. Personal email from Mohamed Haji Ingiriis, June 20, 2020.
31. Lettre de Evangeliste," *Les Missions Catholiques*, #1777 (26 juin, 1903), p. 302; and Evangeliste de Larajasse," La Mission Somalis," *Les Missions Catholiques*, #1391 (31 janvier, 1896), p. 52.
32. I.M. Lewis, *Marriage and the Family in Northern Somaliland* (Kampala: East African Institute of Social Research, 1962), p. 21.
33. Lewis, *Marriage and Family*, pp. 6-7.

34. Ioan M. Lewis, *Understanding Somalia and Somaliland* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), p. 12.
35. Personal email from Mohamed Haji Ingiriis, June 30, 2020. See also, Virginia Luling and Anita Adam, "Continuities and Changes: Marriage in Southern Somalia and the Diaspora," *Northeast African Studies*, Vol. 15, #1 (2015), pp. 139-165. Given the limited amount of published material on Somali marriage practices, this essay is a valuable addition to the ethnographic record.
36. Anonymous, "Frère Cyprien de Sampont," *Le Petite Messager de St. François*, 463 (juillet 1936), p. 223.
37. *Ibid*, p. 224.
38. Frederick M. Hunter, *A Grammar of the Somali Language* (Bombay: The Government Printer, 1880).
39. Anonymous, "Frère Cyprien," p. 225.
40. For further analysis of British imperial policy toward the Somaliland Protectorate, see Charles L. Gesheker, "British Imperialism and the Somali Response, 1884-1899," Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, (UCLA History Department, 1972), pp. 225-253.
41. India Office Records, *Political and Secret Letters from Aden* [L/P&S/7/309], Sadler to Cuningham, January 5, 1898.
42. Adrian Hastings, "Christianity," in John Middleton (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Africa South of the Sahara* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997, Vol. 1), pp. 280-86.
43. See Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia, 1855-1991* (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2002; Harold Marcus, *The Life and Times of Menelik II; 1844-1913* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975); and David Hamilton, "Ethiopia's Frontiers: The Boundary Agreements and Their Demarcation, 1896-1956," (unpublished dissertation, Oxford University, 1974).
44. Charles L. Gesheker, "Anti-Colonialism and Class Formation: The Eastern Horn of Africa Before 1950," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* (Vol. 18, #1, 1985), pp. 1-32.
45. Public Record Office, London (PRO), FO403/177, Stace to Baring, April 12, 1892.
46. *Captain R.B. Cobbold's Diary of the Anglo-Abyssinian Campaign, 1901* (London: Ministry of Defense, Whitehall Library).
47. Samatar, *Oral Poetry*, pp. 108-111 and p. 213, footnote number 58.
48. Abdi Ismail Samatar, *The State and Rural Transformation in Northern Somaliland, 1884-1986* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), p. 35.