Boston University

OpenBU **http://open.bu.edu**

Journal of African Christian Biography Journal of African Christian Biography: v. 8, no. 1

2023-01

A brief introduction to Somali Christian history

https://hdl.handle.net/2144/51538

"Downloaded from OpenBU. Boston University's institutional repository."

A Brief Introduction to Somali Christian History

By Ben I. Aram

Contrary to the frequent misconception that Christianity only arrived in Africa with the arrival of Western missionaries in the nineteenth century, archaeological and anthropological evidence show that Christianity reached Somalia in the centuries after it became established in the ancient Kingdom of Aksum in what is now Eritrea and northern Ethiopia in 356 AD.[56] In fact, "evidence from three directions sheds light on the pre-Islamic Judeao-Christian influence: written records, archaeological data and vestiges of Judeao-Christian symbolism still extant within both traditional Somali culture and closely related ethnic groups—[who are] part of both the Lowland and Highland Eastern Cushitic language clusters such as Oromo, Afar, Hadiya, Sidamo, Kambata, Konso and Rendille. Together such data indicates that both Judaism and Christianity preceded Islam to the lowland Horn of Africa."[57] The historical consciousness that Christianity has been present in Africa from its very beginnings plays a key role in the religious self-understanding of Somalis.

WRITTEN EVIDENCE[58]

Ali Abdirahman (1975: 43-74) begins his comprehensive work by pointing out the earliest record of contacts with coastal Somalia from ancient Middle Eastern civilizations. The first written mention of Somalia as the land of Punt[59] is from the Egyptian Fifth Dynasty, prior to 2000 BC. Later, Somalia was described in the Periplus of the Erythreaean Sea (dated as AD 50), again pointing to contacts by Greek, Egyptian and other Middle Eastern sailors and merchants with the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden coasts of northeast Africa. Ali Abdirahman (117) quotes several Arab sources from the 10th (al-Mas'udi), 11th (al-Biruni) and 12th centuries (al-Idrisi) that describe Seylac (Zeila), a port in northwest Somalia, near the border of Djibouti as a Christian city, with only a small minority population of Yemeni Muslim merchants. These Muslims lived peaceably with their co- religionists and paid tribute to the Aksumite monarch.[60] Later, control of coastal towns shifted to Yemeni Arabs. This situation changed by 1415, when

---

[56] Sada Mire, "Mapping the Archaeology of Somaliland: Religion, Art, Script, Time, Urbanism, Trade and Empire," *African Archaeological Review* 32, no. 1 (March 1, 2015): 111–36. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10437-015-9184-9.

[57] Ben I. Aram, "Somalia's Judeao-Christian Heritage: A Preliminary Survey," *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 22.2 (2003): 3, note 1.
Full article: https://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/ajet/22-2_003.pdf.

[58] The following sections are excerpted from Aram, "Somalia's Judeao-Christian Heritage: A Preliminary Survey," 8-14. See article for a full bibliography.

[59] The source of highly sought-after frankincense and myrrh.

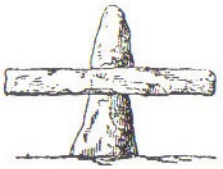
[60] See also Triminghams' quotation 'of lbn Hawqal from 978 (1952: p. 51).

the Abyssinian king Negus Yakuno Amlak re-conquered Seylac, killed many Muslims and forcibly converted survivors to Christianity and converted mosques to churches. However, within a few decades, Christianity had disappeared again from the city (Bertin 1983: 9).

How long Christianity lingered elsewhere along the Gulf of Aden coast of northern Somalia is not known, but there is a fascinating account from St. Francis Xavier's visit to the nearby island of Soqotra in 1542 (Freeman-Grenville 1966:135-137). In a letter dated 20 September 1542, he wrote to the Jesuit headquarters in Rome about his encounters with inhabitants of that island. They claimed to be converts of St. Thomas, and seemed to be totally illiterate and without any Scriptures. Their "priests" were also illiterate, but were able to do their daily prayers from memory, despite the fact they were in a language they did not understand.[61] They had totally forgotten the sacrament of baptism, but had Lenten fasts that parallel those of the Monophysite Ethiopian Orthodox Church (hereafter referred to as EOC) in terms of length and severity. St. Xavier remarked several times how proud the Soqotrans were of being Christian, and of their hostility to Yemeni Muslims. In northeast Somalia, there is one Somali clan, the Carab Maxamed Saalax who trace their genealogy to Soqotra.[62] At present, both the inhabitants of that island and their related clan in Somalia are Muslim.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

Richard Burton's Observations



In 1854 the first European explorer to visit Somalia described ruins of what the local Warsangeli clan claimed to be a church in what is now Sanaag Region of eastern Somaliland (Burton 1987: 127-129).[63] The Warsangeli nomads told him the ruins were the work of the *Nasraani*.[64] He also mentioned that the related Dhulbahante clan living to the south of the Warsangeli (Sool Region of Somaliland) still used to make stone or plastered

[61] St. Xavier speculated it was Chaldean, which is a reasonable hypothesis, since Syriac was used as a liturgical language in the Middle East and among the Mar Toma Christians of Kerala in south India.

[62] CQW. 1999. Personal communication. Nairobi, Kenya.

[63] Left: Illustration of a Dhulbahante cross from Burton's book.

[64] An Arabic term for Christians, somewhat derogatory. It can be speculated that these ruins were the work of what Ehret terms the Ahmar-Dharoor people; he postulates that the modern agropastoral Somali clan of Samaroon (Gadabuursi) are their modern descendants (Ehret 1995:242-247)

wood crosses at the foot and head of their tombs. Other, older graves in the region were also observed to be marked with crosses.

Modern Archaeological Evidence

On 8 September 1991, two European relief workers informed me of a meeting that they had in the previous week with an amateur Somali archaeologist, Cabdi[65] K. In Muqdisho. Cabdi had received some training either in Italy or the USSR. He mentioned having had some contact with Jewish archaeologists who were searching for ancient Jewish antiquities.

Cabdi showed the relief workers a number of artifacts that he had excavated. He was very careful not to mention the precise location, but showed photographs of various excavation sites. At one site Cabdi located a graveyard and had to pay for permission to excavate. While digging, he found an arrow pointing to a place where he found the engraved stone. This engraved stone was on a stone table four meters below ground surface. It had crosses engraved on it as well as geometric designs. There was a hole bored through one end of this stone. Cabdi also displayed other engraved stones, some in a cursive script that did not appear to be like Arabic or Ethiopic script. In the same location, Cabdi found a stone structure that he believed was a place of worship.

Cabdi also mentioned finding a tomb somewhere in Somalia with a gravestone written in Arabic. The date on the tomb used the Christian calendar even though it dated from within the Muslim era. In 1993 Cabdi approached a European relief agency in Muqdisho with a request for funding in order to do further investigation. He refused to publish his information until he received financial support in order to do further research and publish a book. The relief agency he contacted was not able to assist him and I have not heard any further details about him since then.[66]

CULTURAL VESTIGES OF JUDEAO-CHRISTIAN SYMBOLISM

Genealogical Issues

Somali clan structure is based on genealogy, with many people knowing their genealogy beyond their 20th paternal ancestor. As with other non-Arab Muslims, Somalis link founders of particular clan families (eg. Isxaaq, Daarood) with famous Arab sheikhs who arrived from Arabia many centuries before, married a local girl, and founded a clan. In particular, clan genealogies were rooted in the Qureysh clan of the prophet Muhammad. Abdalla Omar (1995: 117-134) has provided some intriguing analysis of these claims, along with dating Islamization of many clans to the I 5th century. Despite the fact they spoke their own language, not Arabic, Somalis used to like to emphasize that they were

[65] In the Somali orthography, "c" represents the "ain" sound also found in Arabic and Hebrew.
[66] As a caution, while it seemed these archaeologists had genuine artifacts, the desire for funding may have influenced what the Christian relief workers were told.

Arabs. This distinction was particularly made vis-a-vis other Africans; however, racial discrimination against Somali migrant workers in Arabia, and disappointment with the lack of Arab relief aid and peacemaking help during the current civil war, have combined to severely erode this claim of Arab origin.

There are at least four Somali clans reputed to be of Jewish descent. Throughout various parts of southeast Ethiopia, southern Somalia and northeast Kenya, deep hand-dug wells, ruins and cairns are attributed by modern day Oromo and Somali clans living there as being the work of the extinct Madanle people. Schlee (1989: 96, 226-228) reviews information about their activities in the Wajir area of northeast Kenya. He cites local Somali oral history that refers to the Madanle as "bani-Israel" and that they were wiped out by a confederation of Digil, Reewin and Hawiye clans in the 16th or 17th century. Schlee presents evidence of their possible incorporation into the Somali Ajuuraan clan which now lives to the west of Wajir. Lewis (1969:47) also mentions that the Madanle occupied much of southern Somalia prior to that time. Cassanelli (l 982: 92-96) gives additional data on this mysterious clan, based on original sources in southern Somalia; he considers the Madanle as part of Ajuuraan theocracy that ruled southern Somalia in the 16th century. Brown (1989:29-36) gives extensive attention to oral history of both Somali and Borana clans in northeast Kenya concerning the wells and cairns attributed to this mysterious people. However, he quotes an early British colonial administrator, Lord Delamere, that the Madanle were Muslims.

The remaining three clans still exist today. The low-caste magician clan of Yibir is found mainly in eastern Ethiopia, Somaliland and northern Somalia. Some sources consider Yibir to be a corruption of the Somali word for Hebrew, *"Cibraani."* During the civil war, Yibir refugees in Kenya publicized their supposed links with the Falasha of northern Ethiopia. This was no doubt linked to their desire to find re-settlement in Israel, just as the Falasha had done. Some Yibir claim their early king Bucul[67] Bacayr[68] was Jewish and defeated by the Islamic missionary Aw Barkhadle in a contest of magic that took place in northern Somalia.

Somalis refer to members of the clans inhabiting the ancient Benaadir coast cities of Muqdisho, Merka, and Baraawe of southern Somalia as the *Gibilcad.*[69] Their background is largely Arab and Persian, and they represent the northernmost extent of Swahili culture on the Indian Ocean coast. However Swahili is spoken only in the southernmost city of Baraawe. Lewis (1969: 42) refers to possible Yemeni Jewish origins for some of the coastal city dwellers but does not elaborate. I have heard various accounts of the Begedi (inland from Merka) and Xaatim[70] (Baraawe) also being of Jewish

[67] An alternate prommciation is spelled "Bucur."
[68] Also known by a Muslim name of Maxamed Xaniif.
[69] Literally, "paleskins."
[70] In the Somali orthography, "x" represents an emphatic, aspirated "h."

descent.

Of lesser significance, but still intriguing, is the use of certain Biblical names among Somalis that are not typically used by Muslim Arabs in the Middle East.[71] These would include lsxaaq (Isaac), Eliyaas, Makahiil (Michael), and Daa'uud. Generally, only Arab Christians or Jews would employ these names. The fact that Isxaaq, Makahiil and Daa'uud are found near the beginning sequence of several clan genealogies may indicate earlier use of the names from pre-Islamic Jewish or Christian influence.

Sabbath Observance

While living in the small town of Homboy, Jilib District, in southern Somalia in 1988, I noticed that a significant portion of the population obeyed the injunction of a local religious leader not to cultivate their fields on Saturdays. These people were disciples of Sheekh Ibraahim from the Garre clan, whose father had founded the town in the early 20th century. They believed that farm work on Saturdays would result in various plagues striking their fields. Those observing this Sabbath rest worshipped normally with other villagers at the mosque on Fridays. I have been told of a family from the Baadacade clan in Buulo Burte in central Somalia that observed a similar taboo on Saturday work.[72] If this issue were to be surveyed, it is likely that more instances would be found.

In terms of Sunday observance, Schlee mentions that the Somali Garre clan of Mandera District in northeast Kenya will not begin a migration on Sundays, nor begin training a young baggage camel on a Sunday (Schlee 1994:55). He himself remarked on finding it unusual to see Muslims more concerned about Sunday than Friday.

Uses of the Cross

As noted by Burton over a century and a half ago, the symbol of the cross is still used in Somali culture. Some use the sign of the cross for a variety of superstitious purposes. In times of extreme danger, a cross may be drawn on the soil for its supposed protective power. Or, in cases where an oath is being taken a sign of the cross may be made. This mark of the cross is sometimes termed *falaad.* This could be related to the root word *fal* which means magic, from which other words meaning magic, bewitched, or wizard are derived, *viz.falaanfal, falan,* and *falanfallow* (Zorc & Osman 1993: 132). While Somalis use either *iskutallaab* or *saliib*[73] for cross, it is interesting to note that the official name of the Red Cross was translated as *laanqayr* (literally, "branch that is blessed").

---

[71] They are found in the Quran, but are not normally used by Muslims in most Arab lands (contrasting with the common usage of Old Testament names like Yuusuf, Ibraahim, Ismaaciil, Muuse, and Sulaymaan).

[72] ACX. 1997. Personal communication. Nairobi, Kenya.

[73] From the Arabic term.

Some sections of the Sheekhaal clan in eastern Ethiopia use the cross as a brand on their camels. They also inscribe a cross on stones marking graves. This mark is called *summaddii awliyo,* meaning, "brand of the saints." The Sheekhaal are a small priestly clan[74] aligned with the Hawiye clan family and are famed for their knowledge of Islam. Certain sections of the Karanle (Murusade) Hawiye clan brand their camels with a cross.[75] The Karanle are located both in central Somalia[76] and in the Shabeelle valley at Iimi within Ethiopia, adjacent to Oromo clans inhabiting the Bale mountains. It is likely that further investigation would reveal that other clans use the cross as a livestock brand.

From several Somali Christians from northwest Somaliland, I learned that pilgrims to the tomb of the pioneer Islamic missionary Aw Barkhadle make a sign of the cross from the white soil from his tomb. They keep this sign on their foreheads until they return to their homes. Three of these pilgrimages are considered to be equal in merit to a pilgrimage to Mecca.

The present survival of the cross as a symbol has no inherent spiritual value, yet it does support the archaeological evidence.[77] No Somali recognizes any Christian content within the sign of cross. Traditionally, Somalis knew very little about the Christian religion, other than it was something evil.

Islam arrived in the Horn of Africa shortly after the death of the Muhammed and spread rapidly. By the fifteenth century all Somalis had become Muslims. Two theological developments peculiar to the neighboring Ethiopian Orthodox Church prevented the pastoral, camel-herding Somalis from retaining the Christian faith: the following of Levitical dietary laws [which meant camels were considered unclean] and over 200 fast days in which animal products could not be consumed.[78] Thus, by the time of Western colonial powers arrived in the late 19th century, to be Somali meant to be Muslim. In fact, unlike other Muslims, Somalis do not have a category of "People of the Book" for Jews and Christians. One is either Muslim or "gaal" [infidel]. The approximately nineteen million Somalis are 99% Sunni Muslim.

Modern Christian mission work in Somalia began in 1880, first with Roman Catholic orphanages in Somaliland [British control], later in Italian controlled Somalia in the center and south. Roman Catholic missionaries also began work among Somalis in Djibouti and eastern Ethiopia. The first Protestant mission group was the Swedish Evangelical Mission which began in the southern port of Kismaayo, and eventually built four other stations in the lower Jubba River valley. The Eastern Mennonite Mission began work in Somalia in 1953, with SIM beginning in 1954 [although SIM had worked with Somalis in Aden since 1943 and in eastern Ethiopia since 1947]. Both the

[74] Their name is derived from the word *sheekh* in Arabic, meaning a religious authority.
[75] ACX. 1997. Personal communication. Nairobi.
[76] Ceel Buur district in Galguduud Region and Mgooye District in Lower Shabeelle Region.
[77] It is similar to the use of the cross as an artistic motif by the Muslim Berber Tamasheq (Tuareg) nomads of the Sahara in Algeria, Mali, and Niger.
[78] Aram, "Somalia's Judeao-Christian Heritage,"

Mennonite and SIM missionaries established a number of schools and hospitals in central and southern Somalia. The Marxist-leaning government of dictator Maxamed Siyaad Barre nationalized mission properties in the early 1970s, and arrested local Christians as "Western lackeys." In light of these pressures, all expatriate missionaries left by 1976. Following the disastrous Ogaden War with Ethiopia in 1977, followed by a massive influx of refugees, the Somali government invited a wide variety of relief organizations, including many Christian agencies, to return in 1981. A small Somali church met in the capital city of Muqdisho from the 1970s to the 1980s.[79]

A low-level civil war began in 1978, exploded into full conflict in the northwest [Somaliland] in 1988 and engulfed the entire country by the end of 1990. After the Barre regime was expelled, Somalia was essentially a failed state until the end of that decade. Currently the weak central government continues to fight *al-Shabaab* jihadists who still control large parts of southern Somalia and carry out terrorist attacks in Muqdisho and other cities. Al-Shabaab is violently anti-Christian, beheading or shooting many accused of being Christians. Somalia ranks 3rd on Open Doors'[80] World Watch List for persecution.

The unrecognized breakaway state of Somaliland is relatively stable with a presence of expatriate Christian workers for several decades. However, nearly 20 local Christians were imprisoned from in 2020 and 2021. Somali Christians in Djibouti and the Somali State in eastern Ethiopia enjoy a greater measure of religious freedom, although societal pressure against leaving Islam remains strong. Technically, Kenya has freedom of religion, but increasing attacks by *al-Shabaab* in the Somali-populated Northeastern Province means that Christians there face a serious threat.

For nearly 30 years, Somalis across the world have developed a deep attachment to the Internet for communication, news, and entertainment. Hundreds of Somali language websites have been launched. YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and WhatsApp are widely used, particularly on mobile devices. This has provided significant access to a variety of worldviews to which most Somalis had not previously been exposed. At the same time, there is evidence of an increasing global trend among Somali Muslims to question their religion. The extremism and violence of *al-Shabaab* provokes a negative response in the minds and hearts of many.

Satellite TV, social media and websites have become very strategic ways to surmount the political, cultural, and linguistic barriers to bring Somalis the Gospel message of the person and work of Jesus Christ. Digital media combined with mobile devices makes it possible for millions of individual Somalis to privately consider the claims of the Good News with little initial risk. A growing number of Somali Christians in their Diaspora are making use of digital media to reach their people within Somalia.

---

[79] Haile, Ahmed Ali, and David W. Shenk. *Teatime in Mogadishu: My Journey as a Peace Ambassador in the World of Islam*. Christians Meeting Muslims Series. Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2011. Link: https://heraldpress.com/9780836195576/teatime-in-mogadishu/

[80] Link: https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/persecution/countries/.

Marwaale, Tabitha Maria Magdalena
1915-1990
Protestant
Somalia

Xaawo Marwaale was born around 1915 in the village of Moofi, Jamaame District of Lower Jubba Region. Moofi was a village inhabited by the WaZigua people [also called Mushunguli]. Their ancestors came from northeast Tanzania and had been enslaved by Arabs (Omar A. Eno and Mohamed A. Eno 2014, Cabdisaciid Cabdi Ismaaciil 2015) in the early 19th century and sold to Somali plantation owners in the Middle Shabeelle Region. A large number escaped and moved to the lower Jubba valley in the middle of the 19th century where they maintained not only their culture, but also their Bantu language (Omar Eno and Van Lehman, 2003). Compared to the neighboring Shambaara/Gosha/Reer Goleed ethnic group, the WaZigua preserved more of their indigenous Bantu language and culture (Menkhaus 2003). Even in the 1980s, some inhabitants of Moofi were not fluent in Somali.

While still a young child, Tabitha was very sickly. Her parents gave her to Swedish missionaries who came to their village from Kismaayo. The Swedish Evangelical Mission had established their first mission station there in 1898 (Thoresen 20014:51). Initially her mother had refused, but Xaawo's father overruled and said this was a good opportunity for her. He told the Swedes that they could bring her to their boarding school in Kismaayo, and if she died, they were to be responsible for burying her. Herman Lundin and Selma Göransson brought Xaawo to the Swedish Mission School in Kismaayo where they nursed her back to health.

At school, Xaawo took the Bible name "Tabitha" [after an early Christian woman mentioned in Acts 9:36]. She began attending classes taught by the Swedish missionaries in Swahili. As she studied the Bible as part of her classes, she eventually put her trust in Jesus Christ. After graduating from the school, Tabitha married and had two children. However, both her husband and their children died of illness in Kismaayo.

In 1935, Mussolini's Fascist regime in Italy attacked Ethiopia from their colonies of Eritrea and Somalia. Sweden opposed this aggression at the League of Nations, so the Italian colonial government retaliated by deporting all the Swedish missionaries from the Jubba Valley. Since Tabitha had been widowed, and since they knew they were about to leave Somalia, the Swedish missionaries Per Olsson and Herman Lundin brought Tabitha back to her parents and family in Moofi.

Initially, Tabitha faced severe persecution from some of her older brothers who told her that she must remarry and return to Islam. She refused their demands and said that she would not re-marry and that she would remain a Christian. Tabitha was beaten so badly by her brothers that it took her three months to recover. However, her father then advocated for her, and said she could remain in her Christian faith. Before Tabitha's father died, he blessed her. He told her that in the future she would receive

visitors from America, Italy and England, that these visitors would joyfully worship with her. Her father said that Tabitha would remain in her Christian faith until she died.

The next 20 years were very difficult times for Tabitha as she faced hostility from her family and her community. However, she did not retaliate, trusted in her Savior Jesus Christ and showed love in the face of hatred. During the 1950s, Tabitha remarried. She witnessed to her husband Xasan, sharing the Gospel with him and he joined her in faith in Jesus Christ. Xasan died in 1982 or 1983.

From the middle of the 1950s until 1972, Tabitha's life became easier. The Mennonite Mission was active in Jamaame District and she, along with the remnant of local Christians from the time of the Swedish Mission worshipped regularly with these Christians from America and Canada. Victor Dorsch built a grain storage bin of concrete at Tabitha's Moofi home that lasted for the rest of her life.

Missionary doctor Ivan Leaman wrote this recollection of Tabitha: "She made a great impression on us when we first met her on our visit in 1960. We remember her exuberant joyful laugh. In 1960 and 1961, before the restrictions forbidding us to do village visitation, we remember with fondness the trips to her village on Sunday afternoons when we had a worship service with Hassan and Tabitha which included singing Swahili songs. One picture shows Hassan and Tabitha standing outside their house and was taken on one of those visits."

Tabitha practiced hospitality, welcoming other local Christians in the Lower Jubba valley to use her house. They considered her their Macallimad (Teacher) because of her deep knowledge of the Bible and her strong faith in Christ. When other Somali Bantu Christians would travel to her village, their faith was strengthened by her on those visits.

Tabitha strongly opposed the superstitions of witchcraft and dances that were part of the local culture. She did have a good knowledge of medicines from plants growing in the area and helped people in her area as a traditional healer. Her reliance was on local medicines and praying to Jesus Christ. She was one of the few literate women in her village and had a good knowledge of the basics of nutrition and sanitation. In addition to her mother-tongue of ki-Zigua, Tabitha was fluent in Swahili and could also speak Somali and af-Maay.

Tabitha received occasional visits from foreign Christians. This was especially important to her in a second lonely season in her life, the years between 1972 [when the Mennonite missionaries were forced to leave Jamaame Hospital (Leaman and Leaman 2021)] and 1985.

A leader in the Muqdisho church Aadan Jimcaale Faarax had previously lived for a time in Jamaame. He returned in 1985 to introduce some expatriate Christians in the Jubba valley to Tabitha and others of the Christian remnant. Afterwards, some of these foreign Christians made regular visits to Tabitha's home. She would greet them joyfully, usually coming in from tilling her cornfield. After putting her tea kettle on the fire, she would open her house and invite her guests inside. On the wall of her house, she had 1960 calendar with different pictures of scenes from the Bible; she would change these pages regularly. She never knew when her Christian friends were coming to visit, so she did not just put it up to impress them. Then, while waiting for

the tea to brew, Tabitha would get a wooden box out from under her bed that contained Bibles, hymnbooks and other Christian literature in Swahili and Somali.

She would distribute hymnbooks to her visitors. She loved to sing hymns in both Swahili and in Somali and asked her visitors to sing with her. She knew most of the songs by heart. Once, a foreign visitor remarked on the large crowd [mainly children] around her house listening to her sing and asked her if she should not be a bit more careful and not sing so loudly. Tabitha replied, "I have been beaten, whipped and jailed for my faith. I am not afraid." This visitor was ashamed because of his own fearfulness.

Missionary doctor Ivan Leaman wrote of meeting Tabitha after 15 years: "We had the wonderful privilege of meeting her again on our visit to Somalia…in 1987. On that surprise visit we recalled old times as we sang again the Swahili songs … [she had] a deep exuberant faith which she carried all her life and shared with others."

In her last few years of life, Tabitha would regularly travel to other towns in the region where she could meet for worship with a small group of Somali and foreign Christians. During the times of singing, Bible reading and listening to sermons, Tabitha would often begin to cry. She was both joyful and sad, recalling her past times of worship with other Christians…and looking forward to the time when she be without tears, worshipping Jesus Christ in the New Jerusalem with believers from all over the world (Revelations 21).

When the civil war came to the Jubba Valley in 1990, Tabitha was extremely vulnerable. She was a Christian, an elderly widow and none of her children were still alive to care for her. The Somali Bantu villages along the Jubba River did not have militias or weapons. This area became a battleground for clan militias from the Kismaayo area and places to the north and east. Most of the Somali Bantu villager's food was looted by gunmen from the different factions. A few local Somali Christians sent Tabitha money so she could buy food, but that was also stolen from her. From the most reliable accounts, it seems that Tabitha died of starvation in November 1990.

Tabitha is like the saints described in Hebrews 11[81] , a true hero of faith. She was someone looking for a better country, a heavenly one. From the world's perspective, Tabitha was weak and insignificant, a member of a despised minority clan with no political power. Furthermore, she was a member of the tiny Somali church. Yet, we know from 1st Corinthians 1:27[82] that God has chosen the weak to shame the strong. Tabitha's legacy of faith was a powerful testimony to the grace and power of God.

If you would like to hear Tabitha's testimony and four songs in Swahili, visit this link.[83] This recording was made at her home in Moofi in 1986.

Ben I. Aram

---

[81] Link to Bible text in Somali here: https://noloshacusub.com/kitaabka-quduuska-ah/axdiga-cusub/warqaddii-cibraaniyada-iyo-waraaqaha-guud/cibraaniyada

[82] Bible text in Somali: https://noloshacusub.com/kitaabka-quduuska-ah/axdiga-cusub/waraaqihii-rasuul-bawlos-qoray/1korintos

[83] Link: https://noloshacusub.com/maqal-muuqal/qasiidooyin/tabitha-qasiidooyin-iyo-maragfurka

Note: Read Tabitha's story in Somali HERE.[84]

References:

Cabdisaciid Cabdi Ismaaciil. 2015. *Halgankii Tukeyaasha. Carabtu Sidee U Jileen Madowga?* (The Struggle of the Crows: How Have the Arabs Painted The Black?)[85] Nairobi: Lino Type-setters: 95-110.

Leaman, Ivan with Mary Ellen Leaman. 2021. *Born For A Purpose. A Memoir From The Horn of Africa*.[86] Morgantown, PA: Masthoff Press: 190-192.

Menkhaus, Ken. 2003. "Bantu ethnic identities in Somalia." [87] In: *Annales d'Ethiopie*. Volume 19 (2003), 323-339.

Omar Eno and Dan Van Lehman. 2003. "The Somali Bantu. Their History and Culture." " Center for Applied Linguistics, The Cultural Orientation Resource Center Washington, DC, USA. DOWNLOAD HERE[88]

Omar A. Eno and Mohamed A. Eno. 2014. "The African Diaspora within Africa and the Impact of Slavery and Stigma in the Islamic Society: A Case Study of Somalia." [89] *Journal of Somali Studies*, Volume 1, Issue 2:61-89.

Thoresen, Frank-Ole. 2014. *A Reconciled Community of Suffering Disciples. Aspects of a Contextual Somali Ecclesiology*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc. LINK[90]

Thoresen, Frank-Ole. 2006. "The SEM Venture." Unpublished manuscript.

This article, received in 2022, was written by Ben I. Aram, who is Director of The New Life Media, a multi-platform social media/website ministry that communicates the Gospel in the Somali language. Ben I. Aram served seven years inside Somalia, then worked in media with Somali refugee Christians in Kenya and Ethiopia for fifteen years. This article was written and translated to Somali as part of the New Life's website

---

[84] Link: https://noloshacusub.com/qoraallo/taariikhda-kaniisadda-soomaalida/qiso-nololeedkii-soomaali-masiixiyiin-ah/tabitha.

[85] Link to book on Amazon: https://www.amazon.com/Halgankii-Tukeyaasha-Carabtu-Jileed-Madowga/dp/9966093788/ref=sr_1_1?keywords=Halgankii-Tukeyaasha-Carabtu-Jileed-Madowga&qid=1673720851&sr=8-1

[86] Link: https://www.masthof.com/products/born-for-a-purpose-a-memoir-from-the-horn-of-africa

[87] Link: https://www.persee.fr/doc/ethio_0066-2127_2003_num_19_1_1051

[88] Link to download: http://www.hartfordinfo.org/issues/wsd/immigrants/somali_bantu.pdf

[89] Link: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/303131283_The_African_Diaspora_within_Africa_and_the_Impact_of_Slavery_and_Stigma_in_the_Islamic_Society_A_Case_Study_of_Somalia

[90] Link: https://www.peterlang.com/document/1051431

"Somali Church History" section, Somali Christian biography subsection, with the aim of encouraging Somali Christians and enlightening Somali Muslims.

Xasan, Liibaan Ibraahim

1968 – 1994
Protestant
Somalia

On 21 March 1994, the *Codka Nolosha Cusub* [Voice of New Life] broadcast office in Nairobi received the news that Liibaan Ibraahim Xasan (born on 12 December 1968) had been shot and killed that morning in Muqdisho, Somalia. After years of correspondence, one of the CNC staff had finally met Liibaan in person in 1993, during a visit to Muqdisho. It is hard to summarize all the memories of this martyr into a few pages. The contact with Liibaan came with a letter he wrote to CNC on 17 February 1990. He mentioned that he had visited a friend who had received a New Testament in Somali from CNC. He requested that a New Testament be sent to him and he closed his letter with the statement: "Please be aware that if you send me [this book] you will be sending me the greatest gift that can be given to a human" .

Several months later, CNC received another letter from Liibaan, thanking them for the Somali New Testament they sent. "This is the most precious gift I have ever received." He quoted some verses from the Beatitudes [Matthew 5], saying that the CNC staff would be blessed because of the mercy shown him. For the rest of 1990, the CNC office exchanged letters and corrected correspondence courses he had completed. These letters showed that Liibaan was a Christian and that he had a good knowledge of Scripture. In one letter, he asked for the "Christian perspective on inheritance, on doing business, and marriage.

In another letter, he said the following:

> When someone wants to believe in a religion, he must know it so that he can answer when questioned. Do not be surprised if I say that I believe that Jesus is my Savior…it is not mandatory for someone to be born in a Christian country to be a real Christian. A Christian is someone chosen by God…Truly I have received faith, talents and joy…do not be surprised that someone who lives in Somalia believes in Jesus, because someone who is really a Muslim cannot dare say that he trusts in Jesus. Truly, the Gospel has enlightened my new path of faith better than anything else has, even if other people do not understand. Truly, I have a thirst to be quenched…please send me a book to teach me about prayer.