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The Conflict over East Africa and the Efforts of Abi Ishaq Ibrahim Al-Atfich in the Island of Zanzibar

## The Conflict over East Africa and the Efforts of Abi Ishaq Ibrahim Al-Atfich in the Island of Zanzibar

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### Abstract:

The coastal East Africa is considered one of the regions that has been a battleground between the East and the West. The area has witnessed multiple migrations of various ethnicities and nationalities throughout different periods. Its abundant resources have made it a coveted destination since ancient times. The geographical discoveries have played a part in this conflict, and attempts to exploit its wealth have continued into modern times. Christianity was used for this purpose, despite the early presence of Arab-Islamic influence. However, thanks to the efforts of some scholars, the region remained resilient. One prominent figure is the Algerian scholar Abu Ishaq Ibrahim al-Atfishi in the island of Zanzibar. He regularly visited and communicated with its scholars, sending them his books and messages, urging the Muslim community to remain steadfast and work diligently, despite the terrifying massacres that occurred thereafter.

**Keywords:** East Africa, geographical discoveries, scholar, al-Atfishi, Zanzibar.

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### Introduction:

The arrival of Muslims in East Africa and their exploration of its coasts predates the arrival of Portuguese sailors, German colonizers, and later the English. Books and historical sources have mentioned that Muslims reached the shores of the Indian Ocean in the 2nd century of the Islamic calendar, which corresponds to the 7th century AD<sup>1</sup>. This occurred during the turmoil in the Umayyad Caliphate when the sons of Ubaid bin Abd al-Julandi rebelled against Caliph Abd al-Malik bin Marwan but were defeated by Hajjaj bin Yusuf al-Thaqafi. They chose East

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<sup>1</sup> Saeed bin Ali Al-Mughairy, Juhaynah Al-Akhbar in the History of Zanzibar, ed. Muhammad Ali Al-Salibi, 4th edition, 2001, p. 14.

Africa as their homeland and refuge in the year 84 AH / 695 CE<sup>1</sup>. However, Islamic migration to East Africa actually began with the advent of Islam, as the early Muslims migrated to Abyssinia (Ethiopia) before the Prophet's migration (Hijra)<sup>2</sup>. Islam later reached East Africa through trade routes, and some argue that Arab connections with East Africa predate Islam due to the uninterrupted trade relations<sup>3</sup>.

"While Portuguese ships, led by Vasco da Gama, did not land on the shores of the Indian Ocean until the 15th century AD in 1498, they encountered Islamic kingdoms such as the Kingdom of Kilwa, Mombasa, Sofala<sup>4</sup>, and other Islamic states that stretched across East, West, North, and South Africa. These kingdoms were rich in urbanization, cultural and architectural landmarks, prosperity, economy, and social integration, as these Muslims intermingled with the indigenous population through marriage and alliances<sup>5</sup>. One of the European historians was fair when he mentioned that before the arrival of Muslims to Africa, not much was known about the continent. Europeans owe their knowledge of the early history within the continent to a few geographers and explorers, including Al-Masudi, Al-Bakri, Yaqut, Ibn Battuta, and Ibn Khaldun<sup>6</sup>. However, the credit for modern geographical explorations, which began in the 19th century in East and Central Africa, goes to the Omani adventurer Hamad bin Mohammed bin Juma Al-Murjabi<sup>7</sup>, known as "Tipu Tip." Explorers like Speke, Livingstone, Cameron, Wissmann, and Stanley, who discovered Lake Tanganyika in 1859, and later Lake Victoria, owe their findings to him. Finally, Scottish explorer Mungo Park reached the source of the Senegal River in 1805<sup>8</sup>. Al-Murjabi also played a role in solidifying Belgian colonization in the Congo, as King Leopold II appointed him as the engineer of the new Congo state. As the translator of Al-Murjabi's memoirs, Dr. Mohammed Al-Mahrouqi, said: "Tipu Tip assumed this role, which will remain a stigma haunting him, not out of ignorance of the consequences,

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<sup>1</sup>- Spencer Trimingham, *Islam in East Africa*, trans. Muhammad Atef Al-Nuri and Fuad Muhammad Al-Shibil, 1st edition, Anglo-Egyptian Library, Cairo, Egypt, 1973, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup>- Al-Tabari, Muhammad bin Jarir, *The History of Messengers and Kings*, 2nd edition, Dar al-Turath, Beirut, Lebanon, 1387 AH, vol. 7, p. 463.

<sup>3</sup>- Abdul Rahman Othman, *Islamic and Christian Influences on Swahili Culture*, 1st edition, Dar Jami'at Africa lil-Tiba'ah wal-Nashr, 2000, p. 85.

<sup>4</sup>- Ibn al-Athir, *The Complete History*, Dar Sader, Beirut, Lebanon, vol. 4, p. 204.

<sup>5</sup>- Ibn Kathir, *The Beginning and the End*, ed. Mustafa Abdul Wahid, Dar al-Ma'arif lil-Tiba'ah wal-Nashr, Lebanon, 1967, vol. 2, p. 183.

<sup>6</sup>- Al-Mughairy, Juhaynah Al-Akhbar, p. 20.

<sup>7</sup>- Cities in the Land of Zanj, as mentioned in geography and travel books, are cities in East Africa, including Tanzania, Kenya, and others. See: Al-Hamawi, Mu'jam al-Bilad, 2nd edition, Dar Sader, Beirut, Lebanon, 1995, vol. 3, p. 224.

<sup>8</sup>- Al-Mughairy, Juhaynah Al-Akhbar, p. 17.

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The Conflict over East Africa and the Efforts of Abi Ishaq Ibrahim Al-Atfich in the Island of Zanzibar but due to the control Europeans had reached<sup>1</sup>." Before Al-Murjabi and others, the credit for maritime explorations and the oceans goes to the great sailor Ahmed bin Majid, who discovered many coastal areas of the continent. The region continued to be occupied by the Portuguese, who excelled in harming the Muslims until Allah raised an Imam from the Omani Imams known as Qaid al-Ard Al-Ya'arbi, who ruled between 1668 and 1716, restoring East Africa to the abode of Islam and Muslims<sup>2</sup>. After the rule of Ya'arbi, the region experienced the emergence of the Busaidi dynasty<sup>3</sup>. The days of Sultan Said bin Sultan (1806–1856) marked the beginning of prosperity and civilization in East Africa, despite the negatives of Western influence during their reigns<sup>4</sup>.

As for the colonization by Germany and later Britain and the expansion of Christianity, it was part of a global colonial and evangelistic strategy that did not spare any region of the Islamic world. There were even regions where the star of Islamic civilization declined while its influence grew in East Africa. Therefore, we will see that this region went through conflicts, power struggles, and missionary expeditions to control it and its resources, in an attempt to erase its Islamic identity from time to time. However, Allah Almighty provided the necessary human resources that can restore what its enemies tried to destroy, even from remote places like Algeria. The question that arises here is: What is the connection between all of this and the Algerian scholar Abu Ishaq al-Tuwayrishi and this remote region of Mezab where he resided? How did he reach it, and how was he able to make efforts to assist Muslims in this part of the world? Were there any preceding efforts in this region?

### **This is what this article seeks to answer in four main axes:**

After the introduction

**First:** Scholars from Algeria and East Africa.

**Second:** Abu Ishaq's first journey and his important activities in Zanzibar to establish Islam.

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<sup>1</sup>- Sultan bin Mohammed Al-Qasimi, The Division of the Omani Empire (1856-1862), 1st edition, Bayan Publishing, Dubai, UAE, pp. 11-15.

<sup>2</sup>- Same reference.

<sup>3</sup>- Hamad or Hamid bin Mohammed bin Jumaa bin Saeed Al-Marjabi is a figure of Omani origin known for his trade activities in East Africa at the beginning of the 19th century. He was born in Zanzibar and started his trade there. However, he gained control over trade and traders in East Africa, and was exploited by European explorers and missionaries to explore the African jungles. He was given the name "Mtepe Tippu." He passed away in 1905. From his memoirs written in the Swahili language. Omani Adventurer in the Jungles of Africa - The Life of Mohammed bin Mohammed bin Jumaa Al-Marjabi, translated by Mohammed Al-Mahrouqi, Jamel Publications, Cologne, Germany, Baghdad, Iraq, 2006, pp. 21-26.

<sup>4</sup>- - Hamad bin Hamid, Omani Adventurer in the Jungles of Africa - The Life of Mohammed bin Mohammed bin Jumaa Al-Marjabi, pp. 14-15.

**Third:** Abu Ishaq's second journey to Zanzibar and his important activities and efforts in recruiting.

**Fourth:** Abu Ishaq's stance on the plight of Muslims in Zanzibar.

**Conclusion:** including the main results.

### **First: Scholars from Algeria and East Africa**

The connection between Algerian scholars and specifically those from the M'zab Valley can be traced back to the days of the Busa'idiyyin due to their doctrinal similarity (Ibadi). The available documents indicate correspondence between Sultan Ali bin Hamoud, who ruled from 1329 AH to 1337 AH (1911 CE), and Qutb al-A'imma Muhammad bin Ishaq al-Atfishi (d. 1914 CE)<sup>1</sup>, the chief imam. According to the archives of Zanzibar, all the correspondences were addressed to Sultan Ali bin Hamoud<sup>2</sup> and not to Barghash, as some researchers suggest<sup>3</sup>. Based on the archived correspondence, the number of these letters reached five, and the main focus of these correspondences was the printing of Qutb al-A'imma's books and their distribution among students<sup>4</sup>. In a letter dated 1331 AH, Qutb al-A'imma stated: "In the name of God, peace be upon the guardian of faith, the facilitator of security and safety, Sultan Ali bin Hamoud. I have received your message, and I have responded to it in two books. I have sent you along with the pilgrims of 1331 AH 200 rials worth of books to be distributed among the students. Finally, he requested him to convey his greetings to the students, scholars, and worshippers". This letter indicates that the scholars and students of Zanzibar, who followed the Ibadi school, were following the news of Qutb al-A'imma and were sending him greetings. Qutb al-A'imma mentioned in his letter", Forgive me if I often send greetings to people and forget their names, and the paper gets lost due to the abundance of work and worries, and sometimes I answer and they don't receive my response"<sup>5</sup>. We do not know if these letters included consultations on jurisprudential matters or issues that Qutb al-A'imma answered, but it is certain that they were written letters, and the phrase "the paper gets lost" is evidence of that. It is also confirmed that some of the printed books were carried by the scholar Abu Muslim al-Bahlani, who died in 1920 and owned the newspaper Al-Islah when he met Qutb al-A'imma

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<sup>1</sup> - Hamad bin Hamid, Omani Adventurer in the Jungles of Africa - The Life of Mohammed bin Mohammed bin Jumaa Al-Marjabi, pp. 14-15.

<sup>2</sup> - Same reference, pp. 19-22.

<sup>3</sup> - The residents of Zanzibar sought assistance from the rulers of the Omani Yaruba dynasty in Muscat, led by Sayyid bin Sultan, in their fight against the Portuguese. They waged war against the Portuguese and defeated them. For more details on this, refer to Al-Mughairy, Juhaynah Al-Akhbar, p. 192 and onwards.

<sup>4</sup> - After the Yaruba period, the rule passed to the Busaidi dynasty, starting with Ahmed bin Said Al-Busaidi. See: Al-Mughairy, Juhaynah Al-Akhbar, p. 206 and onwards.

<sup>5</sup> - Hussein Ghubash, "Oman: Islamic Democracy - Imamate Traditions and Modern Political History, 1500-1970," trans. Antoine Hamsi, pp. 123-130.

The Conflict over East Africa and the Efforts of Abi Ishaq Ibrahim Al-Atfich in the Island of Zanzibar during the Hajj pilgrimage. It is also mentioned in some correspondences that the connection between Qutb al-A'imma and the people of Zanzibar was maintained through Sheikh Al-Barouni, a scholar from Djerba, Tunisia<sup>1</sup>, who sent books to Zanzibar. Some of the most important books by Muhammad bin Yusuf al-Atfishi that were printed in Zanzibar include "Himiyan al-Zad ila Ard al-Ma'ad" in interpretation, "Izalat al-I'tiraz 'an Mahaqi al-Ibadi fi al-'Aqa'id wa 'Ilm al-Kalam" in theology, "Wafa' al-Damanah li Adaa al-Amanah fi 'Ulum al-Hadith" covering the principles and branches of jurisprudence, and "Al-Sirah al-Jami'ah" as a comprehensive book on the Prophetic biography<sup>2</sup>.

### **Secondly: Sheikh Abu Ishaq's First Trip to Zanzibar and His Important Activities to Establish Islam in Zanzibar**

Undoubtedly, information about the visit of Sheikh Abu Ishaq Ibrahim Al-Atfaysh (d. 1965)<sup>3</sup> to Zanzibar for the first time is scarce and very limited. However, it is confirmed that this visit took place after Sheikh Abu Ishaq had settled in Egypt following his exile by the French colonization from Algeria and Tunisia. He chose Egypt as his home and residence. At that time, Egypt was a destination for Zanzibaris, especially the Arab-Omani and Hadhrami communities, who went there to seek knowledge and preserve the Arabic language as there were no universities or higher institutes in Zanzibar. To serve this purpose, an Arab society was established in 1922, headed by Sheikh Abdullah bin Sulaiman Al-Harthy at that time. This society undertook many cultural activities and hosted numerous scholarly figures, regardless of their sectarian affiliation. It is worth mentioning that this society had branches in both Mombasa and Dar es Salaam<sup>4</sup>. Sheikh Abu Ishaq Al-Atfaysh was one of these prominent scholarly and preaching figures who received an invitation from the Arab society in 1948 (corresponding to 1367 AH).

Sheikh Abu Ishaq arrived in Zanzibar in April 1948 during the reign of Sultan Khalifa bin Harub. He had come from Egypt, making a stop in Mombasa, Kenya, which was under the nominal authority of the Sultanate of Zanzibar. He was received by the governor, Sheikh

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<sup>1</sup>- He is Mohammed bin Youssef bin Issa bin Saleh bin Abdul Rahman bin Issa bin Ismail bin Bakir Al-Hafsi Atfich, born in Bani Yazgan in 1821. He is a renowned scholar of Ibadi Islam in the Islamic Maghreb in the modern era. He excelled in various religious sciences and was known as the Pole of Imams. He passed away in 1914. See: Collection of Authors, "Dictionary of Ibadi Personalities from the 1st to the 15th Century AH," 1st edition, Heritage Society, Qarara, Ghardaia, Algeria, 1999, vol. 4, pp. 235-249.

<sup>2</sup>- Ali bin Hamoud bin Hamad bin Said was the eighth Sultan of Zanzibar. He assumed power after the death of his father in 1902 and his reign continued until he abdicated in 1911.

<sup>3</sup>- Regarding the correspondence during the reigns of the seventh and eighth Sultans, namely Hamoud bin Hamad and Ali bin Hamoud, all the correspondence has been found. Refer to Sheikh Mohammed bin Youssef Atfich, "Qutb al-A'imma" on the occasion of the graduation of the twenty-third batch, University of Prince Abdelkader, July 2010, p. 307.

<sup>4</sup>- Letter extracted from the Zanzibar Archive under number 131/11/AA5.

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Mubarak bin Ali Al-Hinai. According to the customary practice, every invited personality coming to Zanzibar had to have some activities in Mombasa as a stopover, and it is likely that Sheikh Abu Ishaq had some activities there, although we have no specific information about them. As for his stay in Zanzibar, Sheikh Abu Ishaq resided in the house of Sheikh Salem Al-Rawahi. The latter and his sons represented the righteous and pious people in Zanzibar, with a dedication to religious sciences and the judiciary. They were also among the prominent elites and wealthy individuals. That is why they allocated a wing of their house located in the Kiponda area of the Stone Town in Zanzibar for the accommodation of Sheikh Abu Ishaq and the reception of his visitors. This area is mainly inhabited by the Twelver Shia community and includes the Shah Khurasan assembly hall and the Ismaili mosques<sup>1</sup>.

**Official Reception for Sheikh Abu Ishaq:** It is customary for senior guests to be received by Sheikh Abdullah Al-Harithi, the President of the Arab Association, Judge of Judges Sheikh Omar bin Ahmed Abu Bakr Al-Sumait, the esteemed Ghulam Ali, and it appears that they are members of the Legislative Council representing the Shia community, and Mr. M.D., the representative of the British resident. The accounts converge that Sheikh Abu Ishaq received an official reception by the Crown Prince at the time, Prince Abdullah bin Khalifa bin Harb<sup>2</sup>.

**Duration of Sheikh Abu Ishaq's Stay:** Sheikh Abu Ishaq Al-Atfaysh stayed in Zanzibar for a period of three months during this visit. He served as a teacher, lecturer, and preacher, calling people to the path of Allah Almighty. During this preaching tour, he also visited the island of Pemba, also known as the Green Island. The head of the Arab Society there was Sheikh Yahya bin Hamid Al-Hinai, accompanied by Sheikh Saeed bin Ali Al-Mughairy, a member of the Legislative Council, and a delegation of dignitaries from Zanzibar. We learned about this visit from the book "Jahina Al-Akhbar fi Tarikh Zanzibar," which includes poetic verses praising the island. Sheikh Abu Ishaq Ibrahim Al-Atfaysh said during his visit:

"Your island is adorned with joy, With its green silk in a beautiful sight. It has hills that captivate hearts and souls, With beauty, craftsmanship, fragrance, and splendor. O, this green island, be gentle to the visitor, You possess his affection and occupy his thoughts. Peace be upon you, for your beauty shines, May God bless you with abundant blessings<sup>3</sup>."

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<sup>1</sup>- Letter extracted from the Zanzibar Archive under number 162/24/AA5.

<sup>2</sup>- Same reference.

<sup>3</sup>- The Baron referred to here, corresponding with the time of Sheikh Atfich, is Mohammed bin Ali al-Barwani, described by Abu Ishaq as a distinguished scholar. Refer to "Al-Manhaj" magazine, Abu Ishaq Atfich, Part One, vol. 6, issue 2, Jumada al-Thani, 1344 AH, p. 346.

The head of the Arab Society in the Green Island was Sheikh Yahya bin Hamid Al-Hinai<sup>1</sup>. Sheikh Abu Ishaq was accompanied by the author of the aforementioned book, who was a member of the Legislative Council representing Pemba Island in Zanzibar.

**The Sheikh Abu Ishaq's most important activities to establish Islam in Zanzibar during this trip were as follows:** Abu Ishaq traveled throughout the island of Zanzibar and its provinces, delivering a series of lessons and lectures. Among them, the elders recall a lecture that the Arabs considered to be a wake-up call. It was an interpretation of the verse: "The mutual rivalry for piling up of worldly things diverts you, until you visit the graves" (Quran 102:1-2). He delivered this lecture at the headquarters of the Arab Association in the Shangani area. This lecture came after a long tour deep into the island, where he witnessed the extravagance and luxury enjoyed by the Arab community. This led to an excessive attachment to worldly possessions and an Arab competition to accumulate wealth, neglecting their duty of spreading the faith and leaving the masses vulnerable to conversion campaigns, especially by the pagans. The esteemed Abu Ishaq did not shy away from acknowledging this painful reality. Prior to him, the author of Juhaynah Al-Akhbar had already pointed it out, saying, "The Arabs overlooked a noble trait when it came to their discovery of the African continent, which is spreading Islam, knowledge, and religion among the African communities within the heartland of Africa"<sup>2</sup>. He also added, "...If the Arabs had been interested in spreading Islam from the beginning of their arrival, the land would have been enlightened by the light of Islam... The Christian missionaries did not find wide ground for converting the Africans, but the Arabs were preoccupied with accumulating wealth and the grandeur of the Sultanate, which eventually diminished"<sup>3</sup>. This prompted Sheikh Abu Ishaq to follow in their footsteps and direct the same observation and criticism. It should be noted that the hosting side of the Sheikh was steeped in wealth, despite their attempts to serve Islam. However, this did not exempt them from the stinging criticism directed at them by Sheikh Abu Ishaq. Hajj Salem bin Masoud Al-Riyami, one of the eyewitnesses, may Allah have mercy on him, said: "The Omanis became extremely

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<sup>1</sup>- Sheikh Mohammed bin Youssef Atfich, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>- Ibrahim bin Mohammed Ibrahim bin Youssef Atfich, Abu Ishaq, was born in 1886. He was an Ibadi scholar, writer, and one of the prominent figures working for the unity of Muslims. He was born in the village of Bani Yasqan in Wadi M'zab and studied under Sheikh Mohammed bin Youssef Atfich until his death in 1332 AH (1914 CE). He then moved to Tunisia and studied at the Zaytuna Mosque. He participated in the national movement led by Sheikh Abdulaziz Tha'alibi, particularly in the resistance against colonization.

<sup>3</sup>- Dar es Salaam is the capital of Tanzania. Of course, the society has branches in these places according to our follow-up of Al-Falaq newspaper.

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The Conflict over East Africa and the Efforts of Abi Ishaq Ibrahim Al-Atfich in the Island of Zanzibar angry and considered the lecture an insult. However, the power of truth and the firmness of the Sheikh made them submit to the reality and accept his guidance"<sup>1</sup>.

The efforts of Sheikh Abu Ishaq did not exclude women. He was invited to the Arab Women's Club, a club affiliated with the Arab Association, where he delivered a lecture on Muslim women and their role in public life. The Arabic translator for the lecture was Sheikh Abdullah bin Saleh Al-Farisi, a scholar of the Shafi'i school and a disciple of Sheikh Omar bin Abu Bakr bin Al-Samit, the Chief Judge of Zanzibar at that time<sup>2</sup>. From this, we can infer that the primary goal of these scholars was to establish Islam in the region, without paying attention to divisive sectarianism. Many contemporary witnesses attest to this fact. Sultan Khalifa bin Harb received Sheikh Abu Ishaq in his council known as "Al-Barzah," where discussions on political, literary, and religious matters took place.

**Departure from Zanzibar:** After a series of activities, Abu Ishaq bid farewell to Zanzibar and was seen off at the airport by Sheikh Mohammed bin Salem Al-Rawahi, the Governor of Mombasa, Sheikh Mubarak bin Ali Al-Hinai, and Sheikh Rashid bin Azan Al-Saqqari, the Governor of Melindi, which is currently part of Kenya<sup>3</sup>. It appears to me that the Governor<sup>4</sup> of Mombasa accompanied the Sheikh on his journey to Zanzibar.

The relationship between Abu Ishaq and the people of Zanzibar remained connected and unbroken. There were several factors that contributed to strengthening and solidifying this relationship:

**A- Intensive Zanzibari presence in Egypt:** Egypt witnessed a significant migration from Zanzibar, as they sent their children to receive education in Arab and Western capitals, especially London. The majority of Omani Arabs headed to Egypt to learn Arabic and other sciences taught in Arabic. Abu Ishaq's residence in the Matareya district in Cairo, known as Dar Abu Ishaq, became a center for Zanzibari students of knowledge, particularly from the Ibadi community.

**B- Printing and publishing:** The influential Bin Rawaha family from Zanzibar, who hosted Abu Ishaq as a guest, was involved in the printing and publishing movement of Ibadi school books and other books that were printed in Egypt and sold in Zanzibar. Sheikh Abu Ishaq played a significant role in editing and reprinting these books. Among them was the valuable collection that included a series of jurisprudential and theological treatises in the Ibadi school.

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<sup>1</sup>- An interview with Salem bin Masood Al-Riyami conducted by the author of the book Mihi Abedelhak "Arab-Islamic Civilization in East Africa - Causes of Resilience and Factors of Decline" in July 2006.

<sup>2</sup>- The same reference.

<sup>3</sup>-Al-Mughairy, Juhayna 2-Al-Akhbar, p. 87.

<sup>4</sup>-Al-Falaq newspaper, issue 11, 1955.



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Additionally, the book "Talqin al-Subyan" was printed in Egypt, edited by Abu Ishaq, and sold in Zanzibar for five shillings<sup>1</sup>. This required close coordination for the printing, publishing, and distribution between Egypt and Zanzibar.

**C – Reference and consultation:** Sheikh Abu Ishaq was considered a juridical and intellectual reference for the Arab community in Zanzibar. This is evident from his response published in Al-Nahdha newspaper. In an article published in Al-Jeel Al-Jadeed magazine in Cairo on November 24, 1952, titled "Al-Abidiyah Celebration", some journalists considered the Ibadi movement as an esoteric movement. Abu Ishaq responded to that article, and Al-Nahdha newspaper from Zanzibar quoted him saying: "Our great scholar and revered Sheikh Ibrahim Atfesh promptly responded to those false accusations"<sup>2</sup>. Some sources indicate that there were correspondences and questions addressed to Sheikh Abu Ishaq from Judge Mohammed bin Salem Al-Rawahi, but we have not had the opportunity to access these correspondences.

- Despite the high regard that the Arabs of Oman in Zanzibar held for Abu Ishaq, they disagreed with him on certain matters and interpretations. For instance, there was a debate between him and Sheikh Ahmed bin Hamdoun, the juridical authority for the Ibadi community in Zanzibar at that time, regarding the permissibility of combining prayers without any valid reasons such as rain or travel. When a question regarding the permissibility of combining the Dhuhr and Asr prayers, and the Maghrib and Isha prayers without a valid reason was raised in Al-Falaq newspaper, Sheikh Ahmed bin Hamdoun answered that it was not permissible. After Abu Ishaq learned of the fatwa, he sent a message to the head of the Arab Association, who was also the editor-in-chief of the mentioned newspaper, saying: "Greetings and blessings to Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamoud Al-Harithi, I have read the brilliant response in Al-Falaq newspaper regarding the question of combining prayers, and the correct stance on the matter, according to the respondent, is that it is inconclusive and not permissible to act upon. This should be responded to and the matter clarified, so that the response is based on knowledge and insight, combining the Dhuhr and Asr prayers, and the Maghrib and Isha prayers are most correctly and excellently practiced according to our scholars. The original practice is the one performed by the Prophet, peace be upon him"<sup>3</sup>. This letter indicates that Sheikh Abu Ishaq maintained a constant connection with the people of Zanzibar, and Al-Falaq newspaper regularly reached him.

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<sup>1</sup> Al-Mughairy, Juhayna 5-Al-Akhbar, p. 248.

<sup>2</sup> Same reference.

<sup>3</sup> Interview ABEd EL hak with Hajj Salem bin Masood Al-Riyami on August 11, 2005.

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After Sheikh Ahmed bin Hamdoun read Abu Ishaq's response, he was not convinced by the Sheikh's answer. He replied with an article titled "The Rays of Truth Shine Their Light," saying: "Indeed, our symbol and the blessing of our school of thought is the virtuous Sheikh Abu Ishaq, a knowledgeable scholar in the rational and transmitted sciences, who is at the level of ijtihad (independent legal reasoning) with no doubt. We truly respect and honor him and take pride in the abundance of his knowledge, and we welcome his response. However, it must be said that...". He continued to elaborate on his response to Abu Ishaq, which was lengthy, but the current context does not permit its inclusion here<sup>1</sup>.

**D– His Connection with the People of Zanzibar:** Abu Ishaq married a third wife, the honorable Sheikha Suad bint Saif bin Salim Al-Ma'amari. She had settled in Egypt with her father years ago, who had chosen Cairo as a second home. She studied in Cairo's secondary schools and benefited from a scholarship to Britain, despite not possessing Egyptian citizenship. In 1947, she visited Zanzibar accompanied by Dr. Ali Hassan Allah and his wife, and she actively engaged with the women of Zanzibar. It is strange that some people spend their whole lives without visiting Zanzibar, even<sup>2</sup> though her maternal uncle, Sheikh Sulaiman Al-Lamki, is one of the prominent figures of Zanzibar<sup>3</sup>, the editor-in-chief of Al-Falak newspaper and a member of the Legislative Council in Zanzibar. Abu Ishaq married her in 1951, and she played a significant role in strengthening his relations with the Arab communities of Zanzibar and Mombasa. After the Sheikh's death, she settled in Mombasa, where she continued her duty of calling for the faith and education until she fell ill. She then moved to Oman, where she passed away, may Allah have mercy on her<sup>4</sup>.

### **Third: Abu Ishaq's Second Journey to Zanzibar and His Important Activities and Recruitment Efforts**

In 1960, the Arab Association extended a second invitation to the esteemed Sheikh Abu Ishaq, with Sheikh Abdullah Al-Harithi still leading the association. Comparison between the two visits: The circumstances of Abu Ishaq's second visit to Zanzibar differ from the first visit in several aspects:

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<sup>1</sup> Same reference.

<sup>2</sup> Juhayna Al-Akhbar / Al-Mughairy / p. 454.

<sup>3</sup> Al-Falaq newspaper, issue 18, published on August 22, 1951.

<sup>4</sup> Mwongozi newspaper, issue published on July 2, 1948.

**A. On the global level:**

1. Many countries around the world, including Egypt, achieved independence, and the success of the July Revolution led by Gamal Abdel Nasser. Meanwhile, the internal affairs of the African continent were preparing for independence under the leadership of Julius Nyerere.

2. The decline of the Islamic movement in Egypt and its conflict with the regime of Gamal Abdel Nasser, which subsequently led to the drying up of intellectual creativity and platforms through which Abu Ishaq used to operate. 3. Algeria still struggles under the yoke of French colonization. Although the Algerian cause has made significant progress towards freedom and independence, it has witnessed developments. In fact, the Algerian cause remained dominant in the thoughts and conscience of Abu Ishaq, may God rest his soul.

4. The issue of Oman and the escalation of the bloody conflict between the Imamate in the interior of Oman, specifically in the Green Mountain, and the Sultanate on the coast. The region witnessed fierce wars between the followers of Imam Ghalib bin Ali Al-Hinai and the English forces supporting the army of Sultan Said bin Taimur. Abu Ishaq was an excellent ambassador for the Imamate at the United Nations and the Arab League. He dedicated himself to this cause, considering it a just cause. Abu Ishaq succeeded in gaining support from many Arab countries and Eastern Europe for the Omani cause<sup>1</sup>. He presented the memorandum of the Imamate to the Secretary-General of the United Nations on September 30, 1957. His trip to New York took place in October 1957, as mentioned in Al-Falaq newspaper: "We know that the Imam's representative is still in New York, awaiting support from friendly countries"<sup>2</sup>. I believe that Sheikh Abu Ishaq is the person referred to in the newspapers in Zanzibar, such as Al-Nahdha and Al-Falaq, when they mention the representative of Imam Ghalib bin Ali Al-Hinai<sup>3</sup>.

We do not want to dwell on the position of Sheikh Abu Ishaq in terms of analysis and discussion. However, this issue, specifically, witnessed a dispute between the prominent figures of the Ibadism in both Oman and Zanzibar. The origin of this dispute is related to the departure of Imam Ghalib bin Ali Al-Hinai and the question of whether he still has the right to hold the position of Imam while retaining the allegiance. Or has he lost his right to the Imamate by leaving Oman? Zanzibar newspapers have addressed this issue extensively. Al-Falaq newspaper published an article titled "Does the Imamate remain for the Imam after he abdicated like Imam Ghalib?" The answer: "Imam Ghalib, may God preserve him and support him, was not deposed

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<sup>1</sup> Al-Nahda newspaper, issue published in 1957.

<sup>2</sup> Al-Falaq newspaper, issue 22, dated February 22, 1957.

<sup>3</sup> Al-Falaq newspaper, same issue.

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The Conflict over East Africa and the Efforts of Abi Ishaq Ibrahim Al-Atfich in the Island of Zanzibar by Muslims. He abdicated himself due to a legitimate excuse when his subjects betrayed him. His Imamate remains intact without the need for renewing the contract or allegiance"<sup>1</sup>.

It seems to me that the author of this fatwa is Sheikh Abu Ishaq, may God rest his soul because he was the jurist reference for the Ibadis gentlemen in both Zanzibar and those who were present in Cairo. Moreover, at that time, Sheikh Abu Ishaq was actively supporting the embassy of Imam Ghalib, advocating for the cause on all levels. Efforts were made to bring Abu Ishaq to Zanzibar, although his name was not mentioned at the end of the fatwa, he had literary connections with the rulers of Zanzibar, who mainly belonged to the Ibadism sect, and he had good relations with them.

### **B-On the internal level in Zanzibar**

1. The political scene witnessed the emergence of political parties, including the Zanzibar National Party (ZNP) led by Dr. Ahmed Baalawi, the Afro-Shirazi Party led by Obeid Amani Karume, the Umma Party led by Abdulrahman Babu, and the Zanzibar and Pemba People's Party (ZPPP). In the mid-1950s, these parties and other youth clubs competed fiercely in legislative elections, which often ended in violent events such as the incidents of 1957. The racial factor, fueled by British colonialism, played a significant role in the political conflict<sup>2</sup>.

2. Decline of the Arab Association: The formation of political parties and student clubs led to a natural division between the traditional elder generation and the more open-minded youth influenced by a different culture. The confrontation between the colonial authorities and the Arab Association in 1954, which resulted in the closure of Al-Falq newspaper and the imprisonment of Arab Association leaders, had a considerable impact on the decline of the association's activities. Abu Ishaq was among those affected by these circumstances. It is worth noting that one of the members of the Arab Association, Hamoud Al-Barwani, was convicted of killing Mr. Sultan Ahmed Al-Mughairy, the representative of Pemba Island in the Legislative Council. The Arab Association announced its boycott of government sessions in protest against the colonial policy of dividing seats on a racial basis. However, the association distanced itself from the incident and considered it an isolated and misguided act. The conflict between the killer and the victim cast its shadow over the political and social landscape in Zanzibar, making Abu Ishaq's mission in Zanzibar more challenging.

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<sup>1</sup>-Al-Falaq newspaper, same issue. However, according to some opinions, it seems that it did not advocate wearing the veil (hijab), given its educational trajectory in Egypt and then England. This was before its ideological shift and marriage to Abu Ishaq.

<sup>2</sup>-Al-Mughairy, Juhayna Al-Akhbar, pp. 9, 46.

3. The presence of an academic institution for teaching the Arabic language and Islamic sciences was represented by the Islamic Institute, established in 1953 in the Furdhani area. Its first director was Sheikh Mahmoud Al-Dahan, an Egyptian national. Abu Ishaq delivered lectures at this institute, as confirmed by Sheikh Mohammed Idris, one of the historians and researchers in Zanzibar.

**C- Regarding the personality of Sheikh Abi Ishaq himself – may Allah bless his soul:**

1. The number of Sheikh Abi Ishaq's students from East Africa multiplied, and it was no longer limited to the people of Zanzibar alone. It extended to include some individuals from Comoros who were studying at Al-Azhar. The influence of Sheikh Abi Ishaq also transcended the boundaries of the Ibadhi sect. He had students from the Shafi'i school of thought, such as Sheikh Maulana Tahir Jamil Al-Layl, the current Mufti of the Comoros. This had a significant impact on the second visit of Sheikh Abi Ishaq, unlike his first visit. Arabs from Zanzibar went above and beyond to welcome the Sheikh. At the forefront of those who received him, amidst the crowded Zanzibar airport, were the leaders of the National Party, the Arab Association, and the honorable judges representing the Ibadhi sect: Sheikh Salem Mohammed Al-Rawahy, representing the Ibadhi sect, and Sheikh Abdullah bin Saleh Al-Farsi, representing the Shafi'i school of thought. Sheikh Abdullah later assumed a judicial position in Zanzibar in March 1960 by virtue of a royal<sup>1</sup> decree issued by Sultan Abdullah, and he was believed to be Jamshid, who later became the Sultan of Zanzibar, the last Arab Sultan in Zanzibar. He also acted as the representative of the British Resident, as customary at that time.

2. Sheikh Abi Ishaq's wife, Mrs. Suad Al-Maamari, accompanied him and was warmly received. She also took on the responsibility of teaching women, personally leading this effort in several mosques in Zanzibar. She was an excellent ambassador and interpreter of Sheikh Abi Ishaq's teachings, and her proficiency in the Swahili language aided her in this role. It is worth mentioning that she later settled in Mombasa, Kenya, after the death of Sheikh Abi Ishaq, continuing to spread the message of Allah, the Exalted<sup>2</sup>.

**The most important activities of Abu Ishaq in his second journey and his efforts to be brought to Zanzibar are as follows:**

As usual, Sheikh Abu Ishaq stayed at Dar Bin Ruwaha in the Kibonda area. Every day, he would hold a gathering called "Barzah" where dignitaries, elders, and scholars would come to discuss various intellectual and jurisprudential issues or seek answers to their questions. Some

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<sup>1</sup> Interview Mihi ABED ELHAK with Hajj Mohammed Atfich about his father, Al-Ma'alim magazine, issue 3, Jumada al-Ula, 1424 AH (August 2003).

<sup>2</sup> Al-Falaq newspaper, issue released on December 17, 1958.

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testimonies indicate that Sultan Abdullah bin Khalifa received Sheikh Abu Ishaq with great hospitality. Sheikh Abu Ishaq had a teaching program in several mosques in the Old Town, including the mosque of Sayyid Hamoud bin Ali and the Friday mosque in the Malindi area. During this blessed visit, Sheikh Ahmed Al-Khalili benefited from Abu Ishaq and studied several books, such as "Bahjat al-Anwar" and "Mashariq al-Anwar." He also studied under the guidance of the Sheikh who later became the judge of Oman. Sheikh Abu Ishaq also conducted reconciliation sessions among some members of the Arab community in Zanzibar in a house called "Bayt al-Qurmid" in one of the villages of Zanzibar. This house was located within the jurisdiction of Sheikh Bwana Uwani Mas'ud Riyami. The issue of Algeria was present and prominent in the sessions and lectures of Sheikh Abu Ishaq, especially as Algeria was on the verge of independence. However, despite all that, Sheikh Abu Ishaq was extremely diplomatic and did not interfere in the internal affairs of Zanzibar, which was experiencing significant political turmoil<sup>1</sup>.

The Arab community in Zanzibar made great efforts to bring Abu Ishaq to Zanzibar, especially since the situation in Egypt had taken a different direction and things had changed significantly. Zanzibar was on the verge of independence and the formation of the National Party for the government. Sheikh Hamoud bin Salim Al-Ruwahi and Sheikh Abdullah Al-Harathi, prominent figures of the Arab community in Zanzibar, wrote letters to the Director of Education and the Director of the Islamic Institute, Sheikh Omar Abdullah, on December 21, 1960, requesting the appointment of an Ibadi scholar for teaching at the Islamic Institute. The title of the letter was "Appointment of Ibadi Master at the Muslim Academy"<sup>2</sup>. At the same time, the aforementioned individuals contacted the British Resident, seeking facilitation in bringing Abu Ishaq to Zanzibar. On December 29, the British Resident sent a letter to the Director of Education, informing him of the desire of Al-Harathi and Al-Riyami to bring Sheikh Abu Ishaq to Zanzibar<sup>3</sup>.

After some time, the British Resident accepted the file of Sheikh Abdul Rahman Al-Suri, a scholar from Hadramaut. As for Sheikh Abu Ishaq, the matter was still under consideration, and this was on January 15, 1961<sup>4</sup>.

On February 24, 1961, the final response came, rejecting Sheikh Abu Ishaq. The British Resident sent a letter to the Director of Education, justifying the rejection as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> - Al-Falaq newspaper, issue released on October 30, 1957.

<sup>2</sup> - Al-Falaq newspaper, issue released on October 30, 1957.

<sup>3</sup> - Al-Falaq newspaper, issue released on May 29, 1957.

<sup>4</sup> - "Zanzibar Al-Ghanima" by Issa Al-Ismaeeli, translated by Professor Mubarak Al-Sabahi, page 104 and onwards.

1. Abu Ishaq is a prominent and highly regarded figure.
2. Abu Ishaq is a political person, as stated in the letter: "A person who has political views."
3. Abu Ishaq stood with the Imamate in Oman against the Sultanate, and his recruitment would create embarrassment with the Sultanate of Oman<sup>1</sup>.

And it is certain that this issue was prior to Sheikh Abu Ishaq's visit to Zanzibar. However, despite that, he descended as a guest among the people of Zanzibar for a period of two months, except for a few days.

#### **Fourthly: Abu Ishaq's stance towards the plight of the Muslims in Zanzibar**

There is no doubt that Abu Ishaq's relations with the people of Zanzibar became stronger than before, and he was closely connected to what was happening in Zanzibar. Perhaps he played a significant role in establishing a connection between the representative of the Zanzibar National Party, Mr. Ali Mohsen Al-Brawani, in Cairo and the National Liberation Front Cairo office. Said Saeed bin Mohammed Al-Riyami states, "We were scheduled to travel to Zanzibar after it gained its independence and formed a government, and Ali Mohsen was one of its ministers. While we were at Cairo International Airport, Abu Ishaq arrived to bid farewell to his wife Saad Al-Mamari, who was leaving for Zanzibar to visit her family. He met Ali Mohsen Al-Brawani and quickly and softly whispered, 'Beware of the crocodile, Kenyatta,' referring to Jomo Kenyatta, the leader of the Mau Mau revolution in Kenya. It was a slip of the tongue from Sheikh Abu Ishaq, as he meant to refer to Julius Nyerere, who was conspiring with Gamal Abdel Nasser, Abdelkrim Khormi, and behind them the forces of global arrogance against the Muslims of Zanzibar." After their arrival, one or two nights later, the disastrous coup took place in Zanzibar in 1964, which resulted in the deaths of at least thirty thousand Muslims of Arab descent. Said Saeed Mohammed Al-Riyami continues, "Abu Ishaq was deeply saddened by the devastating tragedy, and he would inquire about the well-being of certain families. He never smiled again until he passed away approximately one and a half years after the calamity. May Allah have mercy on him." What added to Abu Ishaq's pain was that he no longer had a means to express his opinion after the suppression of freedoms and the confiscation of all media outlets by the revolution in Egypt. And to make matters worse, Abdel Nasser's support for the coup intensified his anguish.

#### **Conclusion:**

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<sup>1</sup>- A royal document issued by the Sultan, sourced from the National Archives in Zanzibar with the reference number 2A/AB86/136.

**Through this study, we have gathered several results:**

1. The conflict over East Africa began early due to the region's abundant economic resources.
2. Arabs entered the region before others (before and after the emergence of Islam), but unfortunately, they were unable to Arabize it.
3. Arab individuals from Oman and Hadhramaut were preoccupied with collecting money, while Europeans such as Germans, Portuguese, and the British, among others, exploited the riches of East Africa for their own benefit through geographical discoveries and with the assistance of Arabs. This was strongly condemned by the scholar Ibrahim Atfich.
4. Scholars exerted their utmost efforts to establish Islam and combat proselytization. While their efforts succeeded in preserving Islam in Tanzania, Kenya, Somalia, and other areas, others succeeded in exploiting the region economically and politically, thanks to their spiritual and temporal authority.
5. The esteemed scholar Atfich attempted to play his role in saving the region by making practical and even political efforts.
6. Muslim scholars united their efforts to prevent the region's detachment, disregarding the detestable sectarianism and divisive nationalism. We find the Shafi'i alongside the Ibadhi or the Shia, whether they were Zaydis or Twelvers.
7. Arab rulers with communist tendencies colluded with the forces of global hegemony against Muslims in Zanzibar, committing massacres against them. In conclusion, this study sheds light on the historical context and events that took place in East Africa, emphasizing the early conflicts and the involvement of various parties. It also highlights the efforts of scholars and the challenges they faced in preserving Islam and combating external influences. The study also criticizes the role of certain Arab rulers and their collusion with global powers, which resulted in tragic consequences for the Muslim population in Zanzibar. Overall, this analysis underscores the importance of understanding the historical dynamics of the region and the need for unity among Muslims to overcome divisive forces.

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