

**COMOROS**

by

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1993
INTRODUCTION

The Comoro islands, together with northern Madagascar, represent the southernmost extent of the medieval Islamic world. The earliest known settlements on the islands date back to the 9th and 10th centuries CE. Though there is no evidence that the people of these early settlements had adopted Islam, archaeological remains indicate that trade goods from the Near East were reaching the islands at that time. Thus, we may presume that some Islamic influence was already present by the 10th century. Firm evidence of Muslim settlements in the islands dates to the 12th and 13th centuries. According to traditions and the early chronicles, Islam reached the Comoros from the Persian Gulf region, through Shirazi migration and settlement, and from such towns as Kilwa on the East African coast. Given the nature of Indian Ocean commerce and trade, Muslims from many parts of the Muslim world undoubtedly visited and settled on the islands throughout mediaeval times.

No comprehensive study has been made of Comorian literary traditions. The earliest known manuscripts date to the 16th century. During subsequent centuries, Islamic texts reached the Comoros from India and the East African coast as well as from the Near East. Arabic and Swahili came to be the literary languages used by clergymen, poets, scholars and members of the royalty, while Comorian, the spoken idiom of the majority of the inhabitants, remained largely unwritten. By the early 19th century, a strong tradition of religious learning existed, and numerous Muslim scholars went from the Comoros to study and teach in Zanzibar and other Muslim towns of the East African coast. Towards the end of the 19th century, a new tradition emerged, with the writing of historical chronicles in various Comorian dialects.

The circumstances of manuscripts in the Comoros are not unlike those prevailing in the Swahili world. Most are in the hands of private owners, who may be unaware of the importance and value of the manuscripts they own. As a result, they are often kept under adverse conditions, and there is little attempt to preserve them. The Centre National de Documentation et Recherche Scientifique in Moroni is taking steps to identify and preserve manuscripts of special importance. Though most of the manuscripts in Grande Comore...
are of well-known Islamic texts, it should be noted that the manuscripts written in Comorian (in Arabic script) are particular to this part of the world, and represent a unique aspect of the cultural heritage of Islam.

Though the islands form a single geographic entity, cultural and historical circumstances have left them politically divided. Three of the four main islands (Grand Comore, Anjouan and Moheli) together form the Islamic Republic of the Comoros; the fourth island, Mayotte, is still governed by France. So far it has only been possible to carry out a survey of Islamic manuscripts on Grande Comore, the largest and most populated island.

INDIVIDUAL COLLECTIONS

BANGOIKUNI
Aziz Mu'allim

Status: Private
Total number of Islamic MSS: 1 (Arabic).
Description of collection: A text entitled Kitāb al-fawā'id ḥi ḥ-ṭibb al-'Arabi.

Shaykh Ahmad bin Muhammad Sa'ad

Status: Private
Total number of Islamic MSS: 1 (Arabic).
Description of collection: A copy of Aḥl al-badr.

IDJIKUNZI
Abdallah Swaleh

Status: Private
Total number of Islamic MSS: 2 (Arabic).
Description of collection: A text entitled Tuḥāna ḍh-ḥulā wa-ṭ-l-ḥābrīya and a copy of Al-ismīn wa-ṭ-mārājīn.

Hay Ahmad Fundi

Status: Private
Total number of Islamic MSS: 1 (Arabic).
Description of collection: A text of Nikāh.

Muhammad Ahmad

Status: Private
Total number of Islamic MSS: 1 (Arabic).
Description of collection: A text of sharīʿ entitled Mujarrad sharīʿ ʿilm al-nuṣūṣ.

MBENI
Ali Mbae

Status: Private
Total number of Islamic MSS: 1 (Arabic).
Description of collection: A single copy of the Qurʿān, copied in the year 1146 [1733]; the pages are attractively decorated in what is known locally as the “Mozambican style”.

Shaykh Muhammad Ma’mun

Status: Private
Total number of Islamic MSS: 3 (Arabic).
Description of collection: A text entitled Ḥadīth tārikh Fāṭima bint Rasiāl Allāh and a copy of Minhāj al-ṭālibin; the third item of the collection is a rather unusual manuscript copy of Majmuʿ al-bahṣ by Dūrā Shikūn, son of the 17th-century Mughal Emperor Shāh Jahān, copied in the year 1079 AH [1668].

Shaykh Muhammad Ma’ruf

Status: Private
Total number of Islamic MSS: 1 (Arabic).
Description of collection: A copy of the Qurʿān.
Shaykh Muhammad Yusuf Ahmad

Status: Private
Total number of Islamic MSS: 1 (Arabic).
Description of collection: A single copy of Minhāj al-tālibīn, copied in the year 1269 [1853].

Shaykh 'Umar bin Maa Munir bin Zubayr

Status: Private
Total number of Islamic MSS: 1 (Arabic).
Description of collection: A copy of Miṣkhāt al-miṣbāḥ.

MORONI

'Abdur Rahman Salim 'Ali Shaykh Abu Bakr

Status: Private
Total number of Islamic MSS: 1 (Arabic).

'Ali Shaykh Ahmad Abu Bakr as-Sībīti

Status: Private
Total number of Islamic MSS: 1 (Arabic).
Description of collection: A copy of the Qurʾān.

Ahmad 'Abdallah Qudrah

Status: Private
Total number of Islamic MSS: 1 (Arabic).
Description of collection: A Qurʾān, copied at Siyu in the Lamu archipelago of Kenya.

Centre National de Documentation et Recherche Scientifique

Status: Public
Total number of Islamic MSS: 27 (Arabic; Comorian; Swahili).

Description of collection: The collection includes a variety of texts, dealing with ḥalāk, qaṣīda, fiqh, niḥāyāt and ḍaʿāʾī. Of particular interest are seven manuscripts on various aspects of Comorian history: Tārīkh izārat al-Qurṣ, Sulūlāt al-Hanuneen, and Tadbīrat sāliḥ al-aḥkāmat yādātayn in Arabic; Buṣūdī il-hadīth and Kīāb sulūlu Sharazi in Comorian; and Hadīthi za reṣafumwe wa kitandaa aṣūl Hadīthi za zamani asūl ya Ṣugzejo in Swahili.

Masjid Ribati bin Shaykh

Status: Mosque library (tongf)
Total number of Islamic MSS: 1 (Arabic).
Description of collection: The collection comprises texts of Ḥim al-bayān and Ḥim al-baḥṣ, together with a text of taṣawwuf; the fourth manuscript, from Oman, is Qūmūs al-Shirīf al-Jumāyyl ibn Khāmis al-Sādī.

Shaykh Ali Fumo

Status: Private
Total number of Islamic MSS: 7 (Arabic; Comorian).
Description of collection: The collection consists of two texts of ḥalāk, two of tafsīr, two copies of Minhāj al-tālibīn and a qaṣīda text (Kīāb al-Burda?) in Arabic and Comorian.

Shaykh Muhammad Abu Bakr

Status: Private
Total number of Islamic MSS: 1 (Arabic).
Description of collection: A copy of the Sehīh of Al-Bukhārī.

NTSAWENI

Masjid Jumba Fumnawo

Status: Mosque library (tongf)
Total number of Islamic MSS: 2 (Arabic).
Description of collection: The collection consists of a copy of the Qurʾān and a text of ḍaʿāʾī: Ashīfāt hawl Ramadān; both manuscripts were
copied at Ntsujini by Ibrahim Adam, a minister of Sultan Sayyid 'Ali.

NTSUJNI
Abulwafa 'Aydarus Mahdaly
Status: Private
Total number of Islamic MSS: 2 (Arabic).
Description of collection: The collection comprises one Qur'an and a copy of Kitab Ithîb 'ullum al-din by Abu Hamid Al-Ghazâli. The Qur'an manuscript, copied in 1197 (1783), is distinctive in that all the vowel signs are written in gold lettering.

Ibrahim Sayyid Hasan
Status: Private
Total number of Islamic MSS: 4 (Arabic).
Description of collection: The collection consists of one copy each of Minhaj al-tashîbîn, Madh khayar al-bariya', the Saheb of Al-Bukhari and a text of naheo entitled Matn al-Ajjararinya.

Al-Khatib Muhammad Hasan Sayyid Hasan Maulana
Status: Private
Total number of Islamic MSS: 1 (Arabic).
Description of collection: The collection consists of one copy each of Minhaj al-tashîbîn, said to have belonged originally to Fumna bin Sultan Taramwe bin Sultan Fumna'we bin Sultan Wukurdaviz.

Qadi 'Abdus Samad Mladjawo
Status: Private
Total number of Islamic MSS: 1 (Arabic).
Description of collection: A single copy of Minhaj al-tashîbîn, said to have belonged originally to Fumna bin Sultan Taramwe bin Sultan Fumna'we bin Sultan Wukurdaviz.

Sayyid Ahmad Mahmud
Status: Private
Total number of Islamic MSS: 1 (Arabic).

Description of collection: A copy of Sharh al-sayriya, being a history of how the Jamal al-Layl family came to the Comoro Islands in the 14th century, written by Sayyid Al-Habib Ahmad bin Zayn al-Hasabi.

Sayyid 'Abdallah Munir
Status: Private
Total number of Islamic MSS: 6 (Arabic).
Description of collection: The collection comprises a copy of the Qur'an, a copy of Tanbih al-anam (said to have belonged originally to Sultan Bwana Fumnu bin Sultan Mbaftumuni), together with a text of qasida, copies of Madh khayar al-bariya and Minhaj al-mishbah, and a manuscript which has texts of both fiqh and 'ibada.

Sayyid Ahmad Muhammad Musa
Status: Private
Total number of Islamic MSS: 2 (Arabic).
Description of collection: One of the manuscripts is the fiqh text Fath al-ma'âsin, copied by Ibrahim Adam, one of the ministers of Sultan Sayyid 'Ali; the other manuscript is entitled Musulid shanif al-anam.