

Books

GERARD C. VAN DE BRUINHORST

In January 2000, a trip was made to Tanzania to make an inventory of the locally produced Islamic literature. Through the financial support of ISIM, 500 titles were collected for the ISIM library. In October 2000, a 6-month fieldwork period was embarked upon, which allowed for the gathering of another 700 books, pamphlets, newspapers, magazines and ephemera in Tanzania and Kenya. In both countries some 30 bookshops (excluding the street vendors) were visited in 10 urban centres. The items in the collection are written in Swahili (approximately 50%), Arabic (30%) and English (20%). Apart from Gujarati and Urdu, which are sparsely used in East African Islamic publications, other languages seem to be of no importance at all.



PHOTO: GERARD VAN DE BRUINHORST, 2001

A bookshop in Dar es Salaam.

Swahili

During the fieldwork process a collection was made of both local productions and works translated into Swahili. Polemical and apologetic works were abundantly available in this language. Also the works on sexuality and biographies of prophets are very popular. Books on magic, however, are still published (and apparently sold) in Arabic. The collection

contains only two Swahili tracts with practical advice on an Islamic *ruqya* in case of a *jinn* possession. Devotional literature is widely available and is mostly bi-lingual – Arabic and Swahili. At least six books explain how to use the 99 names of Allah most profitably. Because Swahili is the mode of instruction in Tanzanian primary schools and part of the curriculum in the secondary schools, the material used for 'Islamic Knowledge' (Maarifa ya Uislam) is entirely in Swahili. The 10th edition of the authoritative *tafsir* by Shaykh Abdallah Saleh al-Farsy (1912-1982), *Kurani Takatifu*, contains for the first time a transcription of the Arabic text in Latin script.

Arabic

Nowadays the local production of Arabic literature in Tanzania and Kenya is very limited. Remarkable is an evaluation report of the Islamic *da'wa* in Kenya. This 80-page account of the current state of Islam is apparently written for an educated audience in the Muslim world. There is an Arabic book on Islamic and Christian relations (*sira*, struggle is used) in Eastern Africa, published in 1999. Also in Arabic, but still extremely popular, is *Hidayatul-attal*, written by Mazrui from Mombasa. This book on *fiqh* and other general Islamic topics has been introduced in the *madrassas* both in Kenya and Tanzania and is extensively quoted by many Muslims. In footnotes the author refers frequently to local, 'incorrect' practices. In order to gain more insight into the inexpensive popular literature, the imported Ara-

bic books which were sold for up to 3000 Tanzanian shillings (2.5 US dollars) were purchased. The bulk of this collection consists of prayer manuals, devotional and *madrasa* literature.

English

The third important language in East African Islamic publishing is English, especially in Kenya. Here the official language of formal education is English, so all the books written for the subject of Islamic Religious Education are obliged to use this medium. Also, the Nairobi branch of the Islamic Foundation publishes books and magazines in English. The situation in Tanzania is quite different. English publications from Tanzanian authors are mainly written for an international audience. Dr Mohammed Said, for example, wrote a book on Abdulwahid Sykes and the role of Muslims in the struggle for independence. Likewise, the university lecturer, Hamza Mustafa Njozi, produced a work on the Mwembechai murders of 1998, when soldiers killed at least four Muslims in Dar es Salaam. Selling or even quoting the book in Tanzania is forbidden. From the non-local English works, a small selection was made, mainly of works printed in India. This category is therefore far from representative.

It is not easy to find bookshops. After closing time, they can hardly be recognized behind their iron gates. Even during opening hours there is no sign indicating the commodities that are sold inside. The mosque turned out to be a good place to start. During

prayer times there are usually one or more book vendors opposite the entrance. These merchants were often most willing to indicate the location of bigger shops. Although getting information about petty traders was much more difficult, tracing them down was usually very much worthwhile. Old material, sold out in the ordinary shops, was often available on the streets and in smaller towns outside the capitals.

Staying in a bookshop resulted in valuable information. Not only were other researchers encountered, but also teachers from *madrassas*, individual scholars, and representatives of the main publishing agencies. Businessmen from Mozambique shopping in Dar es Salaam indicate that the spread of Swahili Islamic books is not limited to Uganda, Tanzania or Kenya.

Publications outside the mainstream of Islam have their own distribution system. An excellent place for Shi'a material is the Bilal Muslim Mission in Dar es Salaam (more than 100 books and two magazines) as well as the Iranian cultural centres in the capitals. At the different branches of the Ahmadiya sects the first Swahili translation of the Qur'an and many other books can be obtained, although very few written by local scholars. Their newspaper, *Mapenzi ya Mungu*, contains interesting data, especially on religious polemics.

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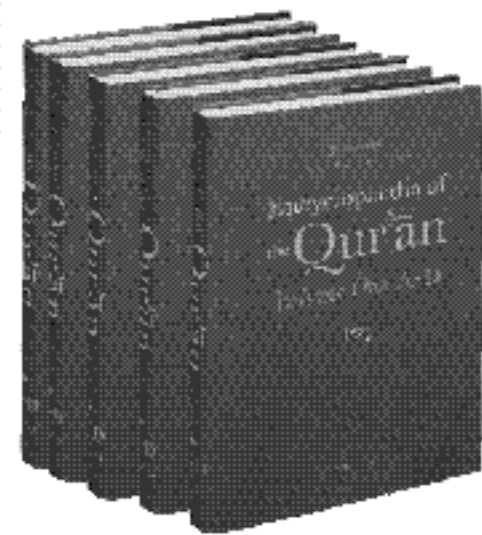
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