



## ■ Cultural Exchange Across Borders, Oceans, and Times

The AGYA conference 'Dynamics of Cultural Impact: Arab and German Cultural Heritage of Zanzibar' explored contemporary effects of historic cultural interactions based on the example of Zanzibar, Oman and Germany.

The history of the Apfelstrudel (apple strudel) cannot be told without taking a look at the history of cultural exchange and trade between Zanzibar and Germany in the nineteenth century, nor without taking into account Zanzibar's long Arab merchant tradition since the seventh century. Zanzibar even became an overseas territory of the Sultanate of Oman in the fifteenth century.

### ■ ZANZIBAR'S ARCHITECTURE: FROM PORTUGUESE FORTRESSES TO GERMAN PLATTENBAUTEN

Cultural exchange processes affect identity, language, artefacts, traditions, and values of a society. They also commonly become manifest in the architectural landscape of a city. AGYA member Bilal Orfali and Architect Ayman Jalloul analysed the cosmopolitan architecture of Zanzibar:



Zanzibar's 'Stone Town' is a conglomeration of various architectural styles from different countries and time periods that were adapted and synthesised on the island. A good example here is the 'Old Dispensary', built in 1849, a well-preserved landmark of Zanzibar. Its hybrid architecture combines Indian influences on the island through its ornamental façade with a traditional Omani U-shaped floor plan, and is adapted to the climatic specificities of an East African island. A more recent and curious example is the Michenzani public housing project: Tower blocks, so-called

Plattenbauten, built by the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in the 1970s as a gift, after Zanzibar officially recognized the GDR as a sovereign state in 1964.

### ■ HOW SAYYIDA SALME, PRINCESS OF ZANZIBAR AND OMAN, BECAME EMILY RUETE

Cultural entanglements also become visible in the lives of individuals. This is certainly the case regarding the extraordinary life of Sayyida Salme, Princess of Zanzibar and Oman (1844 – 1924). The princess married a German tradesman in 1867 and moved to Hamburg, Germany. Her 'Memoirs of an Arabian Princess from Zanzibar' (1888), published under her German name, Emily Ruete, is considered the first autobiography written and published by an Arab woman. It reflects an important episode of German-Zanzibari-Omani history, as AGYA member Norman Domeier pointed out. Her memoirs give rare information on the life of an Omani woman in the nineteenth century, while, at the same time, she directed her stories at a European audience, with the aim of breaking down stereotypes. It is thus also an important work for historical and contemporary women's studies, even though it is scarcely academically explored.

### ■ THE POEMS OF ARAB NAVIGATOR AHMAD IBN MĀJID (D. 1500) LED SAILORS TO ZANZIBAR

When it comes to cultural identity, language is a key and sometimes a compass. The workshop in Salalah was opened by Ramzi Baalbaki, head of the academic council for the Doha Historical Dictionary of the Arabic Language, with a keynote on the status of the Arabic language. In the field of literary studies, AGYA member Kirill Dmitriev focused on pre-modern Arabic poetry in and on Zanzibar. Praised in the poems of famous navigator Ibn Mājid as a place of happiness, sailors were once guided to this island by his easily remembered rhymes.

The workshop was a project of the **AGYA working group Common Heritage and Common Challenges** and was organized by Prof. Dr. Nuha Al-Shaar, Dr. Kirill Dmitriev and Prof. Dr. Bilal Orfali.