NOTES
on the
HISTORY of BERBERA

by

DIANA FEARON

Berbera has one of the few natural harbours in many miles of coastline and it is therefore likely that its history as an inhabited place goes back many centuries, but until archaeologists have dug into the sands of Berbera and of the ruined town of Bunder Abbas to the east of Berbera it will be difficult to establish the type and extent of occupation that has taken place over the years. The notes are compiled from obvious and easily available sources: printed books in English, Foreign Office papers (papers dated 1884 and 1885 only) and oral tradition.

Burton says that Berbera has been occupied in turn by the Furs (old Persians), the Arabs, the Turks, the Gallas and the Somalis. According to a map of the Egyptian Empire of 1450 B. C. (Atlas of Ancient and ClassicalGeography) the Somali coast was part of that domain, an extension of the land of Punt on the Red Sea Coast, but only Egypt proper was included in the Persian Empire of 525 B. C. (Ibid). To the mapmakers of Classical times, the Somali coast was either unknown, as it was to Heroditus (450 B. C.), or on the extreme confines of the known world. The area is marked *Cinnamoni Fera Regio* in a map of the world according to Eratosthenes (220 B. C.), and Ptolemy (A. D. 150) marks the coastal town of Mosylon which might possibly have been Berbera. This, however, is not the view of Dr. Drake-Brockman who states firmly that Berbera, then called Malao, was known to the early Greek and Roman traders but was never a trading post of much importance as Aulities (Zeila) took the trade of the northern interior, and the products of central Somaliland, including Myrrh and frankincense, went to the markets of Mossyllum, opposite Mait Island.

None of this is much help in establishing what sort of a place Berbera was and what kind of people lived there. The only clear fact seems to be that the coastal strip had some contact with the outside world but the interior had none at all and was not even worth marking on a map. That it was not an altogether uninhabited interior in very remote times there is the evidence of arrow heads, axe heads and cave drawings, but the people who made these things or those who had taken their place presumably only impinged on the consciousness of the Greeks and Romans when they came down to the coast to sell the products of the interior. Indeed, until quite modern times the known facts about Somaliland are few and the History of Berbera shares the general obscurity. In spite of its good harbour, it was not the place where, by tradition, the fathers

of the Somali race established themselves when they came from over the sea, they came to Mait and gradually worked their way southwards and westwards. The story of Bunder Abbas may have reference to this period or to some later time. It is said that several centuries ago a migration occurred from the east to the west and that a small section of the Abbas joined a local village of poor fishermen. Later, when Berbera was first use as an alternate site, at an unknown date, the people of Bunder Abbas, a town which had never been occupied during the hot weather except by a few families of fishermen, moved to the sight of modern Berbera. Among the graves of Bunder Abbas are those of three Arabian Seyyids who are said to have moved west with the original Abbas migration.

There are a number of facts and theories that anyone attempting to piece together a general history of Somaliland has to face — the so called Galla graves left behind by a pagan people; the possibility that there were migrations from the west as well as from the east; the ruined towns apparently built by Arab slave traders; other ruined towns which appear to have been built by a settled, semi-agricultural people who could spin; the fact that the Midgans and Tomals practise more of the arts of a settled people than the other Somails. In addition, anyone dealing with the history of Berbera will have to cope with the question of the aqueduct. This, according to Burton who saw the ruins in 1856, ran from Dubar, where there were extensive ruins, seven miles to a reservoir on the sea shore. Bangton Prendergast Walsh who used material from the ruins some thirty years later to make a billiard room described the aquieduct as a solid construction of large stone slabs. It thus seems clear that at some time Berbera was a large enough town to justify such an erection and was ruled by people of considerable engineering skill. Unfortunately, until an archaeologist gets to work, it is not possible to go much further than Burton who nearly a hundred years ago said, «Of the origin of Berbera little is konwn. Al Firuzabadi derives it, with great probability, from two Himyr Chief of southern Arabia. About A. D. 522 the troops of Anyshirwan expelled the Abyssinians from Al-Yaman, and re-established there a Himyari prince under the vassalage of the Persian Monarch»; nowadays we should feel inclined to leave out the «with great probability» from the foregoing sentence. Burton himself was more sceptical than Lieut. Cruttenden R. N. whom he quotes as believing that the aqueduct was built by these Persian vassals from the Yemen. Burton's own comment is:

«— though all the maritime Somali country abounds in traditions of the Furs or ancient Persians, none of the buildings near Berberah justifies our assuming to them, in a country of monsun rain and high winds, an antiquity of 1300 years ago.... the Somali assert that ten generations ago their ancestors drove out the Gallas from Berberah, and attribute these works to the ancient Pagans. That nation of savages, however, was never capable of constructing a scientific aqueduct. I therefore prefer attributing these remains at Berberah to the Ottomans, who, after the conquest of Aden by Sulayman Pasha in A. D. 1538, held Al-Yaman for about 100 years and as auxiliaries of the king of Adel, penetrated as far as Abyssinia. Traces of their architecture are found at Zayla and Harar, and according to tradition, they possessed at Berberah a settlement called, after its founder, Bunder Abbas».

That Burton gives a totally different account of the founding of Bunder Abbas to that given above in these notes is only to be expected when oral tradition is relied upon and, in fact, there is no reason why there should not be some truth in both stories.

With mention of King of Adel, something like firm ground is reached. It seems to be agreed that Adel, Audal or Auzal was the Mohamedan kingdom of Zeila which, at least at times, embraced Berberah. Burton's dates, however, are not easy to arrange into a coherent story. Adel, he says, had been an Arab kingdom in the 7th century. In the 14th century it was engaged in wars with Abyssinia and about 1400 was badly defeated, the city of Zeila itself being beseiged. At about this time, according to Burton, the founder of the Ishak Tribe, Sheikh Ishak, had landed at Mait with forty-four saints. A few years later forty-four Hasrami saints also landed at Berbera and, after a solemn conclave, dispersed to preach Islam. It was not until 1500, however, that the newly formed Somali people drove the Galla from Berbera.

With the sixteenth century the pace quickens. About 1500 the Turks, according to Burton, had conquered the Yemen and the Janissaries drove the Arab merchants to the opposite shore and then followed them to lay imposts on the trade they set up between Adel and India. The Portuguese then appeared on the scene and, in July 1516, burned Zeila: they would have sacked Berbera too, but their fleet was dispersed by storms. After this, the Ottomans appeared. Burton says that they conquered Aden in 1538, held the Yemen for 100 years, and, as auxiliaries of the King of Adel, penetrated as far as Abyssinia. It is then rather surprising to learn from Burton that in the year 1567 (the year after Zeila's fall) Lopez Suarez took without resistance, the inhabitants having fled, and burned the city of «Barbora near to Zayla, a place not unlike to it but much less».

The story of the escape of Berbera in 1516 is repeated by Dr. Drake-Brockman, but a new note is struck by the «handbook of Abyssinia» (London 1867) in a chapter said to be compiled chiefly from the writings of Marmol and Bermudez. Here it is said that Berbera:

«— is situated at the bottom of a convenient bay, on an Island of its name, but called by De Lisle, «Alondi». It has been all along a kind of rival in commerce with that of Zeila and is no less resorted to by foreign merchants, who carry on much the same

traffic. It lies opposite Aden and made once a considerable figure but was burnt and plundered by the Portuguese fleet A. D. 1518, who expected to have found a considerable spoil in it but were happily disappointed, the inhabitants having had time enough to convey themselves and their most valuable effects away».

If one abandons any attempt to decide whether Berbera was burnt and, if so, how often, things do not become any less difficult. As evidence of the liveliness of Berbera's trade just after, according to Burton, the Somalis had ousted the Gallas, there is the statement that in August 1507 Alfonzo Dalbouquerque sailed from Socotra to intercept «the ships which, at that season, start from Barbara and Zeilo and all the Red Sea for Dio and Cambara and all the ports of Malabar». This puts no severe strain on belief, but it is otherwise with information in the «Handbook of Abyssinia». Here Berbera in the early 17th century appears as part of the Mohamedan kingdom of Adel, now Somali, which is «situated along the southern and western coasts of the Gulf of Aden, extends to Cape Guardafuy from which it begins to wind itself south west along the Indian Sea. The Governor is despotic and monarchical though under the protection of kind of homage and tribute». This is all very well and it is also perfectly probable that the main traffic of the country consisted of «gold dust, elephants' teeth, frankincense and Negro slaves, all which they fetch chiefly from Abyssinia, with whom they are continally at war»; these goods were exchanged with merchants from Arabia, Camboya and other parts for «cloths of cotton, silk and linen of various sorts, collars, bracelets and other ornaments, amber, crystal, dates, raisins, fire-arms, Arabian horses and other such commodities». But doubts begin to appear when Berbera is described not only as an Island, but as very fertile one, producing plenty of corn, fruit and cattle, the great part of which was exported by merchants into other countries.

Bartema, writing in the sixteenth century and quoted by Burton had also described Berbera as an Island and perhaps later writers copied his mistakes. The passage given by Burton reads:

«— after that the tempests were appeased, we gave wind to our sails, and in short time arrived at an Island named Barbara, the prince whereof is a Mahometan. The Island is not great but fruitful and well peopled: it hath abundance of flesh. The inhabitants are of colour inclining to black. All their riches is in herds of cattle».

Unfortunately, from the 17th until the 19th century, there are no commonly available books on Berbera. Even Burton skips over the period rapidly and without dates. After stating that Zeila was sacked in 1516, he progresses over several centuries in a few sentences:

«— when the turks were compelled to retire from Southern Arabia, it became subject to the Prince of Sana'a, who gave it in perpetuity to the family of a Sasa ani ling into decay. Zayla passed under the authority of the Sherif of Mocha, who, though receiving no part of the revenue, had yet the power of displacing the Governor. By him it was farmed out to the Haji Sarmarkay, who paid annually to Sayyid Mohammed Al-Barr at Mosha, the sum of 750 crowns, and reserved all that he could collect above that sum for himself. In A. D. 1848 Zayla was taken from the family Al-Barr, and farmed out to Sharmarkay by the «Turksh» Governor of Mocha and Hodaydah».

Several mid-19th century descriptions are available and they all show a town fallen into decadence. Drake-Brockman, quoting from Johnston's «Travels in Abyssinia» says that on March 1842 Berbera consisted only of our or five thousand tents belonging to nomads who had come to barter the produce of the interior for rice, dates and cloth. The British Agent then was Ali Sharmarkay (Governor of Zeila in Burton's time) who had earned this distinction and the right to fly the Red Ensign on his dhows many years earlier for his behaviour during a night attack on an English brig in Berbera harbour and also for saving the lives of the crew.

Lieutenant Cruttenden of the Indian Navy, writing in 1848 and quoted by Burton, says that Berbera was deserted from April until the early part of October, not even fishemen being found there, but that during the cool weather there was a flourishing fair and the harbour was filled with ships from India as well as from Arabian and Red Sea ports. «At Berbera the Cuargue and Harar slave merchant meets his correspondent from Bussrah, Bagdad or Bunder Abbas, and the savage Gudabirso is seen peacefully bartering his ostrich feathers and gums with the smooth-spoken Banian from Pore-Bunder». By the first week in April, however, «Berbera is again deserted, nothing being left to mark the site of a town lately containing 20,000 inhabitants, beyond bones of slaughtered camels and sheep, and the framework of a few huts, which is carefully piled on the beach in readiness for the ensuing year». Exports at this period included clarified butter, rhinocerous horns and cattle; among the imports were cloth, iron and steel in small bars, lead and zinc beads, dates and rice.

By the time Burton visited Berbera there had been a still further decline and the prosperity of the cool weather fair was largely a thing of the past. This decadence, according to him, was due to feuds among the Somalis as to the possession of the port and its customs and profits, which had ruined trade; the state of law and order is demonstrated by the fact that on Burton's second visit his party was attacked on the beach and one of his companions murdered.

The decay of Berbera may have been partly due to the decline of the slave trade, though this was still profitable and Burton mentions that in April 1855 after the arrival of a caravan of 3,000 souls from Harrar, 500 slaves of both sexes were for sale.

Burton describes the town as a wretched collection of dirty mat huts contracted to about one sixth of its former dimensions and surrounded for nearly a mile by desert land strewn with bits of glass and pottery. To the South and east lay a ** Saline sand flat, northwards the sea strand had...* became a huge cemetry and westward, close up to the town, ran a creek forming the harbour. There were many ruins near the town, but it was difficult to determine their date; they were particularly extensive near Dubar and, of course, included the aquiduct.

From the time of Burton's visit until, twenty years later, the Egyptians arrived, thing did not get any better in Berbera. The Ayyal Ahmed section of the Habr Awal were, according to Foreign Office papers, in control of Berbera but were at enmity with the Habr Toljaala and Habr Gerhajis whom they were able to keep in check only by means of fire arms, chiefly in the hands of Arab mercenaries.

The Egyptians came to Berbera in 1874. At that time the Port had lost most of its prosperity an importance, partly because inter-tribal wars in the interior prevented caravans bringing in merchantise, partly because of a general decline in the slave trade.

According to local tradition, the Egyptians sent a delegation who bought Berbera from a group of eleders; one elder, Abdillahi Liban, Habr Awal rer Ahmed, protested at the sale, and said that it was not lawful to sell something that could not be carried in a piece of cloth and that, therefore, it was wrong to sell Berbera. He, however, was overruled.

During their ten years in the town the Egyptians carried through a large building programme; Foreign Office papers make mention of lighthouse and creditable pier, two masjids, barracks, a hospital and store rooms, all substantially built. Water was piped from Dubar to the Egyptian town (now called the Shaab area). The building, however was only carried out, according to L. P. (Under the Flag and Somali Coast Stories) through the enforcement of a corvee, which naturally made the Egyptian authorities unpopular.

It is clear from Foreign Office paper that the Egyptians failed entirely to enforce law and order in the interior, with the result that the trade and prosperity of Berbera did not revive. Their writ, indeed, hardly ran beyond the range of the guns of their garrisons and they could not keep the road between harar and Berbera open.

Trade does not seem to have been entirely dead, however, since there were Indian and Greek merchants in the town and presumably the export of sheep to Aden kept things going. In these prorefrige-

ration days the garrison in Aden depended on the supply of Berbera black-headed sheep.

By 1883, Egypt herself was bankrupt and ready to accept the policy of withdrawing garrisons from outlying territories which were nothing but an expense. Furious diplomatic activity broke out when this was konwn; three of the great powers began to take an interest in Berbera, France and Italy because they had plans to colonise and develop the north-east of Africa; and Great Britain because of fears lest Aden (an importing coaling station on the route to India) should be cut off from essential supplies. Soon afterwards the German also entered on the scene.

Towards the end of the year there were signs that there might soon be serious trouble in Berbera itself. The Egyptian Governor, a «polite and plausible» man named Abdirahman Bey, seized Somali property, made wrong returns in his books, denied justice and built a tomb with shandy verandahs for his relaxation with money raised for extra tax. He further angered the Somalis by photographing respectable woman against their will. He so annoyed the foreign merchants by interfering with the rate of exchange that they incited the tribesmen to rebellion. Outside events contributed to the general unrest, news of the doings of so-called Mahdi in the Sudan made the people of Berbera even less willing to tolerate Abdul Rahman bey.

The garrison on which the Bey relied consisted of 126 black skinned infantrymen from lower Egypt and 70 Egyptian Arabs, half gunners and half cavalry. There were four brass nine pounders, two garlings and two rockets, but only twenty horses for the cavalry. Spare ammunition was old and unreliable.

As the Egyptian position became more and more untenable, warships of various nations appeared of the coast. An Italian Ironclad visited Berbera and the commanding officer gave a party for some Somalis and told them that they would always be well treated if they sided with the Italians against the British, as the Italian government of the period was supposed to be friendly terms with the British, this exploit seemed particularly uncalled for. The French concenterated their attentions on Zeila rather than Berbera, but the Germans appeared to prefer Berbera, two German ships of war en route for Zanzibar had orders to visit Somali ports to make trade agreements which would eventually lead to the establishment of a protectorate. The merchants of Berbera, however, were conscious that the port depend on the Aden trade and, owing to their influence, the Somali leaders insisted on a clause in any trade agreement stipulating arbitration by the Aden authorities in the event of a dispute — no agreement was therefore concluded.

Meanwhile the Aden government were getting increasingly anxious about their food supplies from Berbera. Since the beginning of 1884 ships of the Royal Navy had been keeping an eye on the Somali coast. Major Hunter, who had been consul since 1881, does not seem to have feared German intervention, but he was apprehensive (and it appears with every justification) that the whole coast would be taken over by either the Italians or by the French. In any event if either of these powers took action, he feared that civil war would probably break out, since the Ayyal Ahmed were still in a state of furious enmity with the Habr Toljaala and Habr Gerhajis. In either case the food supplies of Aden would be endangered.

The elders of Berbera seem to have been awere of the difficulties which would face them when the Egyptians withdrew and the Ayyal Ahmed asked for the British protection. In July 1884 Major Hunter made a provisional agreement with the Berbera people, and in the following month Mr. Langton Prendergast Walsh took over as Vice Consul in Berbera. He was generally welcomed, especially by the Habr Awal and the elders. The Egyptians left in September, the Deputy Governor having been sent on ahead as it was reported that he was plotting to hand Berbera over to the Germans.

At this stage the Turks laid claim to Berbera on the grounds that they were suzeraflins of Egypt; they took no action, however, and the British government, which had never given *de jure* recognition to the Egyptian regime, rejected their claim.

Mr. Walsh's first duty when he was appointed to administer Berbera was to secure law and order. He was supported by a force of forty-five armed police and ten unarmed constables. Some time soon after his arrival he increased his force by another fifty; his only properly trained men however were twenty-six from India. By the time the Commander-in-Chief East Indies had visited Berbera, just before October 1884, and had expressed his doubts about the efficiency of the police, Habr Awal Somalis, Arabs, Indians and some Turkish deserters had been enrolled. Mr. Walsh was deeply hurt at the criticism of his mixed following; he responded by setting up a rifle range but pointed out that it was good will of the coast and not the training of his men on which he depended.

For the first few months of Mr. Walsh's time in Berbera, the Royal Navy kept a watch on the place, a precaution that he very much resented. He particularly objected to the fact that an officer slept ashore at his Residency for some time. There were reason, however, for taking care; in the first place, inter-tribal fighting was bitter and frequent, and, in the second, agitators from the Mahdi

tension between the British and French became so great in this part of the world that there was a possibility of the two nations coming to blows.

As well as his police force, Mr. Walsh had an armed dhow and and armed state barge that had belonged to the Bey. The police barrack, stories depot and boat house were all in a front at the south-east corner of the town.

Early in 1885, when there were eight or ten thousand people in the town, there was a small riot, and the untrained police opened fire, killing two and wounding four, before Mr. Walsh could stop them. The inciters of the riot, however, can have had no serious following as things quickly quietened down. H. M. S. Foxhound arrived and the Commanding Officer, the surgeon and Mr. Walsh went into the town and attended to the wounded men without exciting hostility. As a precaution, the ships' boats were armed, manned and brought alongside when Mr. Walsh went to arrest the ring leaders in the riot, one man was arrested and two got away but there was no resistance.

After these stirring times, a more peaceful time followed. The country as whole was not administered at all in the modern sense of the word; all that was done was that caravans and travellers were protected and troops and police were sent to intervene if inter-tribal fighting became too serious. In Berbera (and also in Zeilah and Bulhar) however, all the apparatus of government was set up. Just over ten years after Walsh had first arrived, there were courts, customs houses, and revenue officers in the ports. The assistant Resident in Berbera tried three hundred and twenty four cases in one year, besides dismissing, or settling out of court petty affairs (Life of Sir Percy Cox by Philip Graves). At the beginning of the period, there was a certain classic simplicity about the administration of justice even in Berbera; no formal warrants were issued, men being summoned to court by the presentation of a stone marked with a broad arrow.

Keeping order in the town was not easy at first. It was the custom for a tribesman to come to market armed with two spears, a sword and a shield. It took time to persuade the country people that weapons were best left for safe custody in the police station, but by the time Walsh left in 1893, this new custom had been established. The appointment of a reliable and learned Qadi was another step towards peace; the Qadi did away with much occasion for disputes, especially over marriage arrangements, which might have led to inter-tribal fighting.

Berbera at this period began to change in appearance. For the first time (so far as is known) the town was well populated. The

year round. Not much building of substantial shops and houses took place until 1888 when a fire destroyed almost all huts and «gurgis» of which the town then consisted. After the fire and, more especially after 1893, modern Berbera began to emerge. The main town was laid out with wide, straight streets and one-storied stone building began to appear in increasing numbers. Though there are several discriptions of Berbera available, it is difficult to date particular buildings, but among early government constructions there appear to have been the customs house, the date market and pier. During the nineties the Roman Catholic mission put up what Dr. Drake-Brockman describes as two very substantial stone built edifices; there were in what is now Masjeed Nur Road. The mission moved after a time to Diamoleli on the Sheikh road and finally left the country in 1910.

According to Captain H. G. C. Swayne, who visited the country many times between 1885 and 1893, Berbera was apportioned off into tribal areas. Speaking of the town at a time when permanent buildings were few, he says that the huts were «divided by streets, the different blocks of building space being allotted to the respective Somali tribes, clans and families». There is no indications as to when this arrangement ceased, but possibly the fire of 1888, the influx of refugees from the Ogaden in 1895, and the further influx of refugees, this time from the east of the country during the Mullah wars ,all contributed to the breaking down of barriers between the tribes within the town.

There was no hospital when Mr. Walsh took over but a medicine chest was kept in the Residency. For the first two and half years there was an R. N. vessel constantly in the harbour and therefore a Naval surgeon available in case of need. Afterwards an Indian hospital assistant was appointed.

In 1895, when the refugees began to come in and it is said that there were over seven hundred orphans and waifs in the town, the assistant Resident's wife turned a large room in her house into a dispensary where the sick could be treated and the undernourished fed. (P. Graves; Life of Sir Percy Cox). By 1900 there was civil hospital in the Shaab area. (Handbook of Somaliland: Col. F. Adam).

By the turn of the century Berbera was protected from inundation from the sea by an embankment, and a school and a water tank had been built. The Court house, treasury, jail and Residency were all in the Shaap area and the police quarters lay between the main town and the Shaab. (Handbook of Somaliland and Official History; Operations in Somaliland 1901-1904). The size of the population is a matter of doubt. Captain Swayne gives the figure of

30,000 in the trading season. Colonel Adams, writing of 1900, suggested that the fixed population was 5,000 rising to 25,000 during the cool weather and «operations in Somaliland» agrees with him.

Dr. Drake-Brockman, whose book «British Somaliland» was publisced in 1912, gives a hot weather total of eight or ten thousand which, he says, rose to anything from twenty to forty thousand in December and January. The only possible conclusion seems to be that the population, and especially the static population, was growing.

There was also, according to all authorities, a great increase in prosperity. Here figures are, at the moment, almost totally lacking. When the Egyptians left, it was reported that the revenue of the town had been £ 6,074 with expenditure (which included 1500 gold pounds, a free furnished house, servants, camel and horse allowance for the Bey) at £ 9.057. Captain Swayne states that in 1891-1892 the total value of the trade in Berbera and Bulhar was £ 280,664 of which £ 161,112 worth were imports. Dr. Drade-Brockman merely confines himself to the statement that there had been a vast increase in trade.

During the period up to the Mullah wars not only Berbera but its neighbourhood became more peaceful. Mr. Waslh mentions bands of mounted raiders carrying off stock operating near Dubar, but, inspite of this, he was able to abandon the forts between the Shaab and Dubar straight away, and two years later he withdrew the police post portecting the waterpoint itself.

Sportsmen and other travellers at this time provided almost a minor industry for Berbera since servants, guards, camels and camelmen were hired at Berbera or Bulhar. Sometime during the later ninethies a travellers bungalo was built; it accommodated six with difficulty. Among the distinguished visitors were the Duke of Hamilton, the future Lord Curzon, Prince Esternazy, Count Coudenhove and Lord Delamere. The Duke and Duchess of Connaught came to Berbera during Mr. Walsh's tenure of office and were entertained by Somali dancers.

The era of light administration came to an end with the advent of the Mullah wars, though there was an attempt to revive the system in 1910. Bin Abdulla Hassan tried first to preach in Berbera, but met with no success and so moved out to the east. During the campaigns that followed, Berbera suffered less than the rest of the country since, except for a brief raid during which he fired down the street that bears his name, the Mullah's operations were far away. Many refugees came into the town, but there seems to have been work for everybody, it is recorded that labour was very expensive and that it was necessary to augment the labour force from time to

time with men from many parts of India, as well as with Kaffirs, Zulus, Yaos, Sudanese, Abyssinians and Swahilis.

During the wars, one of the greatest opponents of Bin Abdulla Hassan was the great poet Ali Jama Habil Akil of the Esa Musa rer Wais. One of the streets in Berbera is now called after him. A song of his against the Mad Mullah has been translated: «It is the custom to help strangers or travellers and not to harm or rob them, but in his case he robs them and takes from them their dates». Considering the Mullah's practices of mutilating his victims or smashing them to death from great heights, the sentiments of the song seem rather mild, but perhaps there are other and more useful verses.

Though Berbera was active and prosperous during the Mullah wars, it suffered long term losses, much of its trade being transferred to Jibouti and all development projects, including the scheme to build a railway between Harar and Berbera, being shelved.

The end of the Mullah wars in 1920 meant also the end of Berbera's isolation. Thereafter, as government offices spread througout Somaliland, Berbera became integrated with the Protectorate.