

OLD AFRICA

STORIES *from* EAST AFRICA'S PAST



+ Zebroids

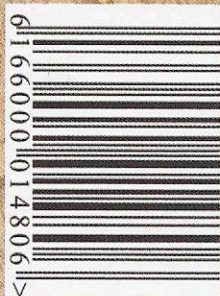
Thika 1920s

Coffee: Social Drug

Aga Khan in Mwanza

Kenya Kaleidoscope

Finding Geothermal



WIN!

2 nights for 2 at
SATAO CAMP

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OLD AFRICA

Cover Photo:

This East African stamp for £1 came out to celebrate Queen Elizabeth II's coronation in 1953. As Old Africa went to press in September, Queen Elizabeth had just passed away. She became Queen while in Kenya in 1952 and she went on to become Great Britain's longest reigning sovereign.



THE AGA KHAN HOSTED IN MWANZA

by Jarat Chopra

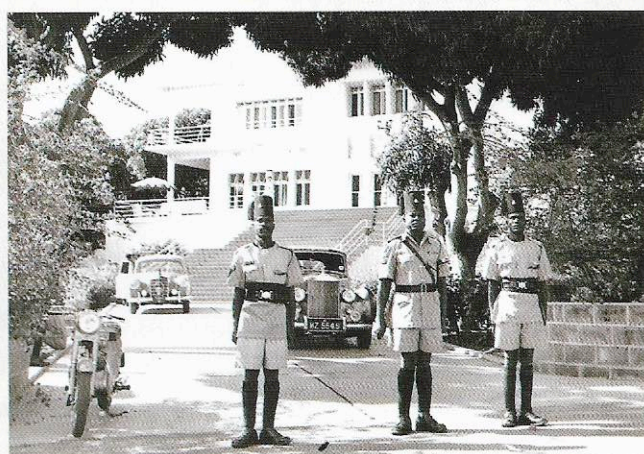
1959 His Highness Prince Karim al-Husayni Shah, Aga Khan IV, undertook his first official visit to Mwanza, Tanganyika in late 1959. Two years earlier, at the age of 20, he had succeeded his grandfather to the title of Imam, the spiritual leader of the Nizari Ismail denomination of Shia Islam as 49th in lineal descent from the Prophet Muhammad. Sir Sultan Muhammad Shah, Aga Khan III, had named his grandson Prince Karim over his sons, Prince Aly Khan and Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan, to take his place and inherit his august office because, as he stated in his Will, there was need of a young man brought up in the new age of atomic energy.

While still an undergraduate pursuing Islamic studies at Harvard University, in October 1957 Prince Karim attended three installation ceremonies in Dar es Salaam, Nairobi and Kampala, where he received the ceremonial regalia of the red and grey robe worn by his grandfather for his jubilee celebrations, a sword of justice, a golden chain with 49 links, and a signet ring. After his graduation in 1959, and in the wake of the reburial of his grandfather in the completed mausoleum on the River Nile at Aswan, the Aga Khan embarked on a tour of East Africa to become better acquainted with tens of thousands of his followers in the region.

He reached Mwanza in October that year, and during his overnight stay the Aga Khan was hosted by the Honourable Iqbal Chand Chopra, CBE, QC, and his wife, Mrs Thelma Florence Chopra, at their house on Capri Point overlooking Bismarck Rock (with the address "PO Box 1, Mwanza," today the President's State House). Throughout the 1950s dignitaries entertained at Chopra House had included HRH Princess Margaret [*Old Africa*, No 22, April-May 2009, pp. 20-22], Secretaries of State for the Colonies, the United Nations Visiting Missions, successive governors and tribal chiefs, and other luminaries that journeyed as far as the shores of Lake Victoria.

Chopra—a member of the Tanganyika Legislative and Executive Councils, and the sole partner of Dr John Thorburn Williamson in the world's largest diamond concern at Mwadui [*Old Africa*, No 21, February-March

2009, pp. 16-17]—had enjoyed an enduring friendship with the elder Aga Khan III. They proved socially compatible quite apart from professing different faiths, having had to translate in their respective life experiences what counts in the East into what counts in the West. Chopra was duly invited to attend the Diamond Jubilee of Aga Khan III in Dar es



Top: His Highness Prince Karim al-Husayni Shah, Aga Khan IV. **Bottom:** The Aga Khan passed a police guard in their signature fez caps, belted khakis and knee-high puttees at the entrance of Chopra House.



Top: The Aga Khan alights from the car at Chopra House in Mwanza and is greeted by Thelma Chopra. **Middle:** The Aga Khan climbs the stairs up to the house. **Bottom:** The Aga Khan arrives at the entrance.

Salaam in August 1946, when the Ismaili leader was weighed against diamonds (243 pounds of industrial diamonds on a super-sized scale, worth £640,000 at the time, in transparent bulletproof caskets on loan from De Beers in London).

Subsequently, in 1951, his younger son, Prince Aly Khan, planned an East African itinerary as part of a second honeymoon with his second wife, the 'Love Goddess' of American movies, Rita Hayworth. It was called the 'Champagne Safari' by a contemporary documentary that depicted in an opening scene a bush camp with stacks of wooden crates marked 'Dry Monopole 1941.' In truckload after truckload of equipment there was a generator to make trays and trays of ice cubes daily to chill the champagne that went with the *pâté de foie gras* and guinea hen under glass, along with the caviar and vodka. However, after weeks of travelling and public engagements, strains on the marriage led Rita Hayworth to return to Hollywood and eventually file for divorce.

Meanwhile, Aly Khan proceeded to Mwanza, where he was received on February 17th by the Chopras, who put at his disposal one of their two Rolls-Royce motor cars. (Today, one of these can be seen on display at the Hotel Tilapia on Capri Point). They commiserated with the prince in his circumstances, and shortly afterwards, on February 20th, he cabled from Nairobi a message of gratitude: "Thousand thanks for all your kindness and" (with the pause of a long pen stroke) "hospitality during my stay in Mwanza. Much appreciated all you did. Kind regards, Aly Khan."

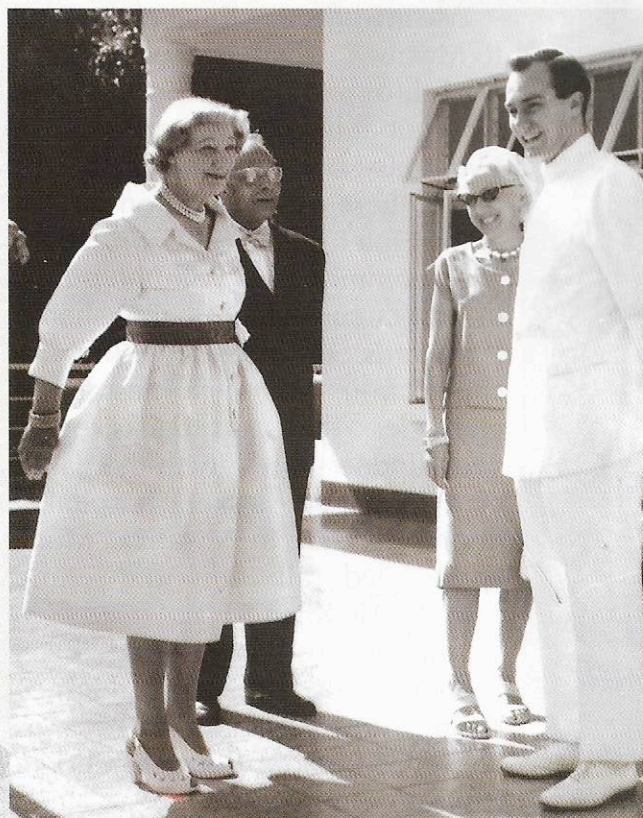
Just as his father had been accommodated, the youthful Prince Karim, now Aga Khan IV, was conveyed by Rolls Royce to Chopra House. On 12 October 1959, he passed a police guard in their signature fez caps, belted khakis and



The Aga Khan and Thelma and guests at a dinner in his honour.



Thelma says good-bye to the Aga Khan.



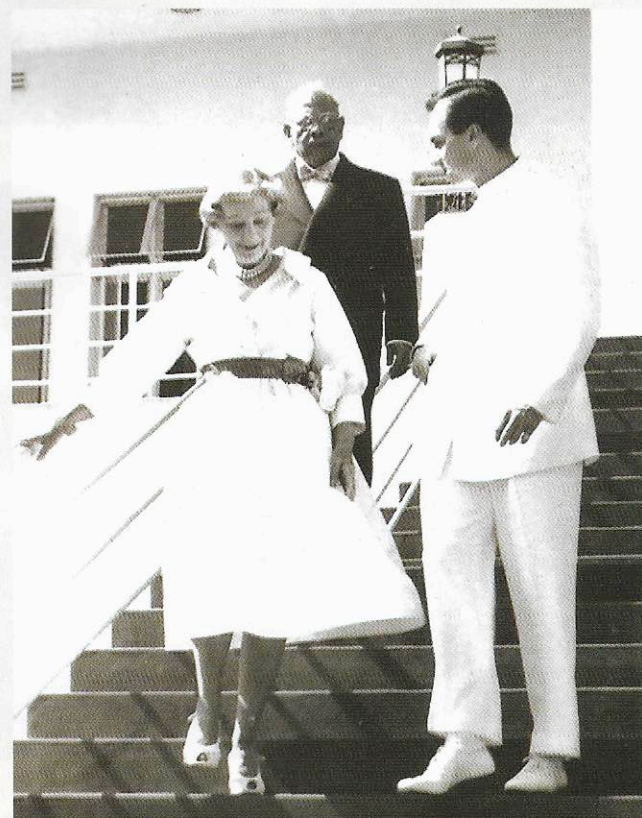
Thelma, with Iqbal Chopra right beside her, prepares to escort the Aga Khan to his transportation.

knee-high puttees at the entrance of the house, and in the courtyard the new Imam, dressed all in white, alighted and was met by his hosts. Thelma led him up the broad oxblood stairway and invited him inside, but he insisted: "After you."

As always on such occasions, in daytime and for formal dinners in the evenings, Thelma wore the latest French fashions. She maintained a dress form—an exact replica of her body shape—at the top *haute couture ateliers* in Paris, so that remotely made-to-measure creations arrived in Africa fitting perfectly.

In the course of his stay, the Aga Khan was chaperoned by a family confidant and *éminence grise* amongst Ismailis in Kenya, Sir Eboo Pirbhai. The Aga Khan was also shadowed by his private secretary, Madame Gaetane Beguel, a Frenchwoman who had served his grandfather in the same capacity. And a retinue of other staff stood by while faithful followers came to pay their respects at the house.

The day after his departure from Mwanza, on 14 October 1959, the Aga Khan was interviewed by the Kenya Broadcasting Service. Echoing the speeches of Chopra in the Legislative Council calling for a multi-racial



Iqbal Chopra, Thelma and the Aga Khan walking down the stairs.



The Aga Khan gestures as he leaves, a photo that was well publicised.



The Aga Khan departs from Chopra House.

future in Tanganyika, he stated on the eve of independence: "I do not think that mono-racial nations would be possible in East Africa."

A week later Sir Eboo wrote a letter of thanks: "Words fail me to express my gratitude for the kindness and courtesy shown to me during His Highness' visit to Mwanza. Without your help my work would have been much more difficult."

Unfortunately, within a few months in May 1960, Aga Khan IV's father Prince Aly Khan succumbed to head injuries sustained in an automobile accident in a Parisian suburb. In the years that followed in the early 1960s, Aga Khan IV's uncle, Prince Sadruddin Aga

Khan, visited Chopra House on more than one occasion as the deputy (later to become the head) of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. By then, Iqbal and Thelma had retired to Geneva, and their son Arjan and his wife Yonnie were living in the house. Yonnie recalls how affable a man Prince Sadruddin was, and how he was especially interested in the prospects for Ismaili migration from East Africa to places like Canada. Recently, in 2017, His Highness Prince Karim al-Husayni Shah celebrated his own Diamond Jubilee as Aga Khan IV, a year-long affair that went global, but which still extended to the cities of his installation.

Top: Prince Aly Khan's cable to Mr and Mrs Chopra in 1951.

Bottom left: A thank you letter sent to Mr and Mrs Chopra from Allaudin Alibhai in 1951 for hosting Aly Khan.

Bottom right: A thank your letter from Sir Eboo Pirbhai to Mr and Mrs Chopra for hosting Prince Karim, Aga Khan IV, in 1959

EAST AFRICAN POSTS AND TELEGRAPHS DEPARTMENT
If the accuracy of an inland telegram or cablegram is doubted, repetition can be obtained free of charge.

Office of Origin and Service Instructions

Handed in at Nairobi 9 a.m., Received here at 5.55 p m.


Office Stamp
1951

This form must accompany any inquiry respecting this Telegram

TO Mr and Mrs Chopra Mwanza

Thousand thanks for all your kindness and hospitality during my stay in mwanza much appreciated all you did kind regards

Aly Khan


 **H. H. The Agakhan's Ismailia Provincial Council**
Phone No. 20 P. O. Box No. 5.
Telegrams:- "ISMAILIS" REF. NO. 176/51 Mwanza, 28th Feb. 1951.

The President & Members of My Council
thanks ~~Mr~~ Honble & Mrs Chopra for their kind
hospitality shown to H.S.H.Lt Col.Prince Alykhan
on His Highness' visit in Mwanza on the 17th inst
and also for the Car & Other entertainments given
to His Highness and appreciates the assistance
in regards given to My Council.

Thanking you.

Yours faithfully,
Allaudin Alibhai
ALLAUDIN ALIBHAI.
: HON. SECRETARY :

To.
Hon'ble I.C.Chopra, M.L.C.
Mwanza.



TELEPHONE: { OFFICE 2166
RESIDENCE 25415
P.O. BOX 88
NAIROBI
(KENYA COLONY)

22nd October, 1959.

My dear Mr. and Mrs. Chopra,

Words fail me to express my gratitude for the kindness and courtesy shown to me during His Highness' visit to Mwanza. Without your help my work would have been much more difficult.

I am most deeply grateful to you both.

With kindest regards,

Yours sincerely,
Eboo

Mr. and Mrs. I.C. Chopra,
P.O. Box 1,
Mwanza,
Tanganyika.