A short note on a silsila of the Qdiriyya brotherhood in Ethiopia

Gori, Alessandro

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All inquiries should be directed to:

Futūḥ al-buldān
Nicola Melis
Di.S.S.I.
Università degli Studi di Cagliari
Viale S. Ignazio 78,
09123 Cagliari
futuh.al.buldan@gmail.com
www.nicolamelis.org

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A short note on a silsila of the Qādiriyya brotherhood in Ethiopia

Alessandro Gori
(University of Florence)

Introduction

In spite of a lack of exact and reliable information on the present distribution of the Islamic mystical brotherhoods in Ethiopia (and Eritrea), the Qādiriyya is the most widespread Islamic brotherhood, ṭarīqa, in the country. In the present paper I carry out a brief research on a spiritual genealogy (silsila) of the Ethiopian Qādiriyya trying to shed light on the ways the ṭarīqa followed to spread in the different regions of Ethiopia, and to contribute to the reconstruction of the history of the group in that country.

1. The Qādiriyya in Ethiopia

ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Ǧīlānī (m. 561/1166) is widely known and devotedly venerated in Ethiopia. His cenotaphs are scattered across the country, and mosques named after him are found in many different towns and

∗The research on which this article is based was made possible thanks to the support of the Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung.

1 The Somali Qādiriya is, on the contrary, relatively well known (see Alessandro Gori, Studi sulla letteratura agiografica islamica somala in lingua araba, Dipartimento di Linguistica, Firenze 2003, in particular pp. 28-32).
To mention only a few examples, in Harar, a famous maqām of ‘Abd al-Qādir and his mother Umm al-Ḥayr Fāṭima (locally called Umma Koda) is located outside the wall of the old town (ḡugal), in the area known as Qurra-be limay just in front of the main bus-station. Eighteen kilometres east of Harar, in the Argobba land, a renowned sacred compound hosts the shrines of ‘Abd al-Qādir and Umma Koda with a house for the congregational meetings of the Qādiriyah brotherhood (ḥadra). Both locations are cherished holy sites to which the faithful of the Harar region flock in pilgrimage to seek the baraka of the saint and his mother. In Eritrea, a very famous shrine (mazār) of ‘Abd al-Qādir exists on the homonymous stretch of land north of Massawa and local traditions obviously claim that the saint actually died there. Emir ‘Abd al-Šakūr b. Yūṣuf of Harar (d. 1794) had a mosque called ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ǧīlānī built near the shrine of ṣayḥ Ḥusayn in the south Ethiopian region of Bale. In Asmara a modern mosque with a maqām perpetuates the memory of the eponymous of the Qādiriyah.

‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ǧīlānī is invoked in devotional poems and prayers.

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2 Unfortunately, no exhaustive list of the cenotaphs of ‘Abd al-Qādir in Ethiopia (and in the Horn) is available. There is no need to underline the interest and the importance that such a list could provide to clarify the dimensions of the cult of this saint in Northeastern Africa.


6 Enrico Cerulli, Studi etiopi 1. La lingua e la storia di Harar, Istituto per l’Oriente, Roma 1936, pp. 44 and 51.

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with the names of local Ethiopian holy men. The text collection recited during the mawlid ceremony in Harar contains a poem attributed to ‘Abd al-Qādir (Ṭuf bi-hālī sab’ān) and a long pious supplication to ask for his help (Yā qūb yā rabbānī al-hayakal al-nūrānī ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Gīlānī). In many Ethiopian Muslim regions, famous Qādiri centres exist: Anna in Rayya Qobbo (Wällo), Dana in Yaggū (Wallo), Qatbare in Qabeena and Galamssoo (Gälämso) in Oromia are among the most celebrated headquarters of the brotherhood and host famous Islamic schools which attract scholars and students to teach and study not only mysticism but the whole syllabus of the Islamic traditional education.

A number of Ethiopian Islamic renowned learned men were affiliated with the Qādiriyya (e.g. Ġamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Annī, d. 1882; Ahmad b. Ādam al-Dānī, d. 1903; ‘Īsā b. Ḥamza al-Qatbarī d. 1947, ‘Umar b. ‘Alī al-Ġalamsī, fl. first half of the 20th century) and contributed to enhance the influence and the prestige of the ṣābiq.

Despite the apparent rooting of the brotherhood in the country, the history of the Qādiriyya in Ethiopia has never been investigated by scholars and is therefore almost completely unknown. The ways the ṣābiq followed in its spread into the different cultural and ethnical landscapes of Islamic Ethiopia are so far only vaguely describable. The reciprocal relationships of the various centres of the brotherhood are not precisely identifiable and the biographies of the Ethiopian qādirī masters can only be sketched. First-hand sources on the mystical group and its literature (manāqib, silsilas, handbooks of doctrine, litanies and devotional texts) are still to be located, collected and critically published.

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11 Dirk Bustorf, s.v. “Qatbäre,” in EAE.
12 Mohammed Hassen, s.v. “Gālāmso,” EAE.
It is often repeated in scholarly literature\textsuperscript{14} that the first introducer of the Qādiriya in Ethiopia was Abū Bakr b. ‘Abd Allāh al-‘Aydrūs, the revered patron saint of Aden (d. 1508), member of the al-Saqqāf branch of the Ḥadrami Bā ‘Alawī sayyid, who allegedly brought the ṭarīqa to Harar. However, no evidence for this assertion has ever been shown yet.\textsuperscript{15} The first inception of the brotherhood remains thus still enshrouded in obscurity.

The late Hussein Ahmed was the first researcher to concretely contribute to the enhancement of our knowledge of the Ethiopian Qādiriya. While carrying out some field work in his native region, he came to know a local silsila of the Qādiriya that sheds light on the spread of the brotherhood from Harar into Wällo in the 19th century.

The silsila published by Hussein Ahmed runs as follows:

\begin{center}
Sayyid Musāfīr – faqīh Hāšim – Ahmad b. Sāliḥ – faqīh Zubayr – šayḫ Muhammad Šāfī (d. 1814/15)\textsuperscript{16} – Muhammad b. faqīh Zubayr – šayḫ Čamal al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Anī – Ahmad b. Ādam (d. 1903) – Muḥammad Yasin (d. 1924); sayyid Ibrāhīm (d. 1956).\textsuperscript{17}
\end{center}

According to Hussein Ahmed’s informants, sayyid Musāfīr was of Yemeni origin\textsuperscript{18} and thus was a trait-d'union between the local Ethiopian Qādiriya and the broader brotherhood network. He initiated to the Qādiri wīrd “a certain faqīh Hāšim” of Harar who in his turn entrusted the ṭarīqa to Ahmad b. Sāliḥ. The latter took the brother-

\textsuperscript{15} The personality of Abū Bakr b. ‘Abd Allāh al-‘Aydrūs is still little known and deserves more in-depth research. He is credited to have introduced the habit of drinking coffee into Arabia. His connection with the Qādiriya is still unclear as some sources point instead to his affiliation to the Şāliyya (Oscar Löfgren, s.v. “Aydrūs,” in Clifford E. Bosworth et al. (eds.), \textit{The Encyclopaedia of Islam}, 2nd edition, Brill, Leiden 1960-2005).
\textsuperscript{16} On this figure see Hussein Ahmed, s.v. “Muḥammad Šāfī,” in \textit{EAE}.
\textsuperscript{18} Interviewed by Hussein Ahmed, šayḥ Muhammad Wale said that sayyid Musāfīr came from a not well-specified “West” and that faqīh Hāšim received the qādiri wīrd also “from an unknown ‘ālim from Medina” (Hussein Ahmed, \textit{Islam in Nineteenth-Century}, p. 69).
hood to Wallo where it took root in the entire region.

The spiritual genealogy collected by Hussein Ahmed provides us with at least two important pieces of information: 1) the Qadiryya most probably arrived in Ethiopia from Yemen, although not through the intermediation of Abu Bakr b. 'Abd Allâh al-'Aydarûs, whose name appears nowhere; 2) the Qadiryya came to Wallo through Shayh Ahmed b. Shalîh among whose pupils also figured the much revered saint and learned man sayyid al-Bâ` al-hâgg Bušra b. Ay Muḥammad.19

Hussein Ahmed’s informants were not able to give further details on the personalities of the three oldest shayhs mentioned in the silsila, so they remain nothing more than simple names. However, it is possible to identify with certainty faqîh Hâsim with the Harari learned man and member of the Harari emir family Hâsim b. 'Abd al-'Azîz (d. 1765)20 who authored a much renowned Arabic collection of pious litanies and prayers in praise of the Prophet (called the Fatâl-Rahmânî [sic!]), a wîrd for the Qadiryya brotherhood and a Harari poem, al-Muṣṭafâ, known both in a shorter and a longer version.

2. Shayh Ahmed b. Šalîh and his silsila

Very recently, new evidence on the silsila of the Wallo Qadiryya has


20 For some introductory information on him see Ewald Wagner, s.v. “Hâsim b. 'Abd al-'Azîz,” in EAE. The affiliation of faqîh Hâsim to the Qadiryya is proved by an unpublished silsila contained in the manuscript Hs. or. 10472 of the Staatsbibliothek in Berlin (see the description of the document in Ewald Wagner, Afrikanische Handschriften. Teil 2. Islamische Handschriften aus Äthiopien, “Verzeichnis der orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland 24-2,” Steiner, Stuttgart 1997, pp. 10-11.
come into light. In Ramadan 1425 (Oct.-Nov. 2004)\textsuperscript{21} the Nağăşî printing press, the main Islamic publishing house of the country based in Addis Ababa,\textsuperscript{22} published the *İqâz himam al-ağbiyâ' bi-raşh qatra min tarafîm al-'ulamâ’ wa-al-awliyâ’* fi ğumhûriyyat Ịyûbiyâ, a collection of short biographies of holy men written by the renowned Wâllo şayh Muḥammad Wale.\textsuperscript{23}

Among the saints whose manâqib were published in the book there is also şayh Aḥmad b. Šâliḥ, *trait d’union* between the Harari and the Wâllo branches of the Qâdirîyya. No factual detail about the life of şayh Aḥmad b. Šâliḥ is recorded in the short biographical note of the *İqâz*.\textsuperscript{24} The sources of the information given in the book are not revealed. The dates of birth and death of the holy man remain unknown and the data about his genealogy are not ascertained. The fact that someone calls Aḥmad b. Šâliḥ “Aḥmad Kubrâ” irritates the author/collector who deems it as a manifestation of coarse ignorance of the basic principles of the Arabic language.

Among the many prodigies which are commonly attributed to şayh Aḥmad, Muḥammad Wale reports only a single *karâma* which he himself seems to consider unbelievable. It is said that Aḥmad b. Šâliḥ on his way to Yâğgu where he was to give the ığâza to ıṣâḥ Zubayr, made a detour to Rayya. There, he noticed a girl who was playing with some boys. He stopped her and announced that she would give birth to someone who would renew his ǧîkr: she was actually the mother-to-be of şayh Gamâl al-Dîn Muḥammad al-Annî. Besides the general skepticism of the author about *karâmât*, in this specific tale

\textsuperscript{21} This is the date given on page 2 of the book. In the short biography of the author however, it is said that the text was published just a few days before his death (Sep. 10\textsuperscript{th} 2005).


\textsuperscript{24} Muḥammad Wale, *İqâz himam al-ağbiyâ’*, pp. 137-140.
Muhammad Wale stresses also a general theological inconsistency: it is highly questionable whether it is legitimate to give a sort of *iǧāza in absentia* to someone who is not (yet) alive.\(^{25}\)

Notwithstanding its scanty amount of information, the section of the *IQāz* is very interesting because it records the complete *silsila* of Aḥmad b. Ṣāliḥ. The spiritual genealogy connecting ṣayḥ Aḥmad back to ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḡilānī runs as follows:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Al-sayyid} ‘\text{Abd al-Qādir} &\text{ al-Ḡilānī} – \text{al-sayyid} \text{Abū Bakr} ‘\text{Abd al-Razzāq} – \\
\text{qādī al-qudāt} &\text{al-sayyid} \text{Nāṣir} – \text{al-ṣayḥ} \text{Abū al-Naṣr} \text{al-sayyid} \text{Muḥammad} – \\
\text{al-ṣayḥ} &\text{Zāhīr al-Dīn} \text{al-sayyid} \text{Aḥmad} – \text{Ṣayf} \text{al-Dīn} \text{al-sayyid} \text{Yahyā} – \text{al-sayyid} \text{Nāğm} \text{al-Dīn} \text{Muḥammad} – ‘\text{Alī} – \text{al-sayyid} \text{Nūr} \text{al-Dīn} \text{Ḥusayn} – \text{al-sayyid} \text{Ṣaraf} \text{al-Dīn} \text{Aḥmad} \text{al-Qādirī} – \text{Ṣḥāb} \text{al-Dīn} \text{al-sayyid} \text{Aḥmad} \text{al-Qādirī} – \text{al-sayyid} \text{‘Alī} \text{al-Ḥāšimi} – \text{al-sayyid} \text{Ṣaraf} \text{al-Dīn} – \text{Baḥr} \text{al-Dīn} \text{sayyid} \text{Aḥmad} \text{al-Qādirī} – \text{sayyid} \text{Ibrāhīm} \text{al-Qādirī} – \text{al-sayyid} \text{Musāfīr} \text{al-Maġribī} – \text{Abū ‘Abd Allāh} \text{Ḥāšim} b. ‘\text{Abd al-‘Azīz} \text{al-Ḥarārī} – \text{Aḥmad} b. Ṣāliḥ.\(^{26}\)
\end{align*}
\]

The reliability of the *silsila* linking the Ethiopian branch of the brotherhood to the wider Islamic world can hardly sustain critical analysis. Quite surprisingly, most of the names mentioned, from Abū Bakr ‘Abd al-Razzāq (one of the sons of ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḡilānī) down to ‘Alī al-Ḥāšimi, Šaraf al-Dīn and Baḥr al-Dīn Aḥmad, correspond to the physical and spiritual genealogy of the Āl al-Ḡilānī al-Ḥamawī, the descendants of ‘Abd al-Qādir in the Syrian town of Ḥamā.\(^{27}\)

In particular, the *nasab* of this Šarīf group almost literally confirms the section of the Ethiopian *silsila/nasab*: ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḡilānī –

\(^{25}\) *Ibidem*, p. 139.


al-sayyid Abū Bakr ‘Abd al-Razzāq – qādī al-quḍāt al-sayyid Nāṣir (called al-Naṣr in the Syrian source) – al-ṣayḥ Abū al-Naṣr al-sayyid Muhammad – al-ṣayḥ Žāhir al-Dīn al-sayyid Aḥmad – Sayf al-Dīn al-sayyid Yahyā. Sayf al-Dīn Yahyā (d. 734/1333-34) was the first member of the offspring of ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḡilānī to settle in Ḥamā in 685/1286-87 on his way back from the ḥaqq (hence his nickname nazīl Ḥamā) and from him the whole Āl Kīlānī group originated. The names from Sayf al-Dīn Yahyā back to al-sayyid ‘Alī al-Hāšimī are not completely identical in the Syrian nasab and in the Ethiopian silsila but the relatively slight discrepancies between the two texts can be easily explained with some disruptions in the transmission. The only really missing person in the Syrian nasab is Ibrāhīm al-Qādir who, however, could be an avatar of Ibrāhīm b. Šaraf al-Dīn b. Aḥmad b. ‘Alī al-Hāšimī who appears in the nasab of šayḥ ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Kīlānī, naqīb al-ašrāf in Damascus (d. ca. 1172/1758-59).

As for sayyid Musāfīr al-Maʿgrībī, who should be the person who practically introduced the tarīqa into Ethiopia, he lays in complete obscurity: one can only speculate on his nisba which often is used in Ethiopia to refer to individuals coming or originating from Sudan. It is of course theoretically conceivable that this sayyid Musāfīr al-Maʿgrībī could have met a member of the Kīlānī family somewhere in the Near East or in the Arabian Peninsula and have been initiated to the Qādirī brotherhood by him. Such an event, however, would probably have been recorded in Ethiopian tradition with much emphasis. It is thus much more likely that sayyid Musāfīr al-Maʿgrībī is nothing but a ghost name functioning to connect the Near-eastern silsila with Ethiopia.

The Īqāz also contains a cursive mention of the line of Qādirī spiritual descendency initiated by šayḥ Aḥmad b. Şāliḥ. The silsila in this


29 How the Syrian nasab came to be known in Ethiopia so that Muḥammad Wāle could insert it in his book as a silsila is not clear. A feedback from an Arabic written source is most likely but cannot be proven.
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case is:


This is once more the famous Anna-Dana silsila, already recorded by J. Spencer Trimingham and then studied by Hussein Ahmed. 31 From the al-Danī al-Ṭānī, the Ethiopian Qādiriyya apparently managed to spread widely in every corner of Ethiopia. Among the most famous disciples of the “second” al-Danī šayḥ, Muḥammad Wale mentions:

al-šayḥ al-Sayyid b. al-sayyid Ibrāhīm al-Ṭālī; šayḥ Abū al-Baṣṭ – šayḥ Mahmūd Kanz – šayḥ Šahīd al-Dār šayḥ al-Karamī who was, in his turn, master of al-ḥāǧǧ Muḥammad Zayn al-Danī (the third Danī). 32

This local Ethiopian section of the silsila thus includes the names of the main representatives of the Qādiriyya of Wällo in the recent past and today. It provides the standard chain of spiritual descent for the whole region, highlighting the pivotal role played by the Anna-Dana connection.

This is the only Ethiopian Qādirī silsila known so far. Other silsilas based on different Qādirī centres in Wällo and/or in Harar which, for sure, exist are still to be discovered. Only further research on the written local tradition of the tarīqa will hopefully allow us to make a more detailed assessment of the network of the Qādiriyya in the whole region.

30 Muḥammad Wale, Ḥiṣām himam al-aḫbiyā’, p. 139.
32 Muḥammad Wale, Ḥiṣām himam al-aḫbiyā’, p. 139.