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

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*Futūh al-buldān* is a well-known work of al-Balāḏurī (d. 297/892), one of the most important Muslim historians who lived in the third century of *hiǧra*. The reference to classical Muslim historiography in the series’ title is coupled with the semantic spectrum of the Arabic root of the word *fath*. It refers to ‘military conquest,’ as well as to the ideas of to ‘open,’ ‘begin,’ and/or ‘reveal.’ Thus, the title of the series is a tribute to a great Muslim historian, but it also represents a synthesis of the ideological framework that underpins the series, which is to disclose pieces of history of Islamic societies.

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

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(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),¹ 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

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¹ 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).
villages. To mention only a few examples, in Harar, a famous maqâm of 'Abd al-Qâdir and his mother Umm al-Ḥayr Fâṭîma (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-Qâdir and Umma Koda with a house for the congregational meetings of the Qâdiriya brotherhood (ḥadrâ). 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 (mazâr) of 'Abd al-Qâdir exists on the homonymous stretch of land north of Massawa and local traditions obviously claim that the saint actually died there. Emir 'Abd al-Ṣâkûr b. Yusuf of Harar (d. 1794) had a mosque called 'Abd al-Qâdir al-Ǧîlânî built near the shrine of ṣayḥ Ḥusayn in the south Ethiopian region of Bale. In Asmara a modern mosque with a maqâm perpetuates the memory of the eponymous of the Qâdiriya.

'Abd al-Qâdir al-Ǧîlânî is invoked in devotional poems and prayers

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2 Unfortunately, no exhaustive list of the cenotaphs of 'Abd al-Qâdir 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.


5 See Gori, s.v. “Umma Koda.”


7 Enrico Cerulli, *Studi etiopici I. La lingua e la storia di Harar*, Istituto per l’Oriente, Roma 1936, pp. 44 and 51.

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 (Tuf bi-ḥallī sab‘an) and a long pious supplication to ask for his help (Ya qaṭb yā rabbānī al-hayakal al-nūrānī ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḡilānī). In many Ethiopian Muslim regions, famous Qādirī centres exist: Anna in Rayya Qobbo (Wällo), Dana in Yəğğu (Wällo), 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 Qādiriyā (e.g. Ǧamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Annī, d. 1882; ʿAbd al-Qādir b. ʿAbd al-Dānī, d. 1903; Ḥanān b. Ḥanān al-Qādirī d. 1947, ʿUmar b. ʿAlī al-Ǧalamsī, fl. first half of the 20th century) and contributed to enhance the influence and the prestige of the ṣārīqa.

Despite the apparent rooting of the brotherhood in the country, the history of the Qādiriyā in Ethiopia has never been investigated by scholars and is therefore almost completely unknown. The ways the ṣārīqa 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 (manāqīb, silsilas, handbooks of doctrine, litanies and devotional texts) are still to be located, collected and critically published.

11 Dirk Bustorf, s.v. “Qādirī,” in EAE.
12 Mohammed Hassen, s.v. “Gälämso,” EAE.
It is often repeated in scholarly literature\(^{14}\) that the first introducer of the Qādiriyya in Ethiopia was Abū Bakr b. ‘Abd Allāh al-‘Aydarūs, 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.\(^{15}\) 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 Qādiriyya. While carrying out some field work in his native region, he came to know a local silsila of the Qādiriyya 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:

\[
\text{Sayyid Musāfir} – \text{faqīḥ Hāšim} – \text{Ahmad b. Ṣāliḥ} – \text{faqīḥ Zubayr} – \text{ṣayḥ Muhammad Šafti (d. 1814/15)}^{16} – \text{Muḥammad b. faqīḥ Zubayr} – \text{ṣayḥ Ġamal al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Annī} – \text{Ahmad b. Ādam (d. 1903)} – \text{Muḥammad Yasin (d. 1924)}; \text{sayyid Ibrāḥīm (d. 1956)}.^{17}
\]

According to Hussein Ahmed’s informants, sayyid Musāfir was of Yemeni origin\(^{18}\) and thus was a trait-d’union between the local Ethiopian Qādiriyya and the broader brotherhood network. He initiated to the Qādiri wird “a certain faqīḥ Hāšim” of Harar who in his turn entrusted the ṭarīqa to Ḥamūd b. Ṣāliḥ. The latter took the brother-

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\(^{15}\) The personality of Abū Bakr b. ‘Abd Allāh al-‘Aydarūs 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 Qādiriyya is still unclear as some sources point instead to his affiliation to the Ṣāḥiliyya (Oscar Löfgren, s.v. “‘Aydarūs,” in Clifford E. Bosworth et al. (eds.), The Encyclopaedia of Islam, 2nd edition, Brill, Leiden 1960-2005).

\(^{16}\) On this figure see Hussein Ahmed, s.v. “Muḥammad Šaft,” in EAE.


\(^{18}\) Interviewed by Hussein Ahmed, ṣayḥ Muḥammad Wale said that sayyid Musāfir came from a not well-specified “West” and that faqīḥ Hāšim received the qādiri wird also “from an unknown ‘ālim from Medina” (Hussein Ahmed, Islam in Nineteenth-Century, p. 69).
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hood to Wällo 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 Qādiriyya most probably arrived in Ethiopia from Yemen, although not through the intermediation of Abū Bakr b. ʿAbd Allāh al-ʿAydarūs, whose name appears nowhere; 2) the Qādiriyya came to Wällo through ṣayḥ Ahmad b. Šāliḥ among whose pupils also figured the much revered saint and learned man sayyid al-Bāʿ al-hāqq Buṣra b. ʿĀy Muḥammad. 19

Hussein Ahmed’s informants were not able to give further details on the personalities of the three oldest ṣayḥs mentioned in the silsila, so they remain nothing more than simple names. However, it is possible to identify with certainty faqīḥ Hāšim with the Harari learned man and member of the Harari emir family Hāšim b. ʿĀbd al-ʿAzīz (d. 1765) 20 who authored a much renowned Arabic collection of pious litanies and prayers in praise of the Prophet (called the Fatḥ al-Raḥmānī [sic!]), a ṭīrū for the Qādiriyya brotherhood and a Harari poem, al-Muṣṭafā, known both in a shorter and a longer version.

2. Ṣayḥ Ahmad b. Šalīḥ and his silsila

Very recently, new evidence on the silsila of the Wällo Qādiriyya has

19 On this famous holy man of Wällo see Eloi Ficquet, s.v. “Buṣra ʿāy Muḥammad,” in EAE; Hussein Ahmed, “Al-Hajj Bushra Ay Muhammad: Muslim reformer, scholar and saint of nineteenth-century Wällo, Ethiopia,” in Bertrand Hirsch – Manfred Kropp (eds., eds., Hrsg.), Saints, Biographies and History in Africa – Saints, biographies et histories en Afrique – Heilige, Biographien und Geschichte in Afrika = Nordostafrikanisch / Westasiatische Studien 5, Peter Lang – Europäischer Verlag der Wissenschaften, Frankfurt am Main-Berlin – Bern – Bruxelles – New York – Oxford – Wien 2003, pp. 175-190. According to the sources, it seems that ṣayḥ Buṣrā had been initiated not only to the Qādiriyya but to several different brotherhoods. The phenomenon of the multiple affiliations to the Islamic brotherhoods in Ethiopia has not been studied at all.

20 For some introductory information on him see Ewald Wagner, s.v. “Hāšim b. ʿĀbd al-ʿAzīz,” in EAE. The affiliation of faqīḥ Hāšim to the Qādiriyya 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 Na\={g}\={a}\={s}\={i} printing press, the main Islamic publishing house of the country based in Addis Ababa,\textsuperscript{22} published the \textit{Iq\={a}z himam al-a\={g}biy\={a}' bi-ra\={s}h q\={a}tra min tar\={a}\={g}im al-'ulam\={a}' wa-al-awliy\={a}' fi \={g}umh\={u}riyyat I\={y}u\={b}iyy\={a}}, a collection of short biographies of holy men written by the renowned W\={a}llo \textit{say\={h}} Mu\={h}ammad Wale.\textsuperscript{23}

Among the saints whose \textit{man\={a}qib} were published in the book there is also \textit{say\={h}} A\={h}mad b. S\={a}li\={h}, \textit{trait d'union} between the Harari and the W\={a}llo branches of the Q\={a}d\={i}riyya. No factual detail about the life of \textit{say\={h}} A\={h}mad b. S\={a}li\={h} is recorded in the short biographical note of the \textit{Iq\={a}z}.\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 A\={h}mad b. S\={a}li\={h} “A\={h}mad Kubr\={a}” 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 \textit{say\={h}} A\={h}mad, Muhammad Wale reports only a single \textit{kar\={a}ma} which he himself seems to consider unbelievable. It is said that A\={h}mad b. S\={a}li\={h} on his way to Y\={a}g\={g}\={u} where he was to give the \textit{i\={g}\={a}za} to \textit{faq\={i}h} 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 \textit{g\={i}kr}: she was actually the mother-to-be of \textit{say\={h}} Gam\={a}l al-D\={i}n Mu\={h}ammad al-An\={n}i. Besides the general skepticism of the author about \textit{kar\={a}m\={a}t}, 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{23} Muhammad Wale, \textit{Iq\={a}z himam al-a\={g}biy\={a}' bi-ra\={s}h q\={a}tra min tar\={a}\={g}im al-'ulam\={a}' wa-al-awliy\={a}' fi \={g}umh\={u}riyyat I\={y}u\={b}iyy\={a}, al-Na\={g}\={a}\={s}, Add\={d}is Ab\={b}, 2004 [2005]. On Muhammad Wale see Hussein Ahmed, s.v. “Mu\={h}ammad Wali b. A\={h}mad b. ‘Umar,” in \textit{EAE}. On the \textit{Iq\={a}z} see also the review by Hussein Ahmed, \textit{Journal of Ethiopian Studies}, 38, 2005, pp. 175-79.

\textsuperscript{24} Muhammad Wale, \textit{Iq\={a}z himam al-a\={g}biy\={a}'}, pp. 137-140.
Muhammad Wale stresses also a general theological inconsistency: it is highly questionable whether it is legitimate to give a sort of iğāza in absentia to someone who is not (yet) alive. Notwithstanding its scanty amount of information, the section of the İqāz is very interesting because it records the complete silsila of Aḥmad b. Ṣāliḥ. The spiritual genealogy connecting šayḥ Aḥmad back to ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḡilānī runs as follows:


[^25]: Ibidem, p. 139.
al-sayyid Abū Bakr ‘Abd al-Razzāq – qādī al-quḍāt al-sayyid Nāṣīr (called al-Nāṣr in the Syrian source) – al-ṣayḥ Abū al-Nāṣr al-sayyid Muhammad – al-ṣayḥ Ţāhīr 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-Gilâni to settle in Ḥamâ in 685/1286-87 on his way back from the ḥaḡ (hence his nickname Ṽazīl Ḥamâ) and from him the whole Ḫilānī group originated. The names from Sayf al-Dīn Yahyā back to al-sayyid ‘Alī al-Ḥāšimī 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. 28 The only really missing person in the Syrian nasab is Ibrāhīm al-Qādir who, however, could be an avatar of Ibrāhīm b. Șaraf al-Dīn b. Aḥmad b. ‘Alī al-Ḥāšimī who appears in the nasab of šayḥ ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Kilâni, naqīb al-ašrāf in Damascus (d. ca. 1172/1758-59). 29

As for sayyid Musâfir al-Mağribî, 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 Musâfir al-Mağribî could have met a member of the Kilâni family somewhere in the Near East or in the Arabian Peninsula and have been initiated to the Qādirî 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 Musâfir al-Mağribî is nothing but a ghost name functioning to connect the Near-eastern silsila with Ethiopia.

The Ḳāẓ also contains a cursive mention of the line of Qādirî spiritual descendency initiated by šayḥ Aḥmad b. Šāliḥ. The silsila in this

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29 How the Syrian nasab came to be known in Ethiopia so that Muḥammad Wâle 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:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Aḥmad b. Sāliḥ,} & \quad \text{– faqīḥ Zubayr al-Ḡāgūrī – al-ḥāḡğ al-šayḥ Muḥhammad Šāfī} \\
\text{al-Nuḡūfī – al-šayḥ Abū Muḥammad b. faqīḥ Zubayr al-Ḡāgūrī – Šamāl al-}
\end{align*}
\] 
\[
\]

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-Dānī al-Ṭānī, the Ethiopian Qādirīyya apparently managed to spread widely in every corner of Ethiopia. Among the most famous disciples of the “second” al-Dānī šayḫ, Muḥammad Wale mentions:

\[
\begin{align*}
al-šayḥ al-Sayyid b. al-sayyid Ibrāhīm al-Ṭālī; & \quad šayḥ Abū al-Baṣṭ – šayḥ Mahmūd Kanz – šayḥ Šahīd al-Dār šayḥ al-Karamī who was, in his turn, master of al-ḥāḡğ Muḥammad Zayn al-Dānī (the third Dānī).^{32}
\end{align*}
\]

This local Ethiopian section of the silsila thus includes the names of the main representatives of the Qādirīyya of Wāllo 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 Wāllo 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 Qādirīyya in the whole region.

\(^{30}\) Muḥammad Wale, Ḥimām al-aḫḥiyā’, p. 139.
\(^{32}\) Muḥammad Wale, Ḥimām al-aḫḥiyā’, p. 139.