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

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*Futūḥ 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 hijra. The reference to classical Muslim historiography in the series’ title is coupled with the semantic spectrum of the Arabic root of the word *fāṭḥ*. 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 he 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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**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* in Ethiopia

‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ǧilānī (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 *Qādiriyya* 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.\textsuperscript{2} To mention only a few examples, in Harar, a famous \textit{maqām} of ‘Abd al-Qādir and his mother Umm al-Ḫayr Fāṭima (locally called Umma Koda)\textsuperscript{3} is located outside the wall of the old town (ḡugal), in the area known as \textit{Qurra-be limay} just in front of the main bus-station.\textsuperscript{4} 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 \textit{Qādiriyya} brotherhood (ḥadrā).\textsuperscript{5} Both locations are cherished holy sites to which the faithful of the Harar region flock in pilgrimage to seek the \textit{baraka} of the saint and his mother. In Eritrea, a very famous shrine (\textit{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.\textsuperscript{6} Emir ‘Abd al-Šakūr b. Yūsuf of Harar (d. 1794) had a mosque called ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ǧilānī built near the shrine of šayḫ Ḥusayn in the south Ethiopian region of Bale.\textsuperscript{7} In Asmara a modern mosque with a \textit{maqām} perpetuates the memory of the eponymous of the \textit{Qādiriyya}.\textsuperscript{8}

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

\textsuperscript{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.


\textsuperscript{5} See Gori, s.v. “Umma Koda.”


\textsuperscript{7} Enrico Cerulli, \textit{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 (Tūf bi-hālī sab‘ān) and a long pious supplication to ask for his help (Yā qūfb yā rabbānī al-hayakal al-nūrānī ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Gīlānī). In many Ethiopian Muslim regions, famous Qādirī centres exist: Anna in Rayya Qobbo (Wällo), Dana in Yäggū (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 Qādiriyya (e.g. Ğamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Annī, d. 1882; Ahmad b. Ğādāl al-Dānī, d. 1903; ‘Īsā b. Ḥamaẓa al-Qatbarī d. 1947, ‘Umar b. ‘Alī al-Galamsī, fl. first half of the 20th century) and contributed to enhance the influence and the prestige of the ṣṭārīqa.

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 ṣṭārīqa 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. “Qatbare,” in EAE.
12 Mohammed Hassen, s.v. “Gälämso,” EAE.
It is often repeated in scholarly literature\(^\text{14}\) that the first introducer of the *Qādiriyya* in Ethiopia was Abū Bakr b. ‘Abd Allāh al-‘Ayadrūs, 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.\(^\text{15}\) 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 *silṣila* of the *Qādiriyya* that sheds light on the spread of the brotherhood from Harar into Wällo in the 19th century.

The *silṣila* published by Hussein Ahmed runs as follows:

*Sayyid* Musāfir – *faqīḥ* Hāṣim – Ahmad b. Sāliḥ – *faqīḥ* Zubayr – *ṣayḥ* Muhammad Šāfi (d. 1814/15)\(^\text{16}\) – Muḥammad b. *faqīḥ* Zubayr – *ṣayḥ* Ğamal al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Annī – Ahmad b. Ādam (d. 1903) – Muḥammad Yasin (d. 1924); *sayyid* Ibrāhīm (d. 1956).\(^\text{17}\)

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


\(^\text{15}\) The personality of Abū Bakr b. ‘Abd Allāh al-‘Ayadrūs 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 *Ṣaḥḥīyya* (Oscar Löfgren, s.v. “*‘Aydarūs*,” in Clifford E. Bosworth et al. (eds.), *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edition, Brill, Leiden 1960-2005).

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


\(^\text{18}\) Interviewed by Hussein Ahmed, *ṣayḥ* Muḥammad Wale said that *sayyid* Musāfir came from a not well-specified “West” and that *faqīḥ* Hāṣim received the *qādiri* *wird* also “from an unknown *‘ālim* from Medina” (Hussein Ahmed, *Islam in Nineteenth-Century*, p. 69).
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 šayḥ Ahmād b. Śāliḥ among whose pupils also figured the much revered saint and learned man sayyid al-Bāʾ al-hāǧǧ Buṣra b. ʿAy Muḥammad.19

Hussein Ahmed’s informants were not able to give further details on the personalities of the three oldest šayḥs 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. ʿAbd 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 wird for the Qādiriyya brotherhood and a Harari poem, al-Muṣṭafā, known both in a shorter and a longer version.

2. Šayḥ Ahmād b. Śāliḥ and his silsila

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

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20 For some introductory information on him see Ewald Wagner, s.v. “Hāšim b. ʿAbd 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 Nağâši
printing press, the main Islamic publishing house of the country based
in Addis Ababa,\textsuperscript{22} published the ʿIqāz himam al-ağbiyâ‘ bi-raṣḥ qaṭra
min tarāǧīm al-ʿulamā‘ wa-al-awliyâ‘ fi ʿumhûriyyat ʿIyâbiyâ‘, a col-
lection of short biographies of holy men written by the renowned
Wâllo šayḥ Muḥammad Wale.\textsuperscript{23}

Among the saints whose manāqib were published in the book there
is also šayḥ Aḥmad b. Ṣâliḥ, trait d’union between the Harari and the
Wâllo branches of the Qâdiriyya. No factual detail about the life of
šayḥ Aḥmad b. Ṣâliḥ is recorded in the short biographical note of the
ʿIqâz.\textsuperscript{24} The sources of the information given in the book are not re-
vealed. 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. Ṣâliḥ “Aḥmad Kubrâ” irritates the au-
thor/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 šayḥ
Aḥmad, Muḥammad Wale reports only a single karâma which he
himself seems to consider unbelievable. It is said that Aḥmad b. Ṣâliḥ
on his way to Yâqīḍu where he was to give the iǧâza to faqīh 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 šayḥ Gamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Annī. Besides the
general skepticism of the author about karāmāt, 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{22} On the editorial activities of the Muslim communities in Ethiopia the bibliography is quite
wide. See Hussein Ahmed “Islamic Literature and Religious Revival in Ethiopia (1991-
“Islamic literature in Ethiopia: A short overview,” Ethiopian Journal of Languages and
\textsuperscript{23} Muḥammad Wale, ʿIqāz himam al-ağbiyâ‘ bi-raṣḥ qaṭra min tarāǧīm al-ʿulamā‘ wa-al-
see Hussein Ahmed, s.v. “Muḥammad Wâlî b. Aḥmad b. ʿUmar,” in EAE. On the ʿIqâz see also
\textsuperscript{24} Muḥammad Wale, ʿIqāz 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.  

Notwithstanding its scanty amount of information, the section of the *Īqāz* 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-Ǧilānī runs as follows:


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-Ǧilānī) down to ‘Alī al-Ḥāšimi, Šārāf al-Dīn and Baḥr al-Dīn Aḥmad, correspond to the physical and spiritual genealogy of the Āl al-Ǧilānī al-Ḥamawī, the descendants of ‘Abd al-Qādir in the Syrian town of Ḥamā.  

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

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25 Ibidem, p. 139.
al-sayyid Abū Bakr ‘Abd al-Razzāq – qādī al-qudāt al-sayyid Nāṣir (called al-Naṣr in the Syrian source) – al-šāyḥ Abū al-Naṣr al-sayyid Muhammad – al-šāyḥ Zāhir 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-Ǧīlānī to settle in Ḥamā in 685/1286-87 on his way back from the haǧg (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 ‘Ālī 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. 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. ‘Ālī al-Ḥāšimī who appears in the nasab of šayḥ ‘Abd al-Ǧāmhūn al-Kīlānī, naqīb al-ašrāf in Damascus (d. ca. 1172/1758-59).

As for sayyid Musāfīr al-Maǧribī, 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-Maǧribī 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-Maǧribī 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. Šāliḥ. The silsila in this
case is:


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


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 Muhammad Wale, Ḥiṣnī hamān al-aḥḥiyā; p. 139.  
32 Muhammad Wale, Ḥiṣnī hamān al-aḥḥiyā; p. 139.