A short note on a silsila of the Qdiriyya brotherhood in Ethiopia
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Futūh al-buldān

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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 hiģra. The reference to classical Muslim historiography in the series’ title is coupled with the semantic spectrum of the Arabic root of the word *fāth*. 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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CONTENTS

Contents p. V
Notes on Transliteration p. VII
Notes on Contributors p. IX

INTRODUCTION

A plurality of historical and linguistic experiences
Nicola Melis – Mauro Nobili p. 1

SECTION I: HORN OF AFRICA

A short note on a silsila of the Qādirīyya brotherhood in Ethiopia
Alessandro Gori p. 17

Silvia Bruzzi p. 27

SECTION II: WESTERN AFRICA

Aḥmad b. Furṭū, portrait d’un ḍālim soudanais du XVIe siècle
Rémi Dewière p. 45

Risāla min Maryam bt. Fūdī ila al-ībn. A brief contribution to the study of Muslim eschatology in 19th century Nigeria
Mauro Nobili p. 71

SECTION III: OTTOMAN “PERIPHERY”

L’emprise ottomane en Géorgie occidentale à l’époque de Süleymân Ier
Güneş Işıksel p. 89
VI

The “talking machine” affair in Ottoman Yemen (1907)
Nicola Melis p. 107

SECTION IV: MISCELLANEA

‘Voi si che avete una religione!’ Identità e alterità alla frontiera greco-albanese
Antonio Maria Pusceddu p. 155

Il pensiero politico di Moḥammad Moṣaddeq: costituzionalismo, patriottismo e democrazia
Pejman Abdolmohammadi p. 179

“Noi n’avions pas d’autre choix.” Colonialisme et guerre de libération au Maroc à travers les témoignages des protagonistes de la Résistance
Manuela Deiana p. 199

SECTION V: NOTES

Una nota sull’apporto fornito da Sībawayhi alla grammatica araba
Ali Kadem Kalati p. 219

Michele Petrone p. 227

Evelin Grassi p. 235
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* 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

‘Abd 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 *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. To mention only a few examples, in Harar, a famous maqâm 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 Qādiriyya 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 (mazâr) 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-Šakur b. Yūsuf of Harar (d. 1794) had a mosque called ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḡilānī 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 Qādiriyya.

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

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.


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 (TIf bi-ḥallī sab‘an) and a long pious supplication to ask for his help (Ya qaḥ 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 Yəqqū (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 Qādiriya (e.g. Ğamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Annī, d. 1882; Ahmad b. Ėdam al-Dānī, d. 1903; ‘Īsā b. Ḥamza al-Qatbarī d. 1947, ‘Umar b. ‘Alī al-Ḫalamsī, fl. first half of the 20th century) and contributed to enhance the influence and the prestige of the ṭarīqa.

Despite the apparent rooting of the brotherhood in the country, the history of the Qādiriya in Ethiopia has never been investigated by scholars and is therefore almost completely unknown. The ways the ṭarīqa 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.

11 Dirk Bustorf, s.v. “Qatbäre,” in EAE.
12 Mohammed Hassen, s.v. “Gälämso,” EAE.
It is often repeated in scholarly literature\textsuperscript{14} that the first introducer of the\textit{ Qādiriyā} in Ethiopia was Abū Bakr b. Ṭabā'Allāh al-'Aydrūs, the revered patron saint of Aden (d. 1508), member of the al-Saqqāf branch of the Ḥadramī Bā ’Alawī\textit{ sayyid}, who allegedly brought the\textit{ 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\textit{ Qādiriyā}. While carrying out some field work in his native region, he came to know a local\textit{ silsila} of the\textit{ Qādiriyā} that sheds light on the spread of the brotherhood from Harar into Wällo in the\textsuperscript{19}th century.

The\textit{ silsila} published by Hussein Ahmed runs as follows:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Sayyid} Musāfīr – \textit{faqīh} Ḥāšim – Ahmad b. Šālih – \textit{faqīh} Zubayr – \textit{ṣayḥ} Muhammad Šafī (d. 1814/15)\textsuperscript{16} – Muḥammad b. \textit{faqīh} Zubayr – \textit{ṣayḥ} Ġamal al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Anṭī – Ahmad b. ʿAdam (d. 1903) – Muḥammad Yasin (d. 1924); \textit{sayyid} Ibrāhīm (d. 1956).\textsuperscript{17}
\end{quote}

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


\textsuperscript{15} The personality of Abū Bakr b. Ṭabā’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\textit{ Qādiriyā} is still unclear as some sources point instead to his affiliation to the\textit{ Şāliyya} (Oscar Löfgren, s.v. “ʿAydrūs,” in Clifford E. Bosworth et al. (eds.), \textit{The Encyclopaedia of Islam}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} edition, Brill, Leiden 1960-2005).

\textsuperscript{16} On this figure see Hussein Ahmed, s.v. “Muḥammad Šafī,” in \textit{EAE}.


\textsuperscript{18} Interviewed by Hussein Ahmed, ʿṣayḥ Muḥammad Wale said that \textit{sayyid} Musāfīr came from a not well-specified “West” and that \textit{faqīh} Ḥāšim received the\textit{ qādiri wīrd} also “from an unknown ḍālim from Medina” (Hussein Ahmed, \textit{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. ‘Abd Allāh al-‘Ayyūrūs, whose name appears nowhere; 2) the Qādiriyya came to Wällo through šayḥ Aḥmad b. Șāliḥ among whose pupils also figured the much revered saint and learned man sayyid al-Bā‘ al-hāǧj Buṣra b. ‘Abd 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 faqih Hāšim with the Harari learned man and member of the Harari emir family Hāšim b. ‘Abd al-‘Azz (d. 1765)20 who authored a much renowned Arabic collection of pious litany verses and prayers in praise of the Prophet (called the Fatḥ al-Raḥmānī [sic!]), a ṭird for the Qādiriyya brotherhood and a Harari poem, al-Muṣṭafā, known both in a shorter and a longer version.

2. Šayḥ Aḥmad b. Șāliḥ 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. ‘Abd al-‘Azz,” in EAE. The affiliation of faqih 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 Nağāšī printing press, the main Islamic publishing house of the country based in Addis Ababa,\textsuperscript{22} published the İqāẓ himam al-āghiyya’ bi-raft qatra min tarāqīm al-ʻulamā’ wa-al-awliyā’ fi ǧumhūriyyat Ịyūbiyya, a collection of short biographies of holy men written by the renowned Wāllo šayḥ Muḥammad Wale.\textsuperscript{23}

Among the saints whose manāqib were published in the book there is also šayḥ Aḥmad b. Šāliḥ, trait d’union between the Harari and the Wāllo branches of the Qādiriyya. No factual detail about the life of šayḥ Aḥmad b. Šāliḥ is recorded in the short biographical note of the İqāẓ.\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. Šāliḥ “Aḥmad Kubrā” 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 šayḥ Aḥmad, Muhammad Wale reports only a single karāma which he himself seems to consider unbelievable. It is said that Aḥmad b. Šāliḥ on his way to Yəqğu where he was to give the iğāza to faqīḥ 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 ḥikr: 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{24} Muhammad Wale, İqāẓ himam al-āghiyya’, pp. 137-140.
Muḥammad 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 ʿIqāż is very interesting because it records the complete silsila of Aḥmad b. Ṣāliḥ. The spiritual genealogy connecting ʿayḥ Aḥmad back to ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥilānī runs as follows:

\[\text{Al-sayyid } 'Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥilānī \rightarrow \text{al-sayyid } Ābū Bakr 'Abd al-Razzāq \rightarrow gāḍī al-qudāt \text{ al-sayyid } Nāṣir \rightarrow \text{al-ṣayḥ Ābū al-Naṣr al-sayyid } Muḥammad \rightarrow \text{al-ṣayḥ Zāhīr al-Dīn al-sayyid } Āḥmad \rightarrow \text{Sayf al-Dīn al-sayyid } Yahyā \rightarrow \text{al-sayyid } Nağm al-Dīn Muḥammad \rightarrow \text{‘Ālī al-Dīn al-sayyid } \text{‘Alī \rightarrow \text{al-sayyid } Nūr al-Dīn Ḥūsayn \rightarrow \text{al-sayyid } Šaraf al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Qādirī \rightarrow \text{Sīhāb al-Dīn al-sayyid } Āḥmad al-Qādirī \rightarrow \text{al-sayyid } \text{‘Alī al-Hāšimi \rightarrow \text{al-sayyid } Šaraf al-Dīn \rightarrow \text{Baḥr al-Dīn sayyid } Aḥmad al-Qādirī \rightarrow \text{sayyid } Ibrāhīm al-Qādirī \rightarrow \text{al-sayyid } Musāfīr al-Maġribī \rightarrow \text{‘Ābū 'Abd Allāh Hāšim b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Harārī \rightarrow \text{Aḥmad b. Šāliḥ}.}\]

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 Ābū Bakr ‘Abd al-Razzāq (one of the sons of ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥilānī) down to ‘Alī al-Hāšimi, Šaraf al-Dīn and Baḥr al-Dīn Aḥmad, correspond to the physical and spiritual genealogy of the Āl al-Ḥilānī 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-Ḥilānī –
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 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-Ḡilānī to settle in Ḫamā in 685/1286-87 on his way back from the ḥaqq (hence his nickname nazīl Ḫamā) 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.28 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).29

As for sayyid Musāfir al-Maṣribī, who should be the person who practically introduced the tariqa 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 Musāfir al-Maṣribī 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 Musāfir al-Maṣribī 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

29 How the Syrian nasab came to be known in Ethiopia so that Muḥammad Wale 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.
A short note on a silsila of the Qādiriyya

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-Ṭārī, 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 Ǧibrāḥīm 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 silsila 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, Ḥqāʾ az himam al-ʿaghīyā’, p. 139.
32 Muḥammad Wale, Ḥqāʾ az himam al-ʿaghīyā’, p. 139.