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

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Mishāh al-arwāḥ fī usūl al-falāḥ by Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Maḡlī (fl. late 15th cen-
tury).
Ms. 2145, Institut des Hautes Etudes e de Recherches Islamiques – Ahmed Baba (Timbuktu)
Timbuktu Script & Scholarship: A Catalogue of Manuscripts from the Exhibition, Cape Town,
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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 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 he series, which is to disclose pieces of history of Islamic societies. The series aims at publishing original works with a multidisciplinary approach, in the field of Islamic history and culture, drawing connections between the past and the present. Futūḥ al-buldān will privilege case studies from areas and languages which are often – and questionably – regarded as ‘peripheral.’
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A short note on a silsila of the
Qādirīyya brotherhood in Ethiopia*

Alessandro Gori
(University of Florence)

Introduction

In spite of a lack of exact and reliable information on the present dis-
tribution of the Islamic mystical brotherhoods in Ethiopia (and Eri-
trea),1 the Qādirīyya is the most widespread Islamic brotherhood,
ṭarīqa, in the country.

In the present paper I carry out a brief research on a spiritual ge-
nealogy (silsila) of the Ethiopian Qādirīyya 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 Qādirīyya 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

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

1 The Somali Qādirīyya 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 (ğugal), 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 Qâdiriyya brotherhood (hadra). 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-Šâkûr b. Yusuf of Harar (d. 1794) had a mosque called ‘Abd al-Qâdir al-Gîlânî built near the shrine of ṣayh Ḥusayn in the south Ethiopian region of Bale. In Asmara a modern mosque with a maqâm perpetuates the memory of the eponymous of the Qâdiriyya. ‘Abd al-Qâdir al-Gîlânî is invoked in devotional poems and prayers

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.

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with the names of local Ethiopian holy men.\textsuperscript{9} The text collection recited during the \textit{mawlid} ceremony in Harar contains a poem attributed to ‘Abd al-Qādir (\textit{Tuf bi-ḥālī sab’an})\textsuperscript{10} and a long pious supplication to ask for his help (\textit{Yā qaḥb yā rabbānī al-hayakal al-nūrānī ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ǧilānī}). In many Ethiopian Muslim regions, famous Qādiri centres exist: Anna in Rayya Qobbo (Wällo), Dana in Yăğğu (Wāllo), Qatbare in Qabeena\textsuperscript{11} and Galamssoo (Gālāmso) in Oromia\textsuperscript{12} 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.\textsuperscript{13}

A number of Ethiopian Islamic renowned learned men were affiliated with the \textit{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-Ǧalamsī, fl. first half of the 20th century) and contributed to enhance the influence and the prestige of the \textit{ṭarīqa}.

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

\textsuperscript{11} Dirk Bustorf, s.v. “Qatbare,” in \textit{EAE}.
\textsuperscript{12} Mohammed Hassen, s.v. “Gālāmso,” \textit{EAE}.
\textsuperscript{13} The strict connection between the mystical brotherhoods and the Islamic traditional educational system in Ethiopia is well described by Hussein Ahmed, “Traditional Muslim Education in Wāllo,” in Anatoly Andreevich Gromyko (ed.), \textit{Proceedings of the Ninth International Congress of Ethiopian Studies}, vol. 3, Nauka, Moscow, 1988, pp. 94-106.
It is often repeated in scholarly literature\(^\text{14}\) that the first introducer of the \textit{Qādiriyā} 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 

\textit{sayyid}, who allegedly brought the \textit{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 \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 19\textsuperscript{th} century.

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

\begin{center}
\begin{footnotesize}
\textit{Sayyid Musāfir – faqīh Hāšim – Ahmad b. Šāliḥ – faqīh Zubayr – šayḥ Muhammad Šāfī (d. 1814/15)}\(^\text{16}\) – Muhammad b. faqīh Zubayr – šayḥ Ġamal al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Anī – Ahmad b. Ādam (d. 1903) – Muḥammad Yasin (d. 1924); sayyid Ibrāhīm (d. 1956).\(^\text{17}\)
\end{footnotesize}
\end{center}

According to Hussein Ahmed’s informants, \textit{sayyid} Musāfir was of Yemeni origin\(^\text{18}\) 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{wird} “a certain faqīh Hāšim” of Harar who in his turn entrusted the \textit{ṭarīqa} to Ahmad b. Šāliḥ. The latter took the brother-


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

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


\(^{18}\) Interviewed by Hussein Ahmed, šayḥ Muhammad Wale said that \textit{sayyid} Musāfir came from a not well-specified “West” and that faqīh Hāšim received the \textit{qādiri} \textit{wird} also “from an unknown ‘ālim from Medina” (Hussein Ahmed, \textit{Islam in Nineteenth-Century}, p. 69).
hood to Wållo 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-‘Aydarūs, whose name appears nowhere; 2) the Qādiriyya came to Wållo through šayḥ Aḥmad b. Ṣāliḥ among whose pupils also figured the much revered saint and learned man sayyid al-Bā’ al-hāǧǧ Bušra b. Āy 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. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (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 Aḥmad b. Ṣāliḥ and his silsila

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


²⁰ For some introductory information on him see Ewald Wagner, s.v. “Hāšim b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz,” 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)²¹ the Nağāṣī printing press, the main Islamic publishing house of the country based in Addis Ababa,²² published the İqāz himam al-ağbiyā’ bi-raṣḥ qaṭra min tarāğım al-’ulamā’ wa-al-awliyā’ fi ǧumhūriyyat İyūbiyā, a collection of short biographies of holy men written by the renowned Wållo šayḥ Muḥammad Wale.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 Wållo branches of the Qādiriyya. No factual detail about the life of šayḥ Aḥmad b. Šāliḥ is recorded in the short biographical note of the İqāz.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, Muḥammad Wale reports only a single karāma which he himself seems to consider unbelievable. It is said that Aḥmad b. Šāliḥ on his way to Yaqū where he was to give the iǧāza 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 ǧikr: 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

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. 10th 2005).


²⁴ Muḥammad Wale, İqāz himam al-ağbiyā’, 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 Ṣayḥ Aḥmad back to ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḡilānī runs as follows:

\[\text{Al-sayyid } 'Abd al-Qādir al-Ḡilānī \rightarrow \text{ al-sayyid } Abū Bakr 'Abd al-Razzāq \rightarrow \text{ qādī al-quḍāt al-sayyid } Nāṣir \rightarrow \text{ al-ṣayḥ Abū al-Naṣr al-sayyid } Muḥammad \rightarrow \text{ al-ṣayḥ Zāhir al-Dīn } al-sayyid Aḥmad \rightarrow \text{ Sayf al-Dīn } al-sayyid Yahyā \rightarrow \text{ al-sayyid } Naṣm al-Dīn Muḥammad \rightarrow \text{ 'Alī } - \text{ al-sayyid } Nūr al-Dīn Ḥusayn \rightarrow \text{ al-sayyid } Šaraf al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Qādirī \rightarrow \text{ Shāh al-Dīn al-sayyid Aḥmad al-Qādirī } \rightarrow \text{ al-sayyid } 'Alī al-Ḥāṣimī \rightarrow \text{ al-sayyid } Šaraf al-Dīn \rightarrow \text{ Baḥr al-Dīn sayyid Aḥmad al-Qādirī } \rightarrow \text{ sayyidī } Ḫāṭim al-Qādirī \rightarrow \text{ al-sayyid } Musāfīr al-Maḡribī \rightarrow \text{ Abū 'Abd Allāh Ḥāṣim b. 'Abd al-'Āzīz al-Harārī } \rightarrow \text{ Aḥmad b. Ṣāliḥ.}\]

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-Ḥāṣimī, Šaraf al-Dīn and Baḥr al-Dīn Aḥmad, correspond to the physical and spiritual genealogy of the Āl al-Ḵilānī al-Ḥamawī, the descendants of ‘Abd al-Qādir in the Syrian town of Ḥamā.27

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

\[\text{Al-sayyid } 'Abd al-Qādir al-Ḡilānī \rightarrow \text{ al-sayyid } Abū Bakr 'Abd al-Razzāq \rightarrow \text{ qādī al-quḍāt al-sayyid } Nāṣir \rightarrow \text{ al-ṣayḥ Abū al-Naṣr al-sayyid } Muḥammad \rightarrow \text{ al-ṣayḥ Zāhir al-Dīn } al-sayyid Aḥmad \rightarrow \text{ Sayf al-Dīn } al-sayyid Yahyā \rightarrow \text{ al-sayyid } Naṣm al-Dīn Muḥammad \rightarrow \text{ 'Alī } - \text{ al-sayyid } Nūr al-Dīn Ḥusayn \rightarrow \text{ al-sayyid } Šaraf al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Qādirī \rightarrow \text{ Shāh al-Dīn al-sayyid Aḥmad al-Qādirī } \rightarrow \text{ al-sayyid } 'Alī al-Ḥāṣimī \rightarrow \text{ al-sayyid } Šaraf al-Dīn \rightarrow \text{ Baḥr al-Dīn sayyid Aḥmad al-Qādirī } \rightarrow \text{ sayyidī } Ḫāṭim al-Qādirī \rightarrow \text{ al-sayyid } Musāfīr al-Maḡribī \rightarrow \text{ Abū 'Abd Allāh Ḥāṣim b. 'Abd al-'Āzīz al-Harārī } \rightarrow \text{ Aḥmad b. Ṣāliḥ.}\]

25 Ibidem, p. 139.
al-sayyid Abū Bakr ‘Abd al-Razzāq – qādī al-quadāt al-sayyid Nāṣir (called al-Nāṣr in the Syrian source) – al-shayḥ Abū al-Nāṣr al-sayyid Muhammad – al-shayḥ 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 Ḥamā in 685/1286-87 on his way back from the haġq (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 nāṣab and in the Ethiopian sílsila 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 nāṣab is Ibrāhīm al-Qādiri who, however, could be an avatar of Ibrāhīm b. Šaraf al-Dīn b. ʿAḥmad b. ‘Alī al-Hāšimī who appears in the nāṣab of šayḥ ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Kīlānī, naqīb al-aṣrāf in Damascus (d. ca. 1172/1758-59).

As for sayyid Musāfīr al-Maḡribī, who should be the person who practically introduced the tariqa into Ethiopia, he lays in complete obscurity: one can only conjecture on his nīsha 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-Maḡribī 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-Maḡribī is nothing but a ghost name functioning to connect the Near-eastern sílsila with Ethiopia.

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

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29 How the Syrian nāṣab came to be known in Ethiopia so that Muḥammad Wale could insert it in his book as a sílsila 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 Hussei n 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 ṣayḥ, Muḥammad Wale mentions:

al-ṣayḥ al-Sayyid b. al-sayyid Ǧibrāḥīm al-Ṭālī; ṣayḥ Abū al-Baṣṭ – ṣayḥ Mahmūd Kanz – ṣayḥ Ǧahīd al-Dār ṣayḥ 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, Ịqāẓ himam al-aqbiyā’, p. 139.
32 Muḥammad Wale, Ịqāẓ himam al-aqbiyā’, p. 139.