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

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A short note on a silsila of the Qadiriyya 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), the Qadiriyya 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 Qadiriyya 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 Qadiriyya 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 Qadiriyya 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 Fâṭima (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 Qâdiriyya 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-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-Šakîr b. Yusuf of Harar (d. 1794) had a mosque called 'Abd al-Qâdir al-Ǧilânî 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 Qâdiriyya.

'Abd al-Qâdir al-Ǧilânî 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. The text collection recited during the mawlid ceremony in Harar contains a poem attributed to ‘Abd al-Qādir (Ṭuf bi-ḥālī sab’an) and a long pious supplication to ask for his help (Yā quṭb yā rabbānī al-hayakal al-nūrānī ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḡīlānī). 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 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-Ḡalamsī, 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 Qādiriyya 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 (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. “Gālāmsī,” EAE.
It is often repeated in scholarly literature\textsuperscript{14} that the first introducer of the 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 sayyid, who allegedly brought the tārīqa 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 Qādiriyā. While carrying out some field work in his native region, he came to know a local silsila of the Qādiriyā that sheds light on the spread of the brotherhood from Harar into Wällo in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century.

The silsila published by Hussein Ahmed runs as follows:

\begin{center}
Sayyid Musāfir – faqīh Ḥāşim – Ahmad b. Ṣāliḥ – faqīh Zubayr – šayḥ Muhammad Šāfi (d. 1814/15)\textsuperscript{16} – Muḥammad b. faqīh Zubayr – šayḥ Ğamal 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 Musāfar was of Yemeni origin\textsuperscript{18} and thus was a trait-d’union between the local Ethiopian Qādiriyā and the broader brotherhood network. He initiated to the Qādirī wird “a certain faqīh Ḥāşim” of Harar who in his turn entrusted the tārīqa to Ahmad b. Ṣāliḥ. The latter took the brother-

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \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 Qādiriyā is still unclear as some sources point instead to his affiliation to the Šāfiyya (Oscar Löfgren, s.v. “‘Aydrūs,” in Clifford E. Bosworth et al. (eds.), *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2\textsuperscript{nd} edition, Brill, Leiden 1960-2005).
\item \textsuperscript{16} On this figure see Hussein Ahmed, s.v. “Muḥammad Šāfī,” in EAE.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Interviewed by Hussein Ahmed, Ḡayḥ Muhammad Wale said that sayyid Musāfar came from a not well-specified “West” and that faqīh Ḥāşim received the qādirī wird also “from an unknown ‘ālim from Medina” (Hussein Ahmed, *Islam in Nineteenth-Century*, p. 69).
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
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 Ahmād b. Šāliḥ among whose pupils also figured the much revered saint and learned man sayyid al-Bā‘ 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 šayḥs mentioned in the silsila, so they remain nothing more than simple names. However, it is possible to identify with certainty faqīḥ Ḥāsim with the Harari learned man and member of the Harari emir family Ḥāsim 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 ṭihr for the Qādiriyya brotherhood and a Harari poem, al-Muṣṭafā, known both in a shorter and a longer version.

2. Šayḥ Ahmād b. Šāliḥ 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. “Hāsim b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz,” in EAE. The affiliation of faqīḥ Ḥāsim 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 \textit{Īqāẓ himam al-ağbiyā‘ bi-raṣḥ qatāra min tarāǧim al-‘ulamā‘ wa-al-awliyā‘} fi ḡumhūriyyat Iṭyūbiyyā, a collection of short biographies of holy men written by the renowned Wālloon shayḥ Muḥammad Wale.\textsuperscript{23}

Among the saints whose manāqib were published in the book there is also shayḥ Aḥmad b. Ṣāliḥ, \textit{trait d’union} between the Harari and the Wālloon branches of the Qādiriyya. No factual detail about the life of shayḥ Ahmad b. Ṣāliḥ is recorded in the short biographical note of the \textit{Īqāẓ}.\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. Ṣāliḥ “Aḥmad Kubr” 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 shayḥ Aḥmad, Muhammad Wale reports only a single karāma which he himself seems to consider unbelievable. It is said that Aḥmad b. Ṣāliḥ on his way to Yāḡğū where he was to give the iǧāza 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 gīrk: she was actually the mother-to-be of shayḥ 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, \textit{Īqāẓ himam al-ağbiyā‘}, 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 Ahmad b. Šāliḥ. The spiritual genealogy connecting *šayḥ* Ahmad back to ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḡilānī 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-Ḡilānī) down to ‘Alī al-Hāšimī, 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-qudāt al-sayyid Nāṣîr (called al-Nāṣr in the Syrian source) – al-ṣayḥ Abū al-Nāṣr al-sayyid Muhammad – al-ṣayḥ Ẓāhir 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 ‘ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Ḡilmānī to settle in Ḥamā in 685/1286-87 on his way back from the haṭṭ (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 ʿAlī al-Hāṣimī 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. Ẓaraf al-Dīn b. ʿĀhmād b. ʿAlī al-Hāṣimī who appears in the nasab of šayḥ ʿAbd al-ʿRāḥmān al-Kīlānī, naqīb al-ʿāṣrāf in Damascus (d. ca. 1172/1758-59).

As for sayyid Musāfīr al-Maḥrībī, 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-Maḥrībī 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-Maḥrībī is nothing but a ghost name functioning to connect the Near-eastern silsila with Ethiopia.

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

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29 How the Syrian nasab came to be known in Ethiopia so that Muhammad 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.
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This is once more the famous Anna-Dana silsila, already recorded by J. Spencer Trimingham and then studied by Hussein Ahmed. 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). This local Ethiopian section of the silsila thus includes the names of the main representatives of the Qādiriyya of Wä̀llo 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 Wä̀llo 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.

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30 Muḥammad Wale, Ḥāǧǧ himam al-aḥḥiyya’, p. 139.
32 Muḥammad Wale, Ḥāǧǧ himam al-aḥḥiyya’, p. 139.