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

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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), the Qādiriya 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 Qādiriya 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 Qādiriya 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 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 (gûgal), 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 (hâdra). 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 Ǧusayn 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.

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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.


6 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.\(^9\) The text collection recited during the *mawlid* ceremony in Harar contains a poem attributed to ‘Abd al-Qādir (*Ṭuf bi-ḥālī sab’an*)\(^{10}\) and a long pious supplication to ask for his help (*Yā qūb yā rabbānī al-hayakal al-nūrānī ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḡālānī*). In many Ethiopian Muslim regions, famous Qādirī centres exist: Anna in Rayya Qobbo (Wällo), Dana in Yāḡū (Wällo), Qatabare in Qabeena\(^{11}\) and Galamssoo (Gälämso) in Oromia\(^{12}\) 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.\(^{13}\)

A number of Ethiopian Islamic renowned learned men were affiliated with the *Qādiriyya* (e.g. Ǧamāl al-Dīn Mūḥammad al-Annī, d. 1882; ʿAbd al-Dūla Ḥabīb b. Ḥaẓīm Mūḥammad al-Ǧamīlī, d. 1903; ʿĪsā b. ʿAlī Ḥanẓūla al-Qatbārī 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 ṣaṭṭaqa.

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 ṣaṭṭaqa 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.

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\(^{11}\) Dirk Bustorf, s.v. “Qatbārī,” in *EAE*.

\(^{12}\) Mohammed Hassen, s.v. “Gālāmso,” *EAE*.

\(^{13}\) 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 Wällo,” in Anatoly Andreevich Gromyko (ed.), *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 *Qādiriyā* in Ethiopia was Abū Bakr b. ‘Abd Allāh al-‘Ayyādirūs, the revered patron saint of Aden (d. 1508), member of the al-Saqqaf branch of the Ḥadramī Bā ‘Alawī sāyīd, who allegedly brought the *taṣrīqa* 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 *Qādiriyā*. While carrying out some field work in his native region, he came to know a local *silṣila* of the *Qādiriyā* that sheds light on the spread of the brotherhood from Harar into Wällo in the 19\(^\text{th}\) century.

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

\[
\text{Sayyid Musāfīr – faqīh Ḥāṣim – Ahmad b. Šāliḥ – faqīh Zubayr – šayḥ Muhammad Šāfī (d. 1814/15)}^{\text{16}} – \text{Muhammad b. faqīh Zubayr – šayḥ Ġamal al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Anī – Ahmad b. Ādam (d. 1903) – Muḥammad Yasin (d. 1924); sayyid Ibrāḥīm (d. 1956).}^{\text{17}}
\]

According to Hussein Ahmed’s informants, *sayyid* Musāfīr was of Yemeni origin\(^\text{18}\) and thus was a *trait-d’union* between the local Ethiopian *Qādiriyā* and the broader brotherhood network. He initiated to the *Qādiri wirid* “a certain faqīh Ḥāṣim” of Harar who in his turn entrusted the *taṣrīqa* to Ahmad b. Šāliḥ. The latter took the brother-

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

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


\(^{18}\) Interviewed by Hussein Ahmed, šayḥ Muhammad Wale said that *sayyid* Musāfīr came from a not well-specified “West” and that faqīh Ḥāṣim received the *qādiri wirid* also “from an unknown ‘ālim from Medina” (Hussein Ahmed, *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. Šāliḥ among whose pupils also figured the much revered saint and learned man sayyid al-Bā‘t al-hāǧ ṣ Buṣrā 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 wīrd for the Qādiriyya brotherhood and a Harari poem, al-Muṣṭaṭfā, known both in a shorter and a longer version.

2. Šayḥ Aḥmad 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. “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)\textsuperscript{21} the Nağāši printing press, the main Islamic publishing house of the country based in Addis Ababa,\textsuperscript{22} published the İğāz himam al-ağbiyā’ bi-raṣḥ qaṭra min tarāğim al-‘ulamā’ wa-al-awliyā’ fi ġumhūriyyat İyūbiyā, 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 İğāz.\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, 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 Yagğu where he was to give the igaża 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 ġikr: 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}Muḥammad Wale, İğāz 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 ḵeqāza in absentia to someone who is not (yet) alive.\(^\text{25}\)

Notwithstanding its scanty amount of information, the section of the Ṣilṣila of Ṣayḥ Ṣayḥūd b. Ṣāliḥ. The spiritual genealogy connecting Ṣayḥ Ṣayḥūd back to Ṣayḥ al-Qādir al-Ḡilānī runs as follows:

\[\text{Al-sayyīd ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḡilānī} \rightarrow \text{al-sayyīd Abū Bakr ʿAbd al-Razzāq} \rightarrow \text{qādī al-qudāt al-sayyīd Nāṣīr} \rightarrow \text{al-ṣayḥ Abū al-Naṣr al-sayyīd Muḥammad} \rightarrow \text{al-ṣayḥ Ṣāḥīḥ al-Dīn al-sayyīd ʿAlmād} \rightarrow \text{Ṣayf al-Dīn al-sayyīd Ẓayyīd Yūḥān} \rightarrow \text{al-sayyīd Naẓīm al-Dīn Muḥammad} \rightarrow \text{‘Alāʾ al-Dīn al-sayyīd ʿAlī} \rightarrow \text{al-sayyīd Nūr al-Dīn Ḥusayn} \rightarrow \text{al-sayyīd Ṣarāf al-Dīn Aḥmād al-Qādirī} \rightarrow \text{Ṣāḥīḥ al-Dīn al-sayyīd Aḥmād al-Qādirī} \rightarrow \text{al-sayyīd ʿAlī al-Ḥāšimī} \rightarrow \text{al-sayyīd Ṣarāf al-Dīn} \rightarrow \text{Baḥr al-Dīn sayyīd Aḥmād al-Qādirī} \rightarrow \text{sayyīd Ibrāhīm al-Qādirī} \rightarrow \text{al-sayyīd Musāfir al-Maʿāribī} \rightarrow \text{Abū ʿAbd Allāh Ḥāshim b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Ḥarārī} \rightarrow \text{Aḥmād b. Ṣāliḥ}.\(^\text{26}\)

The reliability of the sīlṣila 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 ʿAbd al-Razzāq (one of the sons of ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Ḡilānī) down to ʿAlī al-Ḥāšimī, Ṣarāf al-Dīn and Baḥr al-Dīn Aḥmād, correspond to the physical and spiritual genealogy of the Āl al-Ḡilānī al-Ḥamawī, the descendants of ʿAbd al-Qādir in the Syrian town of Ḥumā.\(^\text{27}\)

In particular, the nasāb of this šarīf group almost literally confirms the section of the Ethiopian sīlṣila/nasāb: ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Ḡilānī –

\(^{25}\)Ibidem, p. 139.
al-sayyid Abū Bakr ‘Abd al-Razzāq – qāḍī al-qudāt al-sayyid Nāṣir (called al-Naṣr in the Syrian source) – al-ṣayḥ Abū al-Naṣr 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 ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Gilānī to settle in Ḥamā in 685/1286-87 on his way back from the hajj (hence his nickname nazīl Ḥamā) and from him the whole Al 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-Qādiri 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 Musāfīr al-Maqrīzī, 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 Musāfīr al-Maqrīzī 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-Maqrīzī 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

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 Husseīn Ahmed.31 From the al-Daṇī al-Ṭānī, the Ethiopian Qādiriyya apparently managed to spread widely in every corner of Ethiopia. Among the most famous disciples of the “second” al-Daṇī ṣayḥ, Muḥammad Wale mentions:

al-ṣayḥ al-Sayyid b. al-sayyid Ibrāhīm al-Ṭālī; ṣayḥ Abū al-باشر – ṣayḥ Mahmūd Kanz – ṣayḥ Šahīd al-Dār ṣayḥ al-Karamī who was, in his turn, master of al-ḥāḡḡ Muḥammad Zayn al-Daṇī (the third Daṇī).32

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

30 Muḥammad Wale, Ḥaḏīḥ himam al-aḡhiyā’, p. 139.
32 Muḥammad Wale, Ḥaḏīḥ himam al-aḡhiyā’, p. 139.