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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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 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

ʿAbd 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.\(^2\) To mention only a few examples, in Harar, a famous \textit{maq\=am} of `Abd al-Q\=adir and his mother Umm al-\=Hayr F\=atima (locally called Umma Koda)\(^3\) is located outside the wall of the old town (\=gug\=al), in the area known as \textit{Qurra-be limay} just in front of the main bus-station.\(^4\) Eighteen kilometres east of Harar, in the Argobba land, a renowned sacred compound hosts the shrines of `Abd al-Q\=adir and Umma Koda with a house for the congregational meetings of the \textit{Q\=adiriyya} brotherhood (\textit{had\=ra}).\(^5\) 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{maz\=ar}) of `Abd al-Q\=adir exists on the homonymous stretch of land north of Massawa and local traditions obviously claim that the saint actually died there.\(^6\) Emir `Abd al-\=\=Sak\=ur b. Yusuf of Harar (d. 1794) had a mosque called `Abd al-Q\=adir al-\=\=G\=ilan\=i built near the shrine of \=say\=h \=Husayn in the south Ethiopian region of Bale.\(^7\) In Asmara a modern mosque with a \textit{maq\=am} perpetuates the memory of the eponymous of the \textit{Q\=adiriyya}.\(^8\)

`Abd al-Q\=adir al-\=\=G\=ilan\=i is invoked in devotional poems and prayers

\(^2\) Unfortunately, no exhaustive list of the cenotaphs of `Abd al-Q\=adir 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, \textit{Studi etiopici I. La lingua e la storia di Harar}, Istituto per l’Oriente, Roma 1936, pp. 44 and 51.

\(^8\) Alessandro Gori, “Soggiorno di studi in Eritrea ed Ethiopia. Brevi annotazioni bibliografiche,” \textit{Rassegna di studi etiopici}, 39, 1995 [1997], p. 86. Also in Addis Ababa a mosque called `Abd al-Q\=adir was inaugurated in 2000 (see Abdul\=fattah Abd\=allah, \=Ya’\=Addis Ab\=aba m\=as\=\=g\=udo\=\=c\=h tar\=\=\=ik, vol. 2, Aman Promo\=\=s\=\=n, Addis Ab\=aba 2002 e.c., pp. 150-156).
with the names of local Ethiopian holy men.\(^9\) The text collection recited during the *mawlid* ceremony in Harar contains a poem attributed to ʿAbd al-Qādir (Ṭūf bi-ḥālī sabʿan)\(^10\) and a long pious supplication to ask for his help (Yā quṭb yā rabbānī al-hayakal al-nūrānī ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Ǧīlānī). In many Ethiopian Muslim regions, famous Qādiri centres exist: Anna in Rayya Qobbo (Wällo), Dana in Yeqgū (Wállo), Qatbare in Qabeena\(^11\) and Galamssoo (Ğălămso) 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 *Qādiriya* (e.g. Ġamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Annī, d. 1882; Ahmād b. Ġādāl al-Dānī, d. 1903; Ġūṣṣūn b. Ḥāmza al-Qatbarī d. 1947, ʿUmar b. ʿAbī al-Ğalamsī, 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 (*manāqīb*, *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. “Qatbare,” 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-‘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 tāriqa 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 silsila of the Qādiriyā that sheds light on the spread of the brotherhood from Harar into Wällo in the 19th century.

The silsila published by Hussein Ahmed runs as follows:

\[
\text{Sayyid Musāfir – faqīh Hāšim – Ahmad b. Šāliḥ – faqīh Zubayr – šayḥ Muhammad Šāfi‘ (d. 1814/15)}^{16} – \text{Muhammad b. faqīh Zubayr – šayḥ Ġamal al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Anṣārī – Ahmad b. Ādam (d. 1903) – Muḥammad Yasin (d. 1924); sayyid Ibāḥīm (d. 1956).}^{17}
\]

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 Qādiriyā and the broader brotherhood network. He initiated to the Qādirī wird “a certain faqīh Hāšim” of Harar who in his turn entrusted the tāriqa 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 Qādiriyā is still unclear as some sources point instead to his affiliation to the Šāhilīyya (Oscar Löfgren, s.v. “‘Aydarūs,” in Clifford E. Bosworth et al. (eds.), *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edition, Brill, Leiden 1960-2005).

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


\(^{18}\) Interviewed by Hussein Ahmed, šayḥ Muhammad Wale said that sayyid Musāfir came from a not well-specified “West” and that faqīh Hāšim received the qādirī 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 Aḥmad b. Ṣāliḥ among whose pupils also figured the much revered saint and learned man sayyid al-Bāʾ al-hāqq Buṣra 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 Ḥāšim with the Harari learned man and member of the Harari emir family Ḥāšim b. ʿAbd al-ʾAzīz (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 ṭāriba for the Qādiriyya brotherhood and a Harari poem, al-Muṣṭaḥā, 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 Wällo Qādiriyya has


20 For some introductory information on him see Ewald Wagner, s.v. “Ḥāšim b. ʿAbd al-ʾAzīz,” in EAE. The affiliation of faqīḥ Ḥāšim 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 Nağäşi printing press, the main Islamic publishing house of the country based in Addis Ababa,\textsuperscript{22} published the İqāz himam al-ağbiyā' bi-raṣḥ qaṭra min tarafīm al-'ulamā' wa-al-awliyā' fī ǧumhūriyyat Ilyūbiyā, a collection of short biographies of holy men written by the renowned Wållo šayḫ Muḥammad Wale.\textsuperscript{23}

Among the saints whose manāqib were published in the book there is also šayḫ Aḥmad b. Şāliḥ, trait d’union between the Harari and the Wållo branches of the Qādiriyā. No factual detail about the life of šayḫ Aḥmad b. Şāliḥ is recorded in the short biographical note of the İqāz.\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. Şāliḥ “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 šayḫ Aḥmad, Muḥammad Wale reports only a single karāma which he himself seems to consider unbelievable. It is said that Aḥmad b. Şāliḥ on his way to Yağğu 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 ḡikr: she was actually the mother-to-be of šayḫ 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, İqāz 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 *silṣila* of Aḥmad b. Ṣāliḥ. The spiritual genealogy connecting ṣayḥ Aḥmad back to ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḡilānī runs as follows:

\[

The reliability of the *silṣila* 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-Ḩāšimī, Šaraf al-Dīn and Baḥr al-Dīn Aḥmad, correspond to the physical and spiritual genealogy of the Āl al-Ḳīlānī 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 *silṣila/nasab*: ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḡilānī –

\(^{25}\) Ibidem, p. 139.


al-sayyid 'Abd al-Razzāq – qādī al-qudāt al-sayyid Nāšir (called al-Naṣr in the Syrian source) – al-šayḥ Abū al-Naṣr al-sayyid Muhammad – al-šayḥ 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-Ḫilālī to settle in Ḥamā in 685/1286-87 on his way back from the ḥaġg (hence his nickname nazīl Ḥamā) and from him the whole Āl Ḫilālī group originated. The names from Sayf al-Dīn Yahyā back to al-sayyid Aḥī al-Ḫāṣimī are not completely identical in the Syrian nasab and in the Ethiopian silsilā 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. ‘Aḥī al-Ḫāṣimī who appears in the nasab of šayḥ ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Ḵilālī, naqīb al-aṣrāf in Damascus (d. ca. 1172/1758-59).²⁹

As for sayyid Musāfir al-Maṣrībī, 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 Musāfir al-Maṣrībī could have met a member of the Ḫilālī 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-Maṣrībī is nothing but a ghost name functioning to connect the Near-eastern silsilā with Ethiopia.

The ʿIQĀZ also contains a cursive mention of the line of Qādirī spiritual descendency initiated by šayḥ Aḥmad b. Šāliḥ. The silsilā 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 silsilā 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 Husseiṅ Ahmed.31 From the al-Ǧānī al-Ťānī, the Ethiopian Qādiriyya apparently managed to spread widely in every corner of Ethiopia. Among the most famous disciples of the “second” al-Ǧānī ṣayḥ, Muḥammad Wale mentions:

al-ṣayḥ al-Sayyid b. al-sayyid Ibrāḥīm al-Ťālī; ṣayḥ Abū al-Ǧasṭ – ṣayḥ Mahmūd Kanz – ṣayḥ Ǧāḥīb al-Dār ṣayḥ al-Karamī who was, in his turn, master of al-ḥāǧǧ Muḥammad Zayn al-Ǧānī (the third Ǧānī).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, Ịqāž himam al-aġbiyā’, p. 139.
32 Muḥammad Wale, Ịqāž himam al-aġbiyā’, p. 139.