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Some Observations on Composite and Multiple-Text Manuscripts in the Islamic Tradition of the Horn of Africa

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One-Volume Libraries: Composite and Multiple-Text Manuscripts

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Alessandro Gori

Some Observations on Composite and Multiple-Text Manuscripts in the Islamic Tradition of the Horn of Africa

1 Islamic manuscript culture in the Horn of Africa: General remarks

Our knowledge of the Islamic manuscript tradition of the Horn of Africa (Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Djibouti) is scarce. For various historical and cultural reasons, research on Muslim civilization in this region has been neglected for a long time. Most of the scholars working on North-eastern Africa – with few exceptions such as the Italian Enrico Cerulli¹ – devoted their attention to Christian Ethiopia or to the unwritten cultures of the local peoples (perceived and qualified as purely ‘African’), and did not consider Islam as a field of research. On the other hand, scholars of Islam completely ignored the existence of a Muslim culture in this area, considering it too peripheral to be interesting. It took until the late 20th century that the extent of Islam’s proliferation and the fact that it had been spreading in this area for decades was acknowledged. In consequence, it is a recent development that Islam in the Horn of Africa has become an independent subject of scholarly research, with hard efforts being made to compensate for the delay.²

As in the rest of the Muslim world, Islamic culture in the Horn of Africa has a written dimension which is evident in active text production and also in manuscript production. However, the level of research on this material corresponds to the general level of study of the Islamic presence in this area. Even though it is likely that there are thousands of Islamic manuscripts which have their origin in this region, only a few hundreds have been catalogued in any way. Palaeographic and codicological analysis of this material is practically non-existent. Most of the

The following contribution benefits from the data collected in the framework of the project ‘Islam in the Horn of Africa: a Comparative Literary Approach’ generously supported by the European Research Council (Advanced Grant 322849, for the period 2013–2018), of which I am the Principal Investigator.

1 On the multifaceted and controversial orientalist Cerulli from Italy see Ricci 1988.

2 See Hussein Ahmed 2009 and 2010.

known manuscripts are relatively recent (18th century) or even very recent (19th and 20th centuries), and often no undisputable indication is available as to the ultimate origin of some codices which were found in Ethiopia, but possibly copied elsewhere. The language of the codices is mostly Arabic, but some ‘ajami and multi-lingual manuscripts do exist.³

Some small collections of Islamic manuscripts from the Horn of Africa are stored in Europe: at the Vatican Library (nine catalogued manuscripts from Ethiopia; five from Somalia);⁴ at the Civic Library of Pavia (twelve catalogued manuscripts from Harar, Ethiopia);⁵ at the Archiv der Berlin-Brandenburgischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (22 catalogued manuscripts from Ethiopia, some of them in the Səlti language)⁶; at the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin (21 catalogued manuscripts from Harar);⁷ at the library of the St. Petersburg Institute of Oriental Manuscripts Sciences (eight manuscripts from various regions of Ethiopia briefly described by Dobronravin).⁸ Some scattered Ethiopian or Somali Arabic manuscripts may also be preserved in libraries in London and Paris.⁹

The vast majority of manuscript material has thus remained in Ethiopia. The collection of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (IES) at the University of Addis Ababa, housing 303 Islamic manuscripts in Arabic, Harari and Oromo, is probably

3 For a first general assessment of the entire field see Gori 2007a. The article of the late Hussein Ahmed (2008) is written from a historian’s perspective and expresses a perception, which is praiseworthy in its clarity, of the decisive role that philology should play in the reconstruction of the Ethiopian (Islamic) past.

4 Levi Della Vida 1965, 150–159 (Vat.Ar. 1791, 1792, 1793 1796, 1799 from Ethiopia, Vat.Ar.1788, 1789, 1790, 1794, 1795 from Somalia), Raineri 2004, 232–228 (Cerulli Etiopici 325, 326, 327, 328: This last manuscript contains an Oromo text in praise of the Prophet, not a Harari text as surmised by the cataloguer).

5 Traini 1974. The collection kept in Pavia belonged to the famous engineer Luigi Robecchi Bricchetti (1855–1926), who visited Harar in 1888–1889 (Gori 2009). Three more manuscripts (two in Harari and one in Arabic) from the Horn of Africa can be found in the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei in Rome in the collection of Carlo Conti Rossini (Strelcyn 1976, 197–198, 293–294, 322).

6 See the list in Wagner 1997, 198. The manuscripts belonged to the German orientalist and diplomat Hans Martin Schlobies (1904–1950). An ‘ajami Amharic text of collection (NL Schlobies 84a = Wagner 52) has been analyzed by Gori 2007b.

7 Listed in Wagner 1997, 197. The collection is basically composed of the manuscripts which Wagner acquired in Harar during his many stays in Ethiopia.

8 Dobronravin 2006. The collection, which is still almost unknown, includes several manuscripts acquired in Harar and in the Oromo region by the famous Russian poet and traveler Nikolaj Gumilev in 1910–1911 and 1913 (see also Gori 2008).

9 Andrzejewski-Lewis 1994, for a collection of 22 items coming from Somaliland. Other North-eastern African manuscripts diffusely spread over French libraries are listed in Gori 2007a, 745–747.

the best known repository of Muslim codices. The collection was cursorily described at the end of the 1960s¹⁰, and it took until 2009 for it to eventually be digitized in the context of the project *Ethiopic Manuscript Imaging Project*, (EMIP), which was headed by Professor Steven Delamarter (George Fox University, Portland, Oregon) and had a broad scope. A handlist of the collection was published in 2014 together with a pioneering description of the main codicological features of codices.¹¹ The EMIP has also succeeded in obtaining the authorization to fully digitize the manuscript material in possession of ‘Abdallāh Šarīf, a local learned man in Harar, who owns the largest manuscript collection there. However, it is unknown how many units his collection comprises (surely, no less than 436), and how many other private collections are located in that area.¹²

The existence of other collections in the country is known, but the manuscripts remain practically untouched in private hands where improper storage and the lack of any preservation policy often place them at risk.¹³ Manuscripts are frequently considered by their owners to be devoid of any intrinsic value and are deemed no more than a simple tool to transmit the texts. Thus, they are not treated properly and remain unprotected against the damaging effects of time, dust, insects and weather conditions. State libraries are of course more aware of the necessity of proper preservation and storage practice, but unfortunately they often lack the logistic and technological infrastructure to implement the appropriate measures.

Searching for unexplored collections of manuscripts in Ethiopia, digitizing and cataloguing already located collections are the main tasks for which the very few scholars of this field are requested.

Moreover, in the USA EMIP has digitized some thirty Arabic Ethiopian manuscripts acquired by a private collector.

The research into this newly available material will certainly increase our knowledge of Islam in Ethiopia in general, and of the manuscript tradition in particular; this paper strongly features the knowledge I have gained from my preliminary study of these witnesses.

¹⁰ See a very short survey in Jomier 1967.

¹¹ Gori 2014. The codicological analysis of the manuscripts was conducted by Dr Anne Regourd (in Gori 2014: xlvii–xcii); the background of the EMIP project is described by Steve Delamarter in Gori 2014: xxix–xxxiii.

¹² The collection of ‘Abdallāh Šarīf is now being analyzed by Dr Anne Regourd in the framework of the above mentioned project IslHornAfr.

¹³ In a mission carried out in the area of Ğimma and Wälqite (Western Ethiopia) in December 2014 for the project IslHornAfr, Dr Sara Fani and Dr Michele Petrone have digitized four previously unstudied collections of Islamic manuscripts.

2 Composite manuscripts and MTMs in the manuscript tradition of the Horn of Africa: Some observations

It has become clear that composite and multiple-text manuscripts (MTMs) are very frequent in the Ethiopian Islamic tradition. In particular, this applies to those containing liturgical and teaching texts.

Obviously, it would be premature to believe that it is possible to provide a comprehensive analysis of such manuscripts at this point. Thus, the following constitutes no more than a tentative approach to the topic. Further research may confirm or dismiss the ideas that will be outlined in this article.

Composite manuscripts and MTMs of Islamic Ethiopia can be classified into the following general categories:

1. Composite manuscripts (one codex consisting of several codicological units)
2. MTMs
 - 2a. Texts which address the same topic or related subjects
 - 2b. 'Liturgical' collections

(1) The first category comprises conglomerates, which were compiled from several manuscripts of different origin, shape and dimension and were then bound together.

Even though this kind of codices among the Islamic manuscripts from the Horn of Africa were produced locally, the majority of them emerged due to European influence. Travellers and adventurers, scholars of this research area, colonial officials and military administrators selected texts which they deemed interesting. They were then copied into notebooks or even on to loose sheets of paper. After arriving in Europe, these scattered items were eventually bound or rebound together.

This means of production of codices is widely documented, not only throughout Sub-Saharan Africa¹⁴, but also in the Horn of Africa. There it has been docu-

¹⁴ See for example the items of the recently catalogued collection of George de Gironcourt at the Institut de France in Paris (Nobili 2013).

mented for the Islamic tradition and also for a part of the Ethiopian Christian tradition.¹⁵ One might call it *faute de mieux*, a ‘colonial’ way of creating manuscripts. These manuscripts were mainly produced for Europeans, who were apparently the only true active catalysts of the writing process, and the extent to which they reflect a genuine local tradition prevalent among the intellectual elite before the arrival of these foreigners merits a discussion.

It can be surmised that at least some of these ‘colonial’ manuscripts contain *specimina* of texts which were in circulation locally and might otherwise have remained largely unknown. Nevertheless, it is a matter of fact that the way the texts were put on paper and were assembled is absolutely peculiar to the colonial period and surely differs from what we know the local tradition is.

It is likely that various important theological and historical manuscripts were frequently collected and then copied, or even abridged and merged, by local copyists in a specific way as to satisfy the requests, or fulfil the exigencies, of an influential European.

Furthermore, it is actually doubtful that Ethiopian and Somali scholars would ever have put certain parts of their traditional knowledge into writing instead of preserving them orally, which is more customary (e.g. tribal genealogies, traditional poetry, corpora of judicial practices and administration, proverbs, wisdom and gnomic literature). It is thanks to this foreign impulse that we have manuscripts on the local tribal poetry in Somalia, the clan structure of many human groups, the history of villages or towns, and the traditional healing practices.

Most of the sources that we use for studying ‘customary law’ were first put into writing on request of colonial administrators, and many local legal practices were codified (e.g. in Arabic where they concerned Muslim peoples) due to European influence (i.e. in the Horn of Africa, Italian influence) and on behalf of colonial offices.

Finally, external European influence was surely decisive in the creation of many codices: bindings were made randomly, and unrelated manuscripts were

¹⁵ See for example the Gə‘əz codices of the Conti Rossini Collection at the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei in Rome (Strelcyn 1976, esp. ix–x) produced for the Italian scholars while he was working for the colonial administration in Eritrea. At the National Library in Paris ‘pre-colonial’ Ethiopic manuscripts compose the Mondon Vidailhet (Chaîne 1913) and d’Abbadie collections (d’Abbadie 1849, Chaîne 1912, Conti Rossini 1914). The Griaule collection of Ethiopic manuscripts also at the National Library in Paris is made up of items produced for the members of the Dakar-Djibouti expedition in 1931–1933 (Strelcyn 1954).

put together by chance or without any other reason than to prevent loss or dispersion.

Of course, these are not sufficient reasons to discharge all this material and to diminish its textual and documental value. In fact, these ‘colonial’ manuscripts have preserved an impressive amount of information and have transmitted a significant amount of texts, which could otherwise have been lost. Moreover, they testify the capability of the local African intelligentsia to skilfully use writing and to adapt it to external inputs and influences.

Enrico Cerulli’s collection at the Vatican Library contains good examples of ‘colonial’ composites. Acting as a colonial administrator of high rank, the great Italian orientalist had the opportunity to spend extensive periods in Ethiopia and Somalia, during which he asked (or, more probably, ordered) local copyists to write down Arabic, Harari, Oromo and Somali texts. He selected texts which he considered important for his research on the history and culture of the Muslims of the Horn and most were subsequently published in a series of articles and books which still form the basis of our knowledge of Islam in Ethiopia.¹⁶ The original manuscripts were then donated by Cerulli to the Vatican Library, where they were eventually catalogued by Giorgio Levi Della Vida.¹⁷

Vat.Ar. 1788, 1789, 1790, and 1796 are typical representatives of this ‘colonial’ codex. The texts were mostly copied on ruled foolscap folios or loose sheets used in the colonial administration. The common use of the official paper of the colonial administration proves that the Italian colonial power was directly involved in the production of such manuscripts. In some cases, the sheets are only held together by a simple cover, which is also the only connecting element in absence of any proper binding. Chronographies, hagiographies, genealogical documents, prayers and litanies used in the mystical brotherhoods form the heterogeneous cluster of writings can be found in these codices.

Vat.Ar. 1788, for example, is a random collection of texts of different mystical brotherhoods of the Horn contained in a folder. We thus have a hagiography of ‘Alī Muḥammad Maye of Merka, a much renowned saint of the Aḥmadiyya brotherhood,¹⁸ followed by a selection of mystical poetry of learned men who were active members of the Qādiriyya and Ṣāliḥiyya brotherhoods in Ethiopia and Somalia. No rationale can be detected in the collection except from the simple fact that all the

¹⁶ See Cerulli 1971 for his main articles and contributions on Ethiopian Islam.

¹⁷ Levi Della Vida 1965, 150–59.

¹⁸ This text was edited in Gori 2003, 195–394.

texts are in some way related to the same cultural milieu, i.e. Somali Islamic mystical groups.¹⁹

- (2) As described above, the MTMs category comprises two distinct collections:
- 2a. Texts which deal with the same topic or with related subjects;
 - 2b. 'Liturgical' collections.

(2a) Local codices containing selected texts dealing with the same topic or with related subjects (i.e. Arabic grammar and logic, law and theology, mysticism and magic). Generally, the criterion for the choice of the texts is easily recognizable. The product is intended for teaching and learning the respective branches of the traditional Islamic education. This kind of codex seems to be the most widespread among Ethiopian Islamic manuscripts.

The traditional Islamic higher education in the Muslim areas of the Horn is based on a relatively structured curriculum comprising the following: 1) Arabic grammar and syntax (*ṣarf, naḥw*); 2) the basic elements of the creed (*'aqīda*) and of theology; 3) the principles of law (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), and 4) mysticism (*taṣawwuf*). Logic (*manṭiq*) is also part of the syllabus and is taught as a subsidiary subject of grammar and *'aqīda*.²⁰

In all these branches of traditional learning, teachers and their pupils have recourse to a quite significant set of handbooks. The 'Poem of the one thousand verses' (*Alfiyya*) by Ibn Mālik (d. 1274) is a well-known manual of Arabic grammar.²¹ Another famous handbook for grammar is the *al-Tuḥfa al-wardīyya* ('The present of Ibn al-Wardī') by Ibn al-Wardī (d. 1349). It is a short poem on Arabic grammar which is well-known in the Islamic world.²²

The *Muqaddimat Bā Faḍl*, also called *al-Muqaddima al-ḥaḍramīyya fī fiqh al-sāda al-šāfi'iyya* is also very widespread. It is a concise handbook of law according to the school of law of al-Šāfi'i written by the Yemenite scholar 'Abdallāh Bā Faḍl al-Ḥaḍramī (probably fl. 16th century). This manual designed for students and common faithful is also very widespread on the Swahili coast and among Indonesian *šāfi'i*-s.²³ Al-Laḳānī's (d. 1631) *Ġahwarat al-tawḥīd* ('The Essence of

¹⁹ See the detailed description in Levi Della Vida, 1965, 146–47.

²⁰ On the general curriculum of the Islamic traditional educational institutions in Wällo, see Hussein Ahmed 1998; on the teaching of Arabic grammar among Ethiopian Muslims see Gori 2009.

²¹ See GAL I, 298–300, S I, 521–27.

²² See GAL II, 140, S II, 174.

²³ See Becker 1911; van Bruinessen 1990.

monotheism'), a much reputed poem on the basic tenets of the Islamic faith, is a handbook for theology.²⁴ Nowadays, all these texts are among the most common works used in Ethiopian Islamic educational institutions. The circulation of these texts was assured by manuscript tradition until printed books started being used.

In the manuscript collection of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies in Addis Ababa, I found several examples of such MTMs which had been conceived as handbooks. It is obvious that the analysis of these codices is of crucial importance for understanding the intellectual landscape in which the Ethiopian Islamic intelligentsia acted. This is to be illustrated by the following examples:



Fig. 1: IES 00274 (Harar 23) Commentary on the *al-Tuhfa al-wardiyya*. Folia 5v–6r.

IES 274²⁵ contains an interesting collection of two texts on Arabic grammar: Ibn al-Wardī's (d. 1349) commentary on his *al-Tuhfa al-wardiyya* (5r–36v; Fig. 1)²⁶ and Ibn al-'Aqīl's (d. 1367) commentary on *Alfiyyat Ibn Mālik* (d. 1274) (41r–176r).²⁷ The

²⁴ See GAL II, 317, S II, 436–37.

²⁵ The manuscript is described in Gori 2014, 7–8.

²⁶ See GAL II, 140–141, GAL S II, 174–75.

²⁷ GAL I, 298–300, GAL S I, 521–527.

manuscript was copied by Abū Bakr b. *ṣayḥ* Dadab b. *ṣayḥ* Ḥayr b. ‘Umar b. Ġamāl al-Bakrī, member of the learned al-Quṭbī Somali clan (Aw Quddub) living in Harar, between *ṣafar* and Friday 6th of *ramaḍān* 1254 (= 23 November 1838; colophon 36v and 176r). The Quṭbī clan, which boasts a genealogy going back to Abū Bakr, the first caliph of Islam, is a Somali-speaking holy lineage group who lives off teaching.²⁸

IES 299²⁹ is a collection of basic texts on theology and logic. It contains al-Laqānī’s *Ġawharat al-tawḥīd* (folia 4v–8v) and its commentary *Ithāf al-murīd* (9r–60v),³⁰ followed by: *al-Sullam al-murawnīq* (‘The Elevating Stairs on the Science of Logic’) on logic, composed in 1534 (folia 62v–68r) and its commentary (68v–90v; Fig. 2), both works by the North African scholar al-Aḥḍarī.³¹ In this manuscript, a very renowned work on logic was compiled together with two theological treatises; in some other cases, texts on logic are in the same manuscript as grammatical handbooks (e.g. in IES 309).



Fig. 2: IES 00299, al-Aḥḍarī, commentary on *al-Sullam al-murawnīq*. Folia 68v–69r.

28 Genealogically, the Aw Quddub are a section of the Ṣayḥāl clan family: Pirone 1954, Gori 2003, 221–222.

29 For a description of the manuscript see Gori 2014, 12–13.

30 GAL II, 316–317, GAL S II, 436–437. The commentary on the *Ġawharat al-tawḥīd* was authored by al-Laqānī’s son ‘Abd al-Salām.

31 On al-Aḥḍarī see GAL II, 355–356 and GAL S II 705–706; on the *Sullam al-murawnīq* see also GAL S I, 843.

IES 272³² contains a noteworthy selection of texts about *‘ilm al-ḥurūf* (science of the letters of the alphabet and their supernatural values and powers) and *ḥawāṣṣ al-asmā’* (the qualities and hidden characteristics of the names of God). The first text of the collection is a piece of work by Nāṣir al-Dīn Muḥammad b. ‘Abdallāh Ibn Qurqmās (d. 1477) on the mystical qualities of the letters of the Arabic alphabet called *Kitāb bahğat al-ṭarf fī ‘ilm al-ḥarf* (‘The book of the joy of the glance into the science of the letters’; Fig. 3).³³ It is apparently identical with the *Faṭḥ al-ḥallāq fī ‘ilm al-hurūf wa-al-awfāq* (‘The conquest of Creator in the science of the letters and the magical squares’) by the same author, already known from manuscript 127 of the Escorial.³⁴ This rare text is followed by *al-Nūr al-asmā’ fī šarḥ asmā’ Allāh al-ḥusnā* (‘The most brilliant light on the explanation of the most beautiful Names of God’), attributed to the famous al-Būnī (d. 1225).³⁵ The codex was finished on the 15th of šawwāl 1210 (23 April 1796).³⁶



Fig. 3: IES 00272, Ibn Qurqmās *Kitāb bahğat al-ṭarf fī ‘ilm al-ḥarf* (= *Faṭḥ al-ḥallāq fī ‘ilm al-hurūf wa-al-awfāq*). Folia 1v–2r.

³² See Gori 2014, 6–7 for a more detailed description of the codex.

³³ This title is not mentioned in GAL. On Ibn Qurqmās see GAL II, 139 and GAL S II, 172.

³⁴ Derenbourg 1884, 79.

³⁵ The title, which was already mentioned in Jomier 1967, 288, is not listed in the *corpus bunicum* (Witkam 2007a). A text called *Nūr al-asmā’ fī šarḥ al-asmā’ al-ḥusnā* attributed to a certain Ḥāmid al-Firkawī is mentioned in GAL S II, 937.

³⁶ The scribe was Muḥammad b. Idrīs b. Nūr, otherwise unknown.

(2b) ‘Liturgical’ manuscripts containing relatively standardized collections of texts to be read at relevant religious festivals (mainly the *mawlid al-šarīf*) or at ceremonies performed by members of mystical brotherhoods.

The celebration of the *mawlid* (birthday) of the Prophet on the day 12 of the month of *rabī‘ al-awwal* is one of the most important and cherished festivities among Ethiopian Muslims. To solemnize this occasion, panegyrics praising Muḥammad and magnifying his rank among the Prophets are publicly and collectively read and recited together with devotional prayers (*du‘ā’*) asking for the Prophet’s intercession. Manuscripts with this genre of texts are very widespread and local scholars in Ethiopia and Somalia invested great efforts to produce poems, prayers and pious invocations for the feast of the *mawlid al-šarīf*.

In Harar, for example, a specific collection of texts is usually recited during the mass celebrations on the day of the *Mawlid* as well as during other private or public festivities. This collection is recorded in many codices in Ethiopia (e.g. in IES 264, 273, 1855, 2662, 2663, 2664, 2665, 2666).³⁷ Six printed editions have also been available on the Ethiopian Islamic book market, two of which are actually photomechanical reproductions of manuscripts.³⁸

A first tentative analysis of the sources has shown that the structure of the Harari *Mawlid* collection appears to be built around two textual constellations: a first conglomerate includes *taḥmīs al-Fayyūmī ‘alā qašīdat al-Burda* (‘the Taḥmīs of al-Fayyūmī on the Poem of the Mantle in honour of the Prophet by al-Buṣīrī’; Fig. 4)³⁹ preceded by a series of anonymous *šalāwāt ‘alā al-nabī* (prayers for the Prophet Muḥammad) and a more or less wide selection of pietistic poetry. A second conglomerate includes the less known *Kitāb ‘Unwān al-šarīf* (‘The book of the token of the Noble’) by Abū al-Ḥasan Nūr al-Dīn ‘Alī b. Nāšīr⁴⁰ followed by a series of *šalāwāt ‘alā al-nabī*, long invocations to God and devotional poetry.

The function of *trait d’union* between the two sections of the collection is basically performed by a series of anonymous *salāmāt ‘alā al-nabī* (greetings to the Prophet Muḥammad), to which poems in praise of the Prophet, invocations and other devotional literature are added.

³⁷ For a description of these manuscripts see Gori 2014, 4, 7, 25, 40–42.

³⁸ On the *Mawlid* collection in Harar see Gori 2010. The two photomechanical reproductions appeared in 1412/1992 (manuscript of an anonymous copyist) and in 1421/2000 (manuscript completed on the 26 of *ramaḍān* 1421/22 December 2000 by the copyist Ibrāhīm Muḥammad Wazīr).

³⁹ The *taḥmīs* was composed by Šams al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Fayyūmī (GAL I, 264–65, GAL S II, 469–470; Witkam 2007b, 98). *Taḥmīs* (lit. ‘to make five’) is the procedure by which two hemistichs of an usually well-known poem (in this case the *Burda* of al-Buṣīrī, d. 1294) are supplied by three new hemistichs created by another poet to form a rhyming stanza of five hemistichs.

⁴⁰ For a possible identification of this author see Jomier 1967, 291.



Fig. 4: IES00273, incipit of *taḥmīs al-Fayyūmī ‘alā qaṣīdat al-Burda*. Folia 32v–33r.

As the text collection of the *Mawlid* is conceived to be recited collectively, the influence of the public festival performances managed to partially modify the more recent manuscript tradition. The impact of the ceremonial praxis became evident in the printed editions which are gradually substituting older manuscripts. Texts in Arabic and in Harari which were not originally part of the collection but are commonly sung during the *Mawlid* feast started to be copied in modern manuscripts and were then published in books for the use of the faithful.

3 Closing remarks

Little is known about the Islamic manuscript tradition of the Horn of Africa, which makes it impossible to arrive at definite conclusions with regard to its characteristics. However, a preliminary survey of the available material indicates that composite and MTMs are relatively common in this particular Islamic tradition. This assertion is based on three evident facts: 1) ‘colonial’ manuscripts, more or less purposely assembled and bound by/for Europeans, represent a considerable part of the material. 2) The circulation of codices in the region appears to be directly

linked to the exigencies of education. The tight connection between manuscript copying and teaching/ learning practices triggers the production of codices which contain some fundamental texts and handbooks of a branch of the traditional Islamic curriculum. These manuscripts were created to be read and discussed in educational establishments and were thus conceived as a practical tool for the teacher and his students. 3) Collective and individual recitation of devotional and liturgical texts also fostered the copying of manuscripts to maintain the most commonly chanted and declaimed litanies, prayers, invocations and poems.

Further research and investigation will prove whether these provisional assessments can be confirmed or not.

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