



## IslHornAfr: Islam in the Horn of Africa. A Comparative Literary Approach

Gori, Alessandro

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# Essays in Ethiopian Manuscript Studies

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Edited by  
Alessandro Bausi, Alessandro Gori,  
and Denis Nosnitsin

with assistance from  
Eugenia Sokolinski

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*IslHornAfr:*  
*Islam in the Horn of Africa. A Comparative Literary Approach*

ALESSANDRO GORI, University of Copenhagen

The project *IslHornAfr: Islam in the Horn of Africa, A Comparative Literary Approach* (European Union 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme, ERC Advanced Grant 322849, 2013–2018) was conceived as a contribution to both African and Islamic studies, with the aim of producing a critical and comprehensive picture of the Islamic literary history of the Horn of Africa.

Launched initially at the University of Florence (Italy) in 2013, the project was transferred to the University of Copenhagen (Denmark) in its second year. Besides the Principal Investigator, Alessandro Gori, the project team is currently composed of (in alphabetical order) Sara Fani, Adday Hernandez Lopez, Irmeli Perho, Michele Petrone, and Anne Regourd. The project database has been managed by Orhan Toy.

The project explores the Islamic cultural history in the Horn of Africa as it is reflected in the literary traditions of the region (Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Somalia). It considers primarily the manuscript tradition but also printed texts. In most general terms, the project aims at considerably expanding our knowledge of the texts composed, translated, or copied by the Muslims in the Horn of Africa.

The material shall combine the elements already accessible to scholars with the new data to be recovered in a series of field missions. Field missions shall be organized in Ethiopia, Somaliland, Djibouti, and Eritrea. Institutional (primarily mosques and shrines) and private libraries shall be visited in order to record the manuscripts and their content in their local context. Not only the local literary production of the Horn of Africa but also locally copied texts of foreign origin are being considered.

In 2013, the bulk of research material came from the Arabic collection of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies at Addis Ababa University, digitized by the Ethiopic Manuscript Imaging Project (EMIP).<sup>1</sup> A hand list of these manuscripts has been published.<sup>2</sup> Manuscripts from this collection are discussed in this volume by Michele Petrone and Sara Fani. In 2014, the work focused on the manuscripts from the ʿAbd Allāh Šarīf Museum (Harār, Ethiopia), digitized by the EMIP team.

1 Headed by Steve Delamarter, to whom the PI is most grateful.

2 A. Gori et al., *A Handlist of the Manuscripts in the Institute of the Ethiopian Studies, II: The Arabic Materials of the Ethiopian Islamic Tradition*, Ethiopic Manuscripts, Texts, and Studies, 20 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014).

Most of 2015 has been dedicated to examining manuscripts recorded by the project team during its field research in Ġimma (Oromiyya Region) and Gurage (Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples Region), during November and December, 2014. The mission was locally coordinated by Hassen Muhammad Kawo and Kemal Ibrahim from Addis Ababa University. It produced *c.*200 digitized manuscripts and several hundred fragments. First impressions of the mission are reflected in the mission report published on the project website (<<http://www.islhornafr.eu/mission1.html>>, last accessed 15 June 2015).

A field mission to Somaliland is planned in the summer of 2015. In addition, the collection of manuscripts and microfilms from Ethiopia of the late Abraham Johannes Drewes in Leiden has been digitized for the project and shall be evaluated by the team.

All texts (main texts and additional texts in the manuscripts, documents, books, whether in Arabic or in local languages) are classified with the help of the project database according to their genres, contents, titles, authors, places of creation, number of witnesses, distribution of witnesses, and linguistic and graphic peculiarities. At the time of this publication, *c.*350 distinct texts from 160 manuscripts have been listed in the database (see fig. 1), a considerable share of which is not widely known outside the region of study.

Besides extensive metadata on the texts, the relational database contains metadata on persons (authors, copyists, traditional scholars; at the time of this publication there are 355 names, see fig. 2) and places (at the moment, 84 entries), in addition to an extensive bibliography. A new prosopography of Northeast-African Islam is expected to emerge in the course of the project. Not only the local literary production of the Horn of Africa but also locally copied texts of foreign origin are being considered. A re-evaluation of external Islamic sources dealing with these areas completes the picture.

Codicological peculiarities of manuscript making among Muslims of the Horn of Africa are also explored (primarily by Anne Regourd).

A significant corpus of texts from various spheres—theology, law, history, hagiography, mostly previously unknown or unstudied—shall be critically edited and published (compare the case studies by the project members Alessandro Gori, Sara Fani, and Michele Petrone in this volume). They shall not only be considered in their local context but also compared to the ‘mainstream’ Islamic tradition, highlighting the individual character but also the common features shared by the literatures of the entire Islamic world.

The project team hopes to increase the awareness of Islam in the Horn of Africa for the scholarship, and the awareness of the value of local tradition in Africa itself, as well as contribute to the understanding of the processes of Islamization and their dependence of and effect upon local contexts. In addi-

The screenshot shows the IslHornAfr database interface. At the top, there is a search bar with a dropdown menu set to 'Text' and a 'Search' button. Below the search bar is a navigation sidebar with categories: MANUSCRIPTS, PEOPLE, TEXTS, ARTICLES, BOOKS, BOOK SECTIONS, DISSERTATIONS, COLLECTIONS, GENRES, LANGUAGES, PLACES, and SCRIPTS. The main content area is titled 'Text' and features a decorative calligraphic logo on the right. The text details include:

- Title:** فتح المجيد بكفاية المرید
- Original title:** فتح المجيد بكفاية المرید
- Transliterated title:** Fath al-mağīd bi-kifāyat al-murīd
- Deprecated section:** (empty)
- Sections:** (empty)
- Alternative titles:**
  - Original title:** شرح المنظومة الجزائرية في التوحيد
  - Transliterated title:** Sharh al-Manzūma al-Gazā'iriyya fi al-tawhīd
- Languages:** Arabic →
- Genres:** Beliefs →
- Date of creation:** [HJRI] expressed 1051.9.X The date is mentioned in the introduction of the text
- Deprecated date of creation:** (empty)
- Authors:** اللقاني، عبد السلام بن ابراهيم  
al-Laqa'ni, 'Abd al-Salām b. Ibrāhīm
- Bibliography relations:**
  - Item: Geschichte der arabischen Literatur, Band 2 →
  - Page: 307
  - Relation type: Mentioned in
  - Item: Mu'gam al-ta'riḥ al-turāt al-islāmiyya fi makta... →
  - Page: 1741, n. 4674/4
  - Relation type: Mentioned in
- Relations:** (empty)
- References:**
  - Manuscript parts: [SUSU0002] SSE0002, 1r - 144v →

Fig. 1 IslHornAfr database, text view (internal editable view mode).

tion, the project database (see figs. 1, 2) is expected to become an important tool for research in African Islamic literature, African Islamic biography and African Islamic topography.

In addition to co-organizing the conference that resulted in this volume, the *IslHornAfr* project organizes regular workshops. Among these are: in 2014, March (Addis Ababa, together with CFEE): *Islamic Manuscripts in the Horn of Africa*; in October (Copenhagen): *Islam in the Horn of Africa*,

The screenshot shows the 'Person' view in the IslHornAfr database. The left sidebar contains a navigation menu with categories: MANUSCRIPTS, PEOPLE, TEXTS, ARTICLES, BOOKS, BOOK SECTIONS, DISSERTATIONS, COLLECTIONS, GENRES, LANGUAGES, PLACES, and SCRIPTS. The main content area is titled 'Person' and features a large Arabic calligraphic logo on the right. The profile information includes:

- Original name:** ابانر عمر الرضى
- Transliterated name:** Abādīr 'Umar al-Riḏā
- Additional names:** Abadir Musa Warwaje'le
- Title:** šayḥ, amīr
- Time of activity:** 1216-ca. 1275
- Biographic comments:** Venerated saint and amīr of Harar. He is the most celebrated saint of Harar and the main figure in the story of its foundation; according to this, he arrived with other saints to Harar from Ḥiǧāz in 1216; there he was elected šayḥ by the local tribes. In the following years he fought many battles against the infidel king Karnibāl b. Mahrawāl, his brother, daughter and son. He is also mentioned in the list of the amīrs of Harar. The veneration of Abādīr extends far beyond the Harar region in Muslim Ethiopia.
- Relations:** A table showing a connection to 'Harar, Ethiopia'.
- Bibliography references:** Two entries: 'Legende und geschichte der Fath Madinat Harar von Yahya' (pages 32-33) and '[Encyclopaedia Aethiopica, volume 1, A-C] Abādīr 'Umar al-...'.
- Manuscript SSE0005:** A section for manuscript details.
- Texts and Fragments:** A fragment from folio 18v, titled 'Additional verses to the main poem invoking Šayḥ Abādīr', with the text: 'اغنا سيد ابانر سيدى \ علمكم رحمة القادر مندى \ اغنوا قلب الناحية سيدى ...'

Fig. 2 IslHornAfr database, person view (internal editable view mode).

December (Paris, together with CNRS): *Manuscripts chrétiens et islamiques d'Éthiopie (XII—XX s.). Une approche comparative*; in 2015, February (Copenhagen): *Mission to the Land of Coffee: first achievements and results*; and most recently in August (Warsaw, a panel within 19<sup>th</sup> ICES): *Islamic literature in Ethiopia: new perspectives of research*.<sup>3</sup>

3 For updates and reports, see <<http://www.islhornafr.eu/>>.