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ALESSANDRO GORI, Università degli Studi di Firenze

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The Study of Arabic Grammar in Ethiopia: The Case of two Contemporary Muslim Learned Men¹

ALESSANDRO GORI, Università degli Studi di Firenze²

The presence of Arabic in Ethiopia is ancient, and the language is deeply rooted in the written culture of the country. It is a well-known fact that Christian church books have been translated from Arabic into Gəʿəz for centuries to enrich the bulk of Ethiopian literature. Arabic *marginalia* and notes can be found in Gəʿəz manuscripts; and Arabic documents are kept in ecclesiastical libraries, in monasteries and churches.

Quite naturally, it is primarily in Ethiopian Muslim communities that the Arabic language spread, producing an impressive body of literature which still waits to be discovered and fully appreciated in its cultural and historical importance.

The highly revered position of Arabic across the Islamic world is well known. The last divine revelation to the humankind kept in the Koran is in that language. Every Muslim has to approach the sacred text in its original idiom and even the most ignorant faithful must learn at least some Arabic to be able to duly perform their five daily mandatory prayers. Its religious value made Arabic not only the language of Islamic theology and jurisprudence, but also of science and medicine. Arabic came to be the main expressive tool of a universal civilization, and learned men everywhere in the Islamic world use it and spread it through their written works. The use of this sacred language strengthened the feeling of belonging to a common *umma* (community) and the cohesion among Muslims coming from different continents.

The study and the analysis of Arabic grammar by the Islamic intelligentsia was thus a pillar in the education of every learned man in the Muslim world.

Ethiopian Muslims have been no exception to this common situation.

Arabic grammar and syntax (*naḥw*), with its branches of *ṣarf* (morphology), *ʿarūd* (prosody), *māʿānī* (allegories), *bayān* (eloquence), *badiʿ* (science of metaphors) and *balāġa* (rhetoric), play a crucial role in the curricula of

¹ A slightly abridged version of this paper was presented at the 16th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies in Trondheim (Norway) on July 3rd 2007.

² Dipartimento di Linguistica – Università degli Studi di Firenze.

traditional Islamic high schools in every Muslim community of the country³, including Wällo⁴, Harar's *kabirgār*⁵, and the Gurage areas⁶.

Famous textbooks of Arabic grammar are known and studied in all the educational institutions of Ethiopia⁷.

Local Ethiopian scholars became experts in teaching Arabic grammar to pupils. The mid-19th century *šayḥ* Kammalaw of Wällo was a highly esteemed master of Arabic grammar and syntax, and such famous learned holy men as *ḥāğğ* Bušrā *sayyid al-bā'* of Gata in Qallu (d. 1863) or *ḥāğğ* Ğawhar b. Ḥaydar of Šonke (d. 1935) trained their students also in Arabic⁸.

The most widely spread book of Arabic grammar in Ethiopia is the *Muqaddima al-Āğurruṣṣiyya* by the famous Moroccan scholar of Berber origin Abu °Abdallāh Muḥammad b Dawud al-Šanhāği b. Āğurruṣṣ (d. in Fas 1323)⁹, which is widely used everywhere in the Islamic world. The *Fath rabb al-bariyya °alā al-durra al-bahiyya nazm al-āğurruṣṣiyya* by Ibrāḥīm al-Bağurī (d. 1861), a renown gloss on the *Āğurruṣṣiyya*¹⁰, is also traditionally diffused in Ethiopia¹¹.

Other books that Ethiopian Muslims use to learn Classical Arabic¹² include the *Mulḥat al-i°rāb* by al-Ḥarīrī (d. 1054)¹³, the *Alfiyya* and the *Lāmiyyat al-af°āl* or the *Kitāb al-miftāḥ fi abniyyat al-af°āl* both by Ibn Mālik (d.1273)¹⁴, the *Marāḥ al-arwāḥ* by Aḥmad b. °Alī b. Mas°ud (beginning of the 14th century)¹⁵, the *Muğni al-labīb °an kutub al-a°arīb* by °Abdallāh b. Hišām

³ KEBREAB (1981: 79–83).

⁴ HUSSEIN AHMED (1988: 101–2); Hussein Ahmed (2001: 91–4).

⁵ ABDURAHMAN GARAD – WAGNER (1998: 83).

⁶ DREWES (1976 *passim*).

⁷ It would be very interesting to compare the handbooks circulating in Ethiopia with those used in other Islamic countries, especially in Yemen, the Sudan, and Egypt. For some information on the Iranian Islamic syllabus and textbooks see Seyyed Hossein Nasr (2006:161–76; especially about *šarf* and *naḥw* 162–4); for Mauritania, see Fortier 2003.

⁸ HUSSEIN AHMED (1988: 101–2).

⁹ GAL II: 237–8; GAL S II: 332–5.

¹⁰ GAL II: 238; GAL S II: 335; the *Fath rabb al-bariyya* is actually a gloss on the *Durra al-bahiyya fi nazm al-āğurruṣṣiyya* by Šihāb al-Dīn Yaḥyā al-°Imrīṭī (*floruit* 1581), which is an excerpt from the *Āğurruṣṣiyya* with commentary (GAL II: 238; GAL S II: 335).

¹¹ It is very common to find in Addis Ababa copies of this book printed in Singapore by the famous *Sulaymān al-Mara°i* printing press in 1346/1927–8. Also other books of this Asian publishing house are usually available in the Ethiopian Islamic book market (e.g., an edition of the *Tanbih al-anām*).

¹² HUSSEIN AHMED (1988:100).

¹³ GAL I: 276–8; GAL S 486–9.

¹⁴ GAL I: 298–300; GAL S I: 521–527.

¹⁵ GAL II: 21; GAL S II: 14.

(d. 1360)¹⁶ and the *Muğīb al-nidāʿ alà qaṭr al-nadā* by ʿAfīf al-Dīn ʿAlī b. Aḥmad al-Fākihī al-Makkī al-Šāfiʿī al-Naḥwī (d. 1564)¹⁷.

There are numerous Ethiopian Arabic manuscripts transmitting famous Arabic grammatical texts. To mention a few examples, in the collection of Arabic manuscripts at the IES in Addis Ababa we find the famous *Šarḥ al-masālik li-alfiyyat Ibn Mālik* by Abu Muḥammad ʿAbdallāh b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. ʿAqīl (d. 1367)¹⁸ and the *Šarḥ al-tuḥfa al-wardiyya al-manzuma fi ʿilm al-ʿarabiyya* by Zayn al-Dīn ʿUmar b. al-Wardī (d. 1349)¹⁹; in the Biblioteca Civica of Pavia a copy of the *Muḥtaṣar lumʿa fi al-naḥw* by Ibn al-Ġinnī (d. 1002) is kept²⁰. Also in the library of Hararian *amīr* Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. ʿAbd al-Šakūr (1272–92/1856–75), manuscripts of Arabic grammar were represented²¹.

More recently, books on Arabic grammar originally published in Egypt were brought to Ethiopia and reprinted in Addis Ababa by local Islamic publishing houses. This fact illustrates the exceptional interest of Ethiopian Muslims in the study of this language.

In 1419/1998–99 the *Nağāšī* printing press in Addis Ababa published an impressive collection of Arabic grammatical texts under the title *Mağmuʿat al-šarf*, containing five different works on Arabic morphology and syntax (see appendix 5 for details)²².

Subsequently, the same editor issued four well-known Arabic works expounding on subjects contained in the *Āğurrumiyya* and in some of its commentaries. They are highly elaborate *ḥāšīya* (gloss) and *šarḥ* (commentary) texts (see appendix 5 for the complete list of these books).

In 2002 *Nağāšī* also printed a contemporary commentary to the *Āğurrumiyya*, conceived as a sort of schoolbook for beginners, the *Tuḥfa al-saniyya bi-šarḥ al-muqaddima al-āğurrumiyya* by Muḥammad Muḥyī al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd²³.

¹⁶ GAL II: 23–25; GAL S II: 16–20.

¹⁷ GAL II:23, 381; GAL S II: 16–7, 512. The work is a commentary on the other handbook by Ibn Hišām the *Qaṭr al- al-nadāʿ wa-ball al-šadāʿ*.

¹⁸ Manuscript Harar n. 23: JOMIER (1967: 288); GAL I: 299; GAL S I: 523.

¹⁹ Manuscript Harar 23: see JOMIER (1967: 288); GAL II: 140–1; GAL S II: 174–5.

²⁰ Ms. 12, ff. 9–12: see TRAINI (1973: 858).

²¹ DREWES (1983: 75, 77).

²² The *Nağāšī* edition reproduces that of the *Maṭbaʿat Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī* printed in Cairo 1340/1921–2.

²³ The book was completed by the author in Ramaḍān 1353/1934–5. The pedagogical aim of the text is evident from the series of simple questions at the end of each chapter, meant to facilitate the reader’s revision of the studied subjects.

Commentaries to textbooks of Arabic grammar were also authored by Ethiopian Muslim learned men. Some of them remain unpublished, while others have been printed in Ethiopia or abroad: e.g., *faqīh* Zubayr of Yaḡḡu wrote a commentary to the *Āḡurrumiyya*; *ṣayḥ* Ibrāhīm °Abd al-Razzāq of Yaḡḡu commented the *Alfiyya* of Ibn Mālik, and Muḥammad Amān of Dawway wrote a commentary to the *Āḡurrumiyya* titled *al-Maqāsid al-wafiyya fi šarḥ al-āḡurrumiyya*²⁴.

Ethiopian Muslim scholars have uninterruptedly attended to the study of Arabic grammar. Last year (1427h), in Adaamaa/Nazret, *Maktabat Badr* printing press published the *Namīr al-sāfi bi-šarḥ šawāhid al-kāfi fi °ilmay al-°arud wa-al-qawāfi*, a booklet by Muḥammad b. Ḥāmī al-Dīn b. °Abd al-Šamad al-Burānī, a young living Ethiopian learned man²⁵. It is a commentary on the *šawāhid (loci probantes; probative verses)* on which the rules of the famous handbook on prosody and rhyme *al-Kāfi fi °ilmay al-°arud wa-al-qawāfi*²⁶ are based.

The two contemporary learned men who I chose as a case study for this paper – *ṣayḥ* °Abd al-Bāšit b. Muḥammad b. Ḥasan al-Mināsī and *ṣayḥ* Muḥammad Amīn b. °Abdallāh al-Iṭyubī al-Hararī al-Muḥammadī – are the most convincing proof of this continuous traditional interest. An analysis of their biographies and works will hopefully contribute to shed light on some aspects of the traditional Islamic learning in contemporary Ethiopia. It will also give us a more precise idea of the corpus of doctrine Muslim teachers focus their attention in the field of Arabic grammar and other related subjects on. I believe it can also help enhance our prosopographical knowledge of Muslim learned men which is still very limited and vague.

The main source for the biography of *ṣayḥ* °Abd al-Bāšit b. Muḥammad b. Ḥasan al-Mināsī²⁷ is the biographical note (*tarḡama*) by Muḥammad b. °Alī b. Ādam b. Musā al-Iṭyubī (sic!) al-Wallawī contained in his commentary on the *ṣayḥ*'s principal work on Arabic grammar, *Madanī al-ḥabīb mimman yuwālī muḡnī al-labīb*, recently published in Addis Ababa²⁸.

²⁴ Published in Cairo according to HUSSEIN (1988: 101 and 105 note 50).

²⁵ Muḥammad b. Ḥāmī al-Dīn was born in 1390/1970. He is *imām* and *ḥaṭīb* in *Ġāmī° al-fatḥ* in Addis Ababa and teacher of Arabic at the Institute of Arabic Language of the *Awelia (al-Awwaliyya) College* in Addis Ababa.

²⁶ *Al-Kāfi fi °ilmay al-°arud wa-al-qawāfi* is a much renowned work by Aḥmad b. °Abbād al-Qinā°ī (d. 1454): GAL II: 27; GAL S II: 22.

²⁷ I have already briefly presented this scholar in GORI (2005: 89–92) using a very short Amharic article which appeared in the Islamic Ethiopian magazine *Bilal* (1, 10, 1985 E.C., 21–22).

²⁸ The commentary is titled *Fatḥ al-qarīb al-muḡīb fi šarḥ kitāb madanī al-ḥabīb*. It is a two-volume set published in 2003 in Addis Ababa by *Maktabat Mus°ab b. °Umayr* in

In this *tarğama*, °Abd al-Bāṣiṭ is honoured by many praising terms, some of which are directly referred to his exceptional knowledge of Arabic grammar. He is termed *al-naḥwī al-luğawī*, *sultān qarwā'id luğat al-°arab*, *ḥalīl zamānih*²⁹, and *Sibawayh awānih*³⁰.

According to his own words, ṣayḥ °Abd al-Bāṣiṭ was born in the village of Minās (Borana – Wallo), four years before the battle of Sägāle (1328H/1908). He first received the basic education in his village from his father: in particular, he was introduced into *fiqh* (Jurisprudence) according to the *šāfi'ī* school of Law. As customary in traditional Islamic education, he then left his native Minās to look for famous teachers in the different branches of Muslim learning.

Ṣayḥ °Abd al-Bāṣiṭ thus went to Yaşulá and studied Law under the guidance of °Alī Dağar: in particular, he was taught the *Şafwat al-zubad*, the *alfiyya* on *šāfi'ī fiqh* by Ibn Raslān (d. 1440)³¹. He continued his legal studies in Bulbul with ṣayḥ °Abd al-Salām al-Bulbulī al-Sarrī, but he then turned to what was to become his main field of specialization: Arabic grammar. He travelled to Darrà (northern Shoa) where he started deepening his knowledge of Arabic with *al-šayḥ al-ḥāğğ* Aḥmad b. °Umar al-Sankarī (*nazīl* Darrà), father of the famous ṣayḥ Muḥammad Wale³². He stayed there for 15 years, learning all the branches of the grammatical science: *naḥw*, *şarf*, *balāğā*, *°arud* and *qāfiyya*. He was also taught *mantiq* (logic) and apparently some general elements of the *fiqh* according to the *ḥanafi* school, as ṣayḥ Aḥmad was *ḥanafi*. Ṣayḥ °Abd al-Bāṣiṭ obtained the *iğāza* (permission to teach) from ṣayḥ Aḥmad in all the subjects he studied with him, and returned to Minās.

In his native town he started teaching Arabic, an activity he pursued until his death. After 45 years in Minās he moved to Addis Ababa where he taught for 15 more years. During his 60-years-long career, he had an enormous number of students: their list in the *tarğama* contains the names of almost all the most famous representatives of contemporary Ethiopian Muslim intelligentsia, including Muḥammad Wale, ṣayḥ Sa'īd b. Yusuf b. Maşşur, ṣayḥ Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm *imām* of the *ğāmi'* of Arāb Ganda in Dessie, ṣayḥ Sa'īd Ḥasan Şifā' al-Salulī, and many others.

cooperation with *Mu'assasat al-kutub al-taqāfiyya* of Beirut. The *tarğama* of ṣayḥ °Abd al-Bāṣiṭ b. Muḥammad b. Ḥasan al-Mināsī is on pages 6–11.

²⁹ “Ḥalīl of his times”: the reference is to Ḥalīl b. Aḥmad (d. 791 or 786 or 776) the most famous grammarian of Arabic: R. SELLHEIM, “Ḥalīl b. Aḥmad, al”, in: *EP*, IV, 962–64.

³⁰ “Sibawayh of his times”: Sibawayh (d. ca. 796) disciple of Ḥalīl, one of the great ancient theoreticians of Arabic grammar: M.G. CARTER, “Sibawayhi” in: *EP*, IX, 962–64.

³¹ Şihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Raslān al-Ramlī is the author of the *şafwat al-zubad* handbook of Law according to the *šāfi'ī* school in ca. 1000 *rağaz* verses, based on the *Kitāb al-zubad* by al-Bārizī (GAL: II: 96; GAL S II: 113).

³² Some biographical information about ṣayḥ *al-ḥāğğ* Aḥmad b. °Umar can be found in Muḥammad Wale 1425/2004: 85–93.

At a certain point, *šayḥ* °Abd al-Bāšit also had the opportunity to go to Gaddo to study *ḥadīṭ* with *ḥāğğ* Kabīr Aḥmad b. °Abd al-Raḥmān al-Dawwawī: under his guidance he studied parts of the *kutub al-sitta* and the *Ġāmi° al-šağir* by al-Suyuṭī (d. 1505)³³.

The *šayḥ* died in 1413/1992–3. In his long life he produced many written works, especially poetry in *rağaz* verse, most of which are still unpublished (see appendix 1 for a list).

Among them, one may find a *nazm* (versification) of the famous *Muqaddima al-ḥadramiyya* on the *šāfi°i fiqh*, the most common Law handbook in Ethiopia *šāfi°i* school; an *urğuzā* on °*aqīda* called *al-Durr al-farīd fi °aqīdat al-tawḥīd*; and another *urğuzā* criticizing *qāt* and its use. He wrote also in Amharic: the source mentions a text on virtues of prayer.

In the field of Arabic grammar he wrote a *nazm* of the famous *Marāḥ al-arwāḥ*; the *Urğuzat al-tašrif*, an *urğuzā muzdawwiğā* in 817 verses on verbal conjugation and derivation³⁴; and his masterpiece, *Madanī al-ḥabīb mimman yuwālī muğni al-labīb*³⁵. On this work he wrote also a commentary under the title *Kitāb minḥāğ al-uşul ilā bayān al-furu° bi-al-uşul* which was completed in 1401/1980–81. Muḥammad b. °Alī b. Ādam b. Musá, son of one of the students of *šayḥ* °Abd al-Bāšit, composed a huge commentary on *Madanī al-ḥabīb*, the above mentioned *Faṭḥ al-qarīb al-muğīb*.

The *Madanī al-ḥabīb* is formally an *urğuzā muzdawwiğā* made up of 2,276 verses. It is inspired by the famous *Muğni al-labīb*, and is in fact an abridged poetic version of the latter. Like Ibn Hišām's treatise, it is organized into eight chapters: 1) *al-mufradāt*; 2) *al-ğumla*; 3) *mā yušbih al-ğumla (al-zarf; ġarr wa-mağrur)*; 4) *al-mubtadā° wa-al-ḥabar, al-ḥāl and al-°atf*; 5) *al-ḥadf*; 6) correction of common errors of the grammarians; 7) *kayfiyyat al-i°rāb*; 8) general remarks on sentence construction.

Madanī al-ḥabīb thus covers all the main topics of Arabic grammar and deals with them in detail. As the text is conceived as a *nazm* (poetic version) of another *matn* book (in prose), every subject is treated directly, and in a simple and clear style. Of course, like many of these traditional grammatical handbooks in verse, *Madanī al-ḥabīb* suffers from its very condensed structure and from its tendency to use a very concise way to present the grammatical rules: each rule is actually contained within a single verse written in

³³ GAL II: 147; GAL S II: 183.

³⁴ This work was commented upon by Muḥammad b. °Alī b. Ādam. The commentary was published under the title *Faṭḥ al-kaṛīm al-laṭif šarḥ urğūzat al-tašrif* in 2005 in Addis Ababa by *Maktabat Muş°ab b. °Umayr* in co-operation with *Mu°assasat al-kutub al-ṭaqāfiyya* of Beirut.

³⁵ Published in Addis Ababa in 2003 by *Maktabat Muş°ab b. °Umayr* in co-operation with *Mu°assasat al-kutub al-ṭaqāfiyya* of Beirut.

a compendious style full of references to the Holy Book and of partial quotations of its passages, so that it is often very difficult to understand the grammatical content implied in the poetical text.

However, this is the common traditional way of exposition followed by grammarians to collect and explain grammar and syntax rules: the use of verse is also the standard, as it is believed to make it easier for the students to memorize the text.

Šayḥ °Abd al-Bāsiṭ with his *Madanī al-ḥabīb* exactly reproduces the structure and the content of his model, and in doing this he contributes to preservation of what one may term the ancient tradition of teaching Arabic grammar in Ethiopia.

The biography of the second šayḥ, Muḥammad Amīn b. °Abdallāh al-Itḡubī al-Hararī al-Muḥammadī, can be elicited from the short *tarğama* contained in the preface to his *al-Bākura al-ğiniyya min qiṭāf i°rāb al-āğurrumiyya*³⁶.

Šayḥ Muḥammad Amīn b. °Abdallāh b. Yusuf was born in 1348/1929–30 in the village of Buwayṭa. He is given also the *nisba* al-hararī (*minṭaqatan*; his region) and Karrī (*nāḥiyatan*; his area). As usual, he had his basic education in his native village and its surroundings until he was 14. He then started the traditional long tour of the main Muslim educational centres studying with several different teachers in the various subjects of traditional Islamic education.

First he attended the courses of šayḥ Abu Muḥammad Musà b. Aḥmad al-Adayyilī, *Sibawayḥ zamānih*³⁷, where he studied all the branches of Arabic grammar (*al-funun al-°arabiyya*), *naḥw*, *šarf*, *balāğā*, *°aruḍ*, as well as some logical-philosophical subjects, including *manṭiq*, *maqulāt* and *wad°*³⁸.

He subsequently stayed with šayḥ Madīd al-Adayyilī, with whom he broadened and deepened his knowledge of *naḥw* studying the *Muğīb al-nidā° °alā qatr al-nadā*, the *Fawākih al-ğaniyya* and other more detailed books on grammar (*muṭawwalāt al-naḥw*). He also studied some *tafsīr* (Koranic commentary) with this same teacher.

³⁶ Published in 2003 in Addis Ababa by *Maktabat Muš°ab b. °Umayr al-islāmiyya*. The *tarğama* is on pp. *alif-ğim*.

³⁷ It is worth noting that this šayḥ was given the same eulogizing epithet as šayḥ °Abd al-Bāsiṭ.

³⁸ It is interesting to note that in this case the teacher of Arabic grammar is also the teacher of logic and philosophy: the formal and theoretical aspects common to both subjects are apparently the reason for their being taught together and by the same person. Also manuscripts sometimes contain grammatical alongside logical treatises: see Drewes (1983: 77) for a manuscript including Ibn Malik's *Alfiyya* followed by al-Aḥḍarī's *Sullam* on logic. For a survey of the relationships between grammar and logic in Islam see MAHDI 2007.

Muḥammad Amīn continued his education studying *tafsīr* and more *‘arūd* with *šayḥ* Ibrāhīm b. Yāsīn al-Maḡatī (called *al-šayḥ al-ḥāwī mufasssīr zamānih*). In the second subject, he learned from *šayḥ* Ibrāhīm the *ḥāšiyat al-Damanḥurī al-kubrā ‘alā matn al-kāfi*³⁹, the commentary by al-Anṣārī on the *Manẓumat al-ḥazraḡiyya*⁴⁰, and the commentary by al-Šabbān on his *Manẓumat al-‘arūd*⁴¹. He also continued his education in logic and rhetoric.

He subsequently passed to the *faqīh šayḥ* Yusuf b. ‘Uṭmān al-Warqī with whom he studied Law according to the *šāfi‘ī* school on the commentary of Ġalāl al-Dīn al-Maḡallī on the *Minḥāḡ*⁴², the *Fath al-Waḥḥāb* by al-Anṣārī⁴³, and *Muḡnī al-muḥtāḡ* by al-ḥaṭīb⁴⁴. He continued his juridical education under the guidance of *šayḥ* Ibrāhīm al-Muḡḡī with whom he studied the *Fath al-Ġawād ‘alā al-Iršād* by Ibn Ḥaḡar al-Haytamī⁴⁵. His next teacher was *šayḥ al-ḥāfiẓ* Aḥmad Ibrāhīm al-Karrī, with whom he studied *ḥadīṯ* on the *Šaḥīḥayn* and *iṣṭilāḥāt*⁴⁶. He eventually completed his *cursus studiorum* with *šayḥ* ‘Abdallāh Nur al-Qarsī with whom he learned

³⁹The gloss by Muḥammad al-Damanḥūrī (d. 1871) on the already mentioned text of *al-Kāfi fi ‘ilmay al-‘arūd wa-al-qawāfi* by al-Qinaṯ: GAL II: 27; GAL S II: 22.

⁴⁰Zakariyyā³ b. Muḥammad b. al-Anṣārī (d. 1511 or 1520) is the author of a commentary on the *Rāmiza al-šāfiya fi ‘ilm al-‘arūd wa-al-qāfiya*, the famous work on prosody by Muḥammad al-Ḥazraḡī, also called *al-Qašida al-Ḥazraḡiyya*: GAL I: 100, 312; GAL S I: 545.

⁴¹Abū al-‘Irfān Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-šabbān (d. 1792) is the author of a much appreciated *manẓūma* on prosody called *al-Šāfiya al-kāfiya fi ‘ilm al-‘arūd*, on which he wrote also a commentary: GAL II: 288; GAL S II: 399–400.

⁴²Ġalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Maḡallī (d. 1459) wrote one of the many commentaries on the *Minḥāḡ al-ṭālibīn* by al-Nawawī (d. 1278), which is by far the most famous and most widely spread handbook of *šāfi‘ī fiqh* in the entire Horn of Africa: GAL I: 395; GAL II: 114; GAL S I: 681.

⁴³*Fath al-waḥḥāb* is the title of the commentary that Zakariyyā³ b. Muḥammad b. al-Anṣārī (s. note 40) wrote on the *Minḥāḡ al-ṭālibīn*: GAL I: 395; GAL S I: 681.

⁴⁴Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Širbīnī al-Ḥaṭīb (d. 1569) is the author of the *Muḡnī al-muḥtāḡ*, a commentary on the *Minḥāḡ al-ṭālibīn*: GAL I: 395; GAL II: 320; GAL S I: 681; GAL S II: 441.

⁴⁵Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Ibn Ḥaḡar al-Haytamī (or al-ḥaytamī: d. 1565) is the author of the *Fath al-ḡawād fi šarḥ al-Iršād*, which is a commentary on the famous Law handbook of the *šāfi‘ī* school called *Iršād al-ḡawī ilā masālik al-ḥāwī* by Ismā‘īl b. Abī Bakr al-Muqri² al-Yamanī (d. 1433). The latter is, in turn, an abridged version of the *Ḥāwī al-saḡīr fi al-fatāwā* by al-Qazwīnī (d. 1266; GAL I: 394; GAL II: 190; GAL II: 387–389; GAL S I: 679; GAL S II: 527–529).

⁴⁶The text also hints to the fact that he studied with some anonymous *šayḥ*-s the four *Sunan* and the *Muwatta‘a*² by Mālik b. Anas: this is particularly interesting as the *mālikī* school of Law is scarcely present in Ethiopia.

balāga on *Šurūḥ al-talḥiṣ* by al-Taftāzānī⁴⁷ and *uṣul al-fiqh* on the *Šarḥ ḡāmi° al-ḡawāmi°* by Ḡalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī⁴⁸.

At the end of his educational travels, he managed to collect a great number of *iḡāzāt* in all fields of Islamic learning.

Šayḥ Muḥammad Amīn left Ethiopia in 1398/1977–78 to Saudi Arabia where he still lives. He teaches in the *Dār al-ḥadīṯ al-ḥayriyya* in Aḡyād. He is also a “night teacher” in the *Masḡid al-ḥarām* in Mecca.

His works are many and they cover every field of Islamic learning (see appendix 2 for their list). Most of them are still unpublished. Here I consider in some detail only his grammatical production.

In the field of *nahw*, he expounded various aspects of the *Āḡurrumiyya* in three commentaries:

1) the already mentioned *al-Bākura al-ḡiniyya min qitāf i°rāb al-āḡurrumiyya*; 2) *al-Futuḥāt al-qayyimiyya fi °ilal wa-ḡawābiṯ al-āḡurrumiyya*; 3) *al-ḥarida al-bahiyya fi i°rāb amṯilat al-āḡurrumiyya*. He wrote a gloss (*ḥāšiya*) on the *Kašf al-niqāb °alā mulḥat al-i°rāb* and a series of instructions (*ta°limāt*) on the *I°rāb al-taqrīzāt* by °Uṯmān Šaṯā. He devoted two books to *šarf*, commenting on the famous *Lāmiyyat al-af°āl* by Ibn Mālīk: 1) *Manābil al-riḡāl wa-marādī° al-atfāl °alā lāmiyyat al-af°āl li-Ibn Mālīk*; 2) *Taḥnik al-atfāl °alā lāmiyyat al-af°āl li-Ibn Mālīk*⁴⁹. He also wrote a brief treatise on the morphological use of the vocative particles called *Hadīyyat ulī al-°ilm wa-al-inšāf fi bayān i°rāb al-munādī al-muḡāf*⁵⁰.

As the titles of his books show, šayḥ Muḥammad Amīn is essentially guided by a didactic spirit. At least two of his works are expressly addressed to youngsters. This pedagogical aim leads him to write very plain and clear prose commentaries to the most widely spread handbooks of Arabic grammar. In doing this, he apparently follows a modern approach to the subjects he is dealing with: the style he uses and the way he explains the sometimes very

⁴⁷ The great Islamic theologian Mas°ūd b. °Umar al-Taftāzānī (d. 1389 or 1390; GAL II: 215; GAL S II: 301–304) authored two commentaries (a longer one – *šarḥ muṯawwal* – and a shorter one – *šarḥ muḥtaṣar*) on the *Talḥiṣ al-miftāḥ* by al-Ḥaṯīb al-Qazwīnī (d. 1338; GAL II: 22; GAL S II: 15–16), which is a commentary of the third book (dealing with °ilm al-ma°ānī wa-al-bayān) of the *Miftāḥ al-°ulūm* by Yūsuf al-Sakkākī (d. 1229; GAL I: 294–296; GAL S I: 515–519).

⁴⁸ *Al-Badr al-tālī fi ḥall ḡam° al-ḡawāmi°* by the mentioned Ḡalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī is a much appreciated commentary on the *šāfi°i fiqh* handbook *Ḡam° al-ḡawāmi°* by Taḡ al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 1370; GAL II: 89–90; GAL II: 114; GAL S II: 105–107; GAL S II: 140).

⁴⁹ Published in 2005 in Addis Ababa by *Maktabat Mus°ab b. °Umayr* in cooperation with *Mu°assasat al-kutub al-taqāfiyya* of Beirut. The title inside the book is *Taḥnik al-atfāl bi-ma°ānī lāmiyyat al-af°āl li-Ibn Mālīk*. In the list contained in the *Bākūra al-ḡaniyya* the title is *Taḥnik al-atfāl bi-tarāḡim lāmiyyat al-af°āl*.

⁵⁰ Published in Addis Ababa together with the abovementioned *al-Bākūra al-ḡiniyya*.

confusing aspects of the traditional Arabic grammatical theories are very simple and far from rhetorical concerns. The use of prose is also very peculiar and somehow modern as it breaks with the traditional *nazm* composition: this is the path also followed by other contemporary authors, as the above mentioned Muḥammad b. Ḥāmī al-Dīn b. °Abd al-Šamad al-Buranī.

One may argue whether *šayḥ* Muḥammad Amīn has been influenced by modern educational methods which started spreading in Ethiopia like elsewhere in the Islamic world. The fact that he rewrote his two published commentaries while he was in Mecca⁵¹ may suggest that a modernizing influence was exerted on his approach to the grammatical subjects, since in Saudi Arabia contemporary pedagogical methods are very often applied to and intermingled with traditional educational syllabi and curricula.

Generally speaking, it is difficult to foresee today the evolution of traditional Islamic education in Ethiopia (and in the Horn as a whole) in the next few years, especially in the field of Arabic grammar. It is evident that the model of modern organized and standardized school and high school educational systems will be more and more influential on traditional Muslim centres of learning. The growth of institutionalized colleges (like the *Awelia* [*al-Awwaliyya*] College in Addis Ababa) seems to be a consequence of this kind of influence.

One may only hope that this modernizing tendency will not completely rule out the rich and amazing variety of the traditional corpus of handbooks, commentaries and glosses with their sometimes complicated but always fascinating style and structure, but, on the contrary, will help to keep this heritage alive and productive, so that it may continue to nourish the minds and spirits of students and learned men.

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⁵¹ This is clearly stated on page *tā* of the *targama* in the *Bākūra al-ḡaniyya* and on page 139 of the *Ṭaḥnīk al-atfāl*.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: List of the works by *šayḥ* °Abd al-Bāṣiṭ b. Muḥammad b. Ḥasan al-Mināsī as mentioned in his *tarğama*

al-Durr al-farīd fi °aqīdat al-tawḥīd;
Kitāb minhāğ al-uṣul ilā bayān al-furu° bi-al-uṣul;
Madanī al-ḥabīb mimman yuwālī muğnī al-labīb;
Nazm lubb al-uṣul fi fann al-uṣul;
Nazm marāḥ al-arwāḥ;
Nazm al-muqaddima al-ḥadramiyya;
Nazm nuḥbat al-fiker;
Urğuzā fi damm al-qāt;
Urğuzat al-taṣrīf.

Appendix 2: List of the works by *šayḥ* Muḥammad Amīn as mentioned in his *tarğama*

In grammar and syntax:

al-Bākura al-ğaniyya min qitāf i°rāb al-āğurrumiyya;
al-Futuḥāt al-qayyimiyya fi °ilal wa-dawābit al- āğurrumiyya;
Hadīyyat ulī al-°ilm wa-al-inṣāf fi bayān i°rāb al-munādī al-mudāf.
al-ḥarīda al-bahiyya fi i°rāb amṭilat al-āğurrumiyya;
Ḥāšiya °alā kaṣf al-niqāb °alā mulḥat al-i°rāb;
Ğawāhir al-ta°limāt °alā i°rāb al-taqrīzāt li-°Uṭmān Ṣaṭā;
Manābil al-riğāl wa-marādī° al-atfāl °alā lāmiyyat al-af°āl li-Ibn Mālik;
Taḥnik al-atfāl °alā lāmiyyat al-af°āl li-Ibn Mālik.

In *fiqh*:

Ḥāšiya °alā fath al-ğawād li-Ibn Hağar;
Sullam al-mi°rāğ °alā dibāğat al-Minhāğ li-al-Nawawī.

In °ilm al-ḥadīṭ:

Hidāyat al-tālīb al-mu°dim °alā dibāğat al-muslim (sic!);
al-Nahr al-ğarī °alā tarāğim wa-muṣkilāt al-buḥārī.

In *muṣṭalah*:

*al-Bākura al-ḥadīṭiyya °alā matn al-bayquniyya*⁵².

In *tafsīr*:

Mikṣāf al-zalmā °alā ṭayyibat al-asmā° (manzuma fi asmā° Allāh al-ḥusnā);
°Umdat al-tafsīr wa-al-mu°ribīn °alā kitāb rabb al-°ālamīn.

In °ilm al-riğāl:

Ḥulāṣat al-qawl al-mufhim fi tarāğim riğāl al-muslim (sic!).

Appendix 3: List of the handbooks used in traditional Islamic education according to our two sources

Şafwat al-zubad (= Šihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Raslān al-Ramlī, *Şafwat al-zubad*, 1000 rağaz verses based on the *Kitāb al-zubad* by al-Bārīzī);

⁵² Published in 2005 in Addis Ababa by *Maktabat Muṣ°ab b. °Umayr* in cooperation with *Mu°assasat al-kutub al-taqāfiyya* of Beirut.

Šarḥ Ġalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī °alā al-Minhāğ; (= Ġalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Maḥallī [d. 1459], commentary on *Minhāğ al-tālibīn* by al-Nawawī [d. 1278]);
Faṭḥ al-Wabbāb by al-Anṣārī (= Zakariyyā° b. Muḥammad b. al-Anṣārī [1511 or 1520], commentary on *Minhāğ al-tālibīn*);
Muğni al-Muḥtāğ by al-ḥaṭīb (= Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Širbīnī al-ḥaṭīb [d. 1569], *Muğni al-muḥtāğ* commentary on *Minhāğ al-tālibīn*);
Faṭḥ al-Ğawād °alā al-Iršād by Ibn Ḥağar al-Haytamī (= Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Ibn Ḥağar al-Haytamī [or al-Ḥayṭamī: d. 1565], *Faṭḥ al-Ğawād fi šarḥ al-Iršād*, commentary on *Iršād al-ğāwī ilā masālik al-ḥāwī* by Ismā°il b. Abī Bakr al-Muqri° al-Yamanī [d. 1433], abridged version of *al-ḥāwī al-sağīr fi al-fatāwā* by al-Qazwīnī d. 1266);
Šarḥ ġami° al-ğawāmi° by Ġalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī (= Ġalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī, *Al-Badr al-tālī° fi ḥall ġam° al-ğawāmi°*, commentary on *Ğam° al-ğawāmi°* by Tağ al-Dīn al-Subkī [d. 1370]).

Appendix 4: List of some of the main handbooks of Arabic grammar traditionally used in Islamic learning centres

Alfiyya and *Lāmiyyat al-af°āl* [or *Kitāb al-miftāḥ fi abniyyat al-af°āl*] by Ibn Mālīk (d. 1273);
Marāḥ al-arwāḥ by Aḥmad b. °Alī b. Mas°ud (beginning of 14th century);
Muğib al-nidā° °alā qaṭr al-nadā by °Affī al-Dīn °Alī b. Aḥmad al-Fākihī al-Makkī al-Šāfi°ī al-Naḥwī (d. 1564);
Muğni al-labīb °an kutub al-a°arīb by °Abdallāh b. Hišām (d. 1360);
Muḥtaṣar al-lum°a fi al-naḥw by Ibn al-Ğinnī (d. 1002);
Mulḥat al-i°rāb by al-Ḥarīrī (d. 1054);
al-Muqaddima al-Āğurrumiyya Abu Abdallāh Muḥammad b. Dāwud al-Šanhāğī b. Āğurrum (d. 1323);
Šarḥ al-masālik li-Alfiyyat Ibn Mālīk by Abu Muḥammad °Abdallāh b. °Abd al-Raḥmān b. °Aqīl;
Šarḥ al-tuḥfa al-wardiyya al-manzuma fi °ilm al-°arabiyya, by Zayn al-Dīn °Umar b. al-Wardī (d. 1349);
Ḥāšiyat al-Damanhurī al-kubrā °alā matn al-kāfi (= Muḥammad al-Damanhurī [d. 1871], gloss on the *al-Kāfi fi °ilmay al-°aruḍ wa-al-qawāfi* by al-Qina°ī);
Šarḥ al-Anṣārī °alā Manzumat al-ḥazrağiyya (= Zakariyyā° b. Muḥammad b. al-Anṣārī [d. 1511 or 1520], commentary on the *al-Rāmiza al-šāfiyya fi °ilm al-°aruḍ wa-al-qāfiyya al-Qašida al-ḥazrağiyya* by Muḥammad al-ḥazrağī);
Šarḥ al-Šabbān °alā Manzumat al-°aruḍ (= Abu al-°Irfān Muḥammad b. °Alī al-Šabbān [d. 1792], *manzuma* called *al-Šāfiyya al-kāfiyya fi °ilm al-°aruḍ*);
Šarḥ al-fawākih al-ğiniyya °alā mutammimat al-Āğurrumiyya by °Abdallāh b. Aḥmad al-Fākihī (d. 1564);
Šuruḥ al-talḥiṣ al-Taftāzānī (d. 1389 or 1390), *šarḥ muṭawwal* and *šarḥ muḥtaṣar* on *Talḥiṣ al-miftāḥ* by al-ḥaṭīb al-Qazwīnī (d. 1338).

Appendix 5: List of the handbooks of Arabic grammar currently available on book market in Ethiopia

Faṭḥ rabb al-bariyya °alā al-durra al-bahiyya nazm al-āğurrumiyya by Ibrāḥīm al-Bağurī (d. 1861), gloss on the *al-Durra al-bahiyya fi nazm al- āğurrumiyya* by Šihāb al-Dīn Yaḥyā al-°Imri°ī, d. 1568);

Mağmu'at al-šarf, including 1) *al-Šāfiya* by Ibn al-Ḥāğib (d. 1249)⁵³; 2) *Marāb al-arwāb* by Aḥmad b. °Alī b. Mas°ud (*floruit* beginning of 14th century)⁵⁴; 3) *Kitāb al-°Izzī* (*Kitāb tašrif al-Zanğānī* or *al-°Izzī* or *Mabādi° al-tašrif*) by °Izz al-Dīn Abu al-Faḍā°il °Abd al-Wahhāb b. Ibrāhīm al-ḥazrağī al-Zanğānī (*floruit* 1257)⁵⁵; 4) *al-Maqsud fī al-tašrif*, anonymous but attributed to Abu Ḥanifa⁵⁶, and 5) the anonymous series of verbal paradigms on the basis of the verb *našara* called *Amṭila muḥtalifa*.

Šarḥ al-sayyid Aḥmad Zaynī Daḥlān °alā matn al-āğurrumiyya, Addis Ababa: Nağāšī, safar 1421/2000, commentary on the *Āğurrumiyya* by Aḥmad Zaynī Daḥlān *šāfi°i mufti* of Mecca (d. 1886)⁵⁷;

Šarḥ al-fawākih al-ğaniyya °alā mutammimat al- āğurrumiyya by °Abdallāh b. Aḥmad al-Fākihī (d. 1564)⁵⁸, gloss on *Tatimmat* (or *Mutammimat al-āğurrumiyya*), commentary to *al-Āğurrumiyya* by Šams al-Dīn (or Ğamāl al-Dīn, according to Brockelmann) Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. °Abd al-Raḥmān al Ru°aynī al-ḥaṭṭāb al-Makkī al-Mālikī (d. 1547)⁵⁹, published in Addis Ababa in Rabī° al-awwal 1427/2006⁶⁰;

Ḥāšiyat al-°allāma Abī al-Nağā °alā šarḥ al-šayḥ ḥālid al-Azharī °alā matn al-Āğurrumiyya, Addis Ababa (n.d.)⁶¹;

Kašf al-niqāb °an muḥdirāt mulḥat al-i°rāb by °Abdallāh b. Aḥmad al-Fākihī (d. 1564), on the most complicated aspects of *i°rāb* (conjugation), Addis Ababa: Nağāšī 1427/2006⁶².

Muḥammad b. Ḥāmī al-Dīn b. °Abd al-Šamad al-Buranī, *al-Namir al-šāfi°i bi-šarḥ šawāhid al-kāfi°i fī °ilmay al-°arud wa-al-qawāfi°i*, Adaamaa/Nazret, Maktabat Badr 1427/2006.

Summary

The article deals with the contribution of two contemporary Muslim Ethiopian scholars (*šayḥ* °Abd al-Bāšit b. Muḥammad b. Ḥasan al-Mināsī and *šayḥ* Muḥammad Amīn b. °Abdallāh al-Itiyubī al-Hararī al-Muḥammadī) to the study of Arabic grammar. The position of this subject in the curricula of traditional Islamic education in Ethiopia is shortly described from both a diachronic and a synchronic perspective. The biography of the two learned men is analyzed with a special emphasis on the different phases of their training and on the literary outcomes of their activity. Finally, the main handbooks used in the Islamic educational centres in Ethiopia are listed to give the reader a clear idea of the frame in which the aspiring *šayḥ*-s and their masters study and teach.

⁵³ See GAL I: 303–306; GAL S I: 531–539; H. FLEISCH, “Ibn Ḥāğib”, in: *EI*², III, 781.

⁵⁴ GAL II: 21; GAL S II: 14.

⁵⁵ See GAL I: 283; GAL S I: 497–8.

⁵⁶ GAL S II: 657.

⁵⁷ GAL II: 499–500; GAL S II: 810–811; GAL I: 238; GAL S I: 334. The original book was printed in Cairo at the famous Mušṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī printing press in ḍū al-qa°da 1372 (August 1953).

⁵⁸ GAL II: 380, GAL S II: 512. The original edition was printed in Cairo at *Mušṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī* printing press in 1343/1924–25.

⁵⁹ GAL II: 238, GAL S II: 334.

⁶⁰ Original book printed in Cairo at *Mušṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī* in 1343/1924–25. First edition Cairo 1298/1880–81.

⁶¹ Original book printed in Cairo 1343/1924–25 at *Mušṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī*.

⁶² GAL S I: 489; GAL S II: 512. Book originally published in Cairo at *Mušṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī* printing press in 1343/1924–25.