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Contemporary and Historical Muslim Scholars as Portrayed by the Ethiopian Islamic Press in the 1990's

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After the fall of the Derg regime in 1991 Islamic press flourished in Ethiopia. Several different magazines started to be published in Amharic for the Muslim community. This periodical press mirrored the wishes, the fears, the social and political needs and requests of Ethiopian Muslims¹.

Particularly, the monthly *Bilal*, which took its name from the first *mu'addin* in Islamic history, the Abyssinian freedman Bilāl b. Rabāḥ² was the first Islamic magazine to be founded in post-Derg Ethiopia in Mäskäräm 1985 E.C. (September 1993 A.D.). It was conceived and presented as a bilingual publication, in Amharic and Arabic, however, an overwhelming majority of its articles were in Amharic.

Bilal was published and distributed by the private firm “Nejashi Islamic Printing Company” (*Näḡaši Islamik Asättāmi Dərəḡḡət*)³, whose name recalled the Ethiopian king who welcomed, in Abyssinia, Muslim refugees escaping the persecution of pagans in Mekka 615 A.D., and, according to Islamic tradition, subsequently accepted Islam⁴. The magazine editor in chief, starting with the third issue, was the renowned Wallo scholar, ḥāḡḡ Muḥāmmād Wāle⁵ ḥāḡḡ Aḥmād ‘Umār, disciple of ḥāḡḡ ‘Abdālbaṣiṭ, Māḥammād and of ṣayḥ Muḥāmmād Sani Ḥabib, *imām* of the al-Nūr mosque in Addis Ababa⁶; his first assistant editor was Ġāmil Šarif Šayd,

¹ For an assessment of Islamic literature and press and in the post-Derg period see HUSSEIN AHMED 1994b, 1998, 1998b and 1998c. A list of Ethiopian Islamic newspapers and magazines can be found in O’FAHEY 2003, pp. 65–68.

² For some information about this famous personage see ‘ARAFAT art. in EI² s. v. *Bilāl*.

³ In Arabic the firm was called *Mu’assasat al-Naḡāšī li-al-tawzī‘, wa-al-taṣḡilāt al-islāmiyya*, while in English the name *Nejashi Islamic Publisher and Audiovisual Services* or *Nejashi Studio* was apparently used. In the books printed by the same firm we may also find the Amharic denomination *Näḡaši islamik asattaminna yä’odiyovižewal agälgelot dərəḡḡət*.

⁴ See for instance VAN DONZEL art. in EI² s. v. *al-Naḡāšī*.

⁵ In Arabic alphabet written *Walī* or *Walá*, as the orthography used in the magazine does not distinguish final *yā’* from *alif maqṣūra*.

⁶ Ḥāḡḡ Muḥammad Wāle Aḥmād authored various articles of *Bilal*, books and booklets in Arabic and Amharic which are listed in O’FAHEY 2003 p. 59. To that list one should add *Yäḥāḡḡanna ‘umra guzo sāna sər‘at bā’arattu mähhabočč* (title in Arabic:

then from the fourth issue on was Zākāriya Muḥammād Yasin, while the publishing house and media company manager was Sāʿid Muḥammād Nurye⁷. The Nāḡaši firm also opened and ran a shop near the Anwar mosque in Addis Ababa to sell Islamic literature and religious audio and video tapes mainly in Amharic and Arabic, but also in English, Tigrinya and Oromo⁸.

20 issues of *Bilal* were published. The last issue of the series was the one sent forth in Ṭərr 1987 E.C. (January 1995 A.D.), 28 months⁹ after the foundation of the periodical¹⁰. Many issues of the magazine apparently remained unsold, thus creating a unsustainable economic situation for the publisher who subsequently was forced to stop the publication¹¹. However, in its two-year life, *Bilal* definitively imposed itself as the most important, serious, and authoritative periodical publication in the panorama of the Ethiopian Islamic press.

Other magazines did exist, but they all were short-lived, locally oriented, scarcely distributed and, generally, qualitatively poor in content and

Kayfiyyat adāʾ al-ḥāḡḡ wa-al-ʿumra ʿalā al-madāhib al-arbaʿa; in the Arabic front page the author is given also the title of *ṣayḥ*) published in Addis Ababa in 1412h/1991–92 A.D., in which he briefly explains, following apparently the famous *ṣāfiʿī* scholar *imām* al-Nawawī (d. 1277 A.D.), the way how to perform the pilgrimage to Mekka according to the four different legal schools accepted in sunni Islam. HUSSEIN AHMED 1998, p. 90 mentions also Muḥammad Wāle’s Amharic translation of al-Nawawī’s collection of *ḥadīṭ*, *Riyāḍ al-ṣāliḥīn*.

⁷ *Nūrī* or *Nūrā*, in Arabic script.

⁸ Among the books printed and distributed by Nejashi Publisher, we may mention here: *Yāʾimam Nāwāwī arba ḥadis* (an abridged translation of the well-known collection of forty sayings of the Prophet Muhammad by the above-mentioned *imām* al-Nawawī (*al-Arbaʿīn al-nawawīyya*); *Al-Tāwḥīd. Islamawī ṣənsā ḥassab* (an Amharic version of *al-ʿAqaʿid al-islamiyya*, a presentation of the fundamentals of Islamic faith by the contemporary Muslim scholar al-Sayyid Sābiq who died in 2000); in Oromo we may find: *Hundeeḡwan Aqiida*, on the basic elements of Islamic creed and *Takkaa ol fuudha seera islaamatti*, on matrimonial rules in Islam (O’FAHEY 2003, p. 40: the author of this book is Mahammad Xiyyo). Long lists containig titles of Islamic religious audio and video tapes in English, Amharic, Tigrinya and Oromo were often printed in the reverse front page of many issues of *Bilal*.

⁹ Quite obviously, no issue was published in the month of Pagumen. Each issue is dated according to the Ethiopian Christian calendar in the Amharic front page and to the Islamic calendar in the Arabic section.

¹⁰ HUSSEIN AHMED 1998, p. 102, this last issue (number 1 of the third year dated Ṭərr 1987 E.C.) came out very late in January 1995.

¹¹ In issue 3, 1, pp. 21–23, the difficulties which *Bilal* had to face are explained in detail in a sort of written dialogue with the readers. Here we can not deal with the contents of this very sharp discussion, which sheds light on the causes that forced *Bilal* to close.

graphical shape¹². The kind of study that Hussein Ahmed did for the weekly *al-ʿAlam*¹³, that is, a careful analysis of the subjects discussed in *Bilal* issues and of the evolution of the editorial line of the magazine, is beyond the scope of this paper.

However, even a very superficial reader can notice that in the issues of *Bilal*, the history of Islam is always an important topic. Especially, the long-debated problem of the origin of Islam in Ethiopia was extensively discussed, since it was felt as deeply connected to the reconstruction of the collective identity of Ethiopian Muslims and their relationship with their Christian countrymen¹⁴.

As history seems to be a major interest of the editorial staff of *Bilal*, in an effort to enhance the knowledge which Ethiopian Muslims have of their own community, the magazine devoted great attention also to the presentation to the readers of some of the famous exponents of Islam in Ethiopia. In a quite regular survey published in *Bilal* under the title *tāwawāqu* (make acquaintance), the magazine frequently offered its public the biographies of some of the most eminent representatives of Ethiopian Islam in the recent past.

Here we would like to summarize the content of five of these biographical articles published in *Bilal*. In doing so, we will try to collect out of them not only a deal of useful historical, biographical and cultural data, but also some hints as to the process of reconstruction of the historical consciousness of Ethiopian Muslims in the first lustrum of the 90ties of the past century. In fact, by creating a gallery of portraits of pious, brilliant, learned and brave exponents of Islam in Ethiopia, *Bilal* aimed at several objectives:

to show the importance and the solidity of the Muslim presence in Ethiopia, against the common idea that Ethiopia is only a Christian country; to denounce the wrongs suffered by the Muslims, especially by their scholars, during the Imperial and the Derg regimes; to highlight the positive role played by Muslims in the historical evolution of Ethiopia and of the region of the Horn as a whole; and finally, to give the readers a set of exemplary models of Ethiopian Muslims in which modern Islamic communities

¹² HUSSEIN AHMED 1998, p. 104, says that the same publishing house of *Bilal* started in April 1993 a second magazine, called just *Naḡāšī*, under the editorship of *Hāḡḡ* Muḥammad Wāle Aḥmād, but managed to send forth only two issues. HUSSEIN AHMED 1998, pp. 98–103, makes a rapid survey of the form and content of some of *Bilal* issues. Other magazines like *al-Risāla*, *Daʿwa*, *al-Manār*, *Salām*, and *Aḍān* are mentioned and briefly analyzed in HUSSEIN AHMED 1998 pp. 103–105 and in HUSSEIN AHMED 1998b. The Markaz al-Qurʾān of Dese published a magazine called *Furqān*, whose only first issue came out in Mäggabit 1985 (March 1993).

¹³ HUSSEIN AHMED 1994.

¹⁴ An analysis of a series of historical articles published in *Bilal* is in CARMICHAEL 1996.

might find a source of inspiration for their daily behaviour and a guidance for their further development.

In particular, the model offered to the Ethiopian Muslims in this gallery of portraits, seems to be inspired by the classical Islamic ideal of the *‘ālim ‘āmil*, the active scholar¹⁵, who combines in his person the deep knowledge, the devotion to learning of the erudite, with the energy, the tenacity and the boldness of the teacher and fighter. It is thanks to these kind of people that Islam successfully managed to survive through all past difficulties and to keep its own peculiar identity almost intact.

As said before, the major part of the contents of *Bilal* is in Amharic. Nevertheless, almost every issue also has an Arabic section, and an Arabic front page, which is naturally the rear last page for the Amharic reader. It is interesting to note that the Arabic section of *Bilal* is always shorter than the Amharic one and significantly varies in extent from issue to issue (from 10 pages in the first issue 1.1 to no pages in issue 2.6). From a very rapid survey, it appears moreover that the Arabic section of *Bilal* never contains a simple, literal translation of a selection of the Amharic articles, as one may surmise. On the contrary, only rarely may we find in it a kind of summary of the content of the Amharic part. Mostly, we find that an article is entitled as an Amharic one, but shows at the same time a certain peculiarity of its own. Quite often we find an Arabic article whose text has no correspondence at all in the Amharic section. These noteworthy differences are probably explainable by the fact that the public target of the Arabic section is composed exclusively of scholars who have the necessary language skills to read and understand the language of the Koran. This accounts for the reduced dimensions and for the more engaged – so to speak – contents of the section.

As far as the biographical articles are concerned, only two of the five texts we are going to present hereafter lack the Arabic version. In all the remaining cases, the Arabic versions seem to have been conceived as a sort of more erudite and, in at least one case, a more detailed text which had to spark the interest of the scholar and satisfy the more refined curiosity of the learned¹⁶. Also the linguistic style of these biographical articles tries to sketchily reproduce some of the typical manners of expression of the traditional Arabic biographical and hagiographical literature (*manāqib*). Moreover, since the reading pub-

¹⁵ The model of the learned who puts his knowledge into practise is sanctioned by a great number of prophetic sayings and epitomized in a *ḥadīṭ* according to which Muhammad said: “Someone will not become a learned man unless he acts with his learning” (“Lā yakūnu al-marʾu ‘āliman ḥattā yakūna bi-‘ilmihi ‘āmilan”; transmitted by Ibn Ḥibbān in *Rawdat al-‘uqalā* and by al-Bayhaqī).

¹⁶ This is evident in *ṣayḥ* Sāyid Muḥamād Sadiq’s biography, whose *nasab* (genealogy) is given only in the Arabic section.

lic is numerically restricted but, because of its language knowledge, it is at the same time more religiously aware – as one might say –, some data find their more appropriate collocation in the Arabic than in the Amharic section.

It is worth while noting that four of the five learned men, whom we will discuss, are from Wallo and the fifth studied there for a long time. This could be explained by the fact that *Bilal* was edited by a Wallo scholar, who desired to highlight the leading role played by his native region in the life of Islam in Ethiopia. In fact, the fundamental importance of the Wallo region as an educational and cultural centre in Islamic Ethiopia can not be underestimated. From this point of view, these articles give us some information on the location of the main schools of Islamic culture during the past century, on the topics of the educational career followed by pupils and students and on the textbooks most widely used by teachers. The data we thus collect may supplement the study on the traditional Islamic education in Wallo already made by Hussein Ahmed¹⁷.

In the following, we will present the scholars we selected in a simple chronological order and we will base our translation on the Amharic text, except for the text on Muḥammād Sani Ḥabīb, for whom we prefer the more detailed Arabic text to the Amharic one. A reference to the Arabic, if possible, will however always be made, by making use of the biographical data sometimes contained only in the Arabic text. Some rapid linguistic observations will underline some peculiar lexical usages of Arabic loanwords or Amharic calques on an Arabic basis.

1. *Ḥaḡḡi Bāšər* Ali Tiḡāni (1859–1973 A.D.)

The biographical article published in *Bilal*¹⁸ is based on the historical report given to the magazine by the son of the *šayḥ*, *ḥaḡḡi* Muḥammād Bāšər, who is presented as the very best source of knowledge of his father's life, which has sometimes been narrated in an uncorrect way.

Ḥaḡḡi Bāšər was born in 1858 A.D. in the village of Čullənqe in Yäḡḡu – Wäldiya (Wallo), from Ali Ḥaydār and Rahma Adām. As his *nisba* shows, he was a member of the Tiḡāniyya brotherhood, founded by the famous North African scholar and saint Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Tiḡānī (1737–1815), and well established in all the Maghrib, in Sudan and in West Africa.¹⁹ The Tiḡāniyya has been strongly present in Ethiopia, particularly in Jimma where, according to Trimingham, it was brought by the local scholar *al-*

¹⁷ HUSSEIN AHMED 1988.

¹⁸ *Bilal*, 2, 3 (1986 E.C.), pp. 20–21 and 31. This article has no Arabic version.

¹⁹ For the biography of al-Tiḡānī, the history and principles of his *ṭarīqa* see ABUN-NASR 1965.

ḥaḡḡ Yūsif at the beginning of the XXth century²⁰, and in Gomma Gera and Guma and among Banī Šanqūl, where it arrived from the bordering Sudan.

As for Wallo, as we shall see, it was *ḥaḡḡi* Bāšər who introduced the brotherhood, to which he had been initiated in Sudan, spreading it to Borana Warra Himano and Warra Babbo²¹. As a child, *ḥaḡḡi* Bāšər studied the Qurʾān in Čullənqe under the guidance of his first teacher, *šayḥ* ʿUmar, and he managed not only to master the simple reading of the sacred text²², but also to learn it by heart²³. Once he finished this basic level of learning, he went in Wārābabbo, to the village of Iḡärsa, where he studied Islamic jurisprudence according to the Ḥanafī school²⁴, with *šayḥ* Ali Surur²⁵. Moreover in the village of Tatessa, he deepened his linguistic skills in Arabic, by studying Arabic grammar *naḥw* (morphology and syntax), *balāḡa* (eloquence) and *badiʿ* (metaphors and other rethorical expressions)²⁶, under the guidance of *šayḥ* Ali Bušra. *Ḥaḡḡi* Säʿid Ibrahim (the *šayḥ* of Čalle) and *ḥaḡḡi* Abdulwāhab (the *šayḥ* of Oda)²⁷ were studying together with him at that time in the same school and with the same teacher. After having visited other learning centres in the region, he went to Sudan, where he studied in Khartoum and Oum Durman. In Sudan he entered the Tiḡāniyya brotherhood, by the intermediation of Saʿid Muḥammad ibn al-Muḥtār. He thus started teaching in his turn the tiḡānī *awrād*²⁸ and spent half of his life teaching and acquiring more and more Islamic learning, especially in the field

²⁰ TRIMINGHAM 1952, p. 246. *Al-ḥaḡḡ* Yūsif was initiated to the Tiḡāniyya when he was on pilgrimage in Mecca by the West African *muqaddam* of the brotherhood Alfa Hāšim. Once back in Jimma, he managed to bring into the *ṭarīqa* the sultan Abba Dula, so paving the way for the further spread of the brotherhood. CERULLI 1933, p. 96 maintains that the Tiḡāniyya was brought to Jimma by a *šayḥ* coming from Sudan.

²¹ HUSSEIN AHMED 2001, pp.70–71.

²² The text uses the Amharic form *aqqārar*, derived from the verb *qarrā*, calqued on Arabic *qaraʿa*. *Aqqārar* is explained in the article by current Amharic *tära nəbab*.

²³ *Baqalaččäw hafzäw* (calqued on the Arabic verb *ḥafizā*) and explained in Amharic as *šämdädäw*.

²⁴ According to HUSSEIN AHMED 2001, pp. 66–67, the Ḥanafī school of law is the second strongest among Muslims in Wallo, and predominates in highland areas. The history of the propagation of the different Islamic juridical currents in Ethiopia is still very uncertain.

²⁵ HUSSEIN AHMED 1988, p. 101 mentions an ʿUmar Surūr, teacher in Lagot in Warra Himano: we do not know the relationship between the two learned men.

²⁶ HUSSEIN AHMED 1988, pp. 100–101, shows almost the same curriculum studiorum.

²⁷ HUSSEIN AHMED 1988, pp. 101–102, refers to this *šayḥ* of Oda (ʿAbd al-Wahhāb ʿAbd al-Ğalīl Muṣṭafā, underlying that he was a famous ḥanafī teacher who had several hundreds of students under him.

²⁸ *Awrād* is the plural of the Arabic word *wird* which means the set of Koranic and traditional invocations used in mystical ceremonies by each brotherhood.

of *ḥadīt*. Beside his deep knowledge of Islamic religion and culture, *ḥaǧǧi* Bāšər was a very fervent (*qānaʿi*) defender of his faith. This eagerness probably brought him back to his country from Sudan and pushed him to clash with the imperial regime of Ḥaylā Šəllase.

The article mentions in particular three different circumstances in which *ḥaǧǧi* Bāšər was directly involved in military operations against Imperial troops.

The first was in 1352 A.H./1933–34 A.D. when *ḥaǧǧi* Bāšər guided an Islamic movement²⁹ in the Raya region, in a place called Mehone. According to our source, due to lack of organization and inferiority in number, the Muslim forces were defeated and *ḥaǧǧi* Bāšər and his followers were compelled to flee and hide. Negus Ḥaylā Šəllase promised a reward to the one who would deliver *ḥaǧǧi* Bāšər to the authorities, but the *ḥaǧǧi* and his companions were able to remain concealed for four years. Four months before the Italian invasion in Ethiopia, in the same spot, Mehone, *ḥaǧǧi* Bāšər prepared once again to fight, but at the last moment, for unknown reasons, he withdrew.

In 1947 A.D. *ḥaǧǧi* Bāšər went to battle for the third time. He prepared a more organized alliance of local personalities, who signed an agreement to fight against Ḥaylā Šəllase. Among the participants of this group there were, significantly, not only Muslims but also Christians. The son of *ləǧ* Iyāsu and the son of Tayyā Guləllāte, Malāku Tayyā were part of the group. Famous Yāǧǧu Muslim exponents as *ato* Muḥammād Gəbril and *šayḥ* Sumale were also involved in the preparatives for the battle. According to the data given in the article, the conspirators gathered 300 rifles and ammunition. As the organization of the revolt was completed, a dispute arose in the ranks of the conspirators on the date to start the fight. At this moment, a member of the plotting coalition, whose name the magazine does not reveal, betrayed his comrades and reported the whole affair to the Imperial authorities. This informant went up to Addis Abeba to inform the Negus himself, hoping to obtain a reward. Contrary to his expectations, this delator was convicted to 3 years of jail as he too was found guilty of conspiracy.

Even though the plot was uncovered, *ḥaǧǧi* Bāšər and his companions decided not to give up and they begun the battle. The forces led by *ḥaǧǧi* Bāšər reported a momentary success. At that point, the ruler of Yāǧǧu, *däǧǧazmačč* Gäläta, sent supplementary troops and the rebels were easily defeated, many of them were killed, and the others were dispersed. *Ḥaǧǧi* Bāšər decided to surrender to the Imperial army, so that his companions who managed to survive and to flee after the defeat could avoid further persecution. He was arrested and, following his request, he was transferred to Addis Abeba where he was put in jail. He spent three years and eight months in the Alām bäqqaññ

²⁹ The text uses the words *yätəǧəl ənqəsəqqase*, movement of fight.

prison in Addis Abeba, and then the Supreme Court of Justice sentenced him to death. As the death penalty had to be confirmed by a personal decision of the Negus, *haḡḡi* Bāšər was summoned by Ḥaylā Šəllase.

The article reports at a certain length the dialogue between *haḡḡi* Bāšər and the Negus. The pious Muslims said that he did not want to overthrow the Emperor's government, and that his aim was only to see the right of the Islamic population respected. He was confident in God, the only one who has the power to make people die. So even if the tribunal had decided to execute him, if God wanted, he would remain alive, as a human tribunal can not change the divine decree. Ḥaylā Šəllase was deeply impressed by this statement of courage and fear of God. He stood up and immediately ordered to set *haḡḡi* Bāšər free. This Imperial personal step was surprising and shocking. As the magazine says: "Allah set him free!"³⁰. *Haḡḡi* Bāšər was released and, reaching the age of 115, died in 1973 A.D. He is buried in the Islamic cemetery of Kolfe.

The article stresses the fact that the struggle carried out by *haḡḡi* Bāšər and his companions was a cause of pride for all Muslims even though he was criticized for his lack of organization and for the inadequacy of his military capability. Regardless, the pious, the learned and the charitable character of *haḡḡi* Bāšər was generally recognized and appreciated³¹.

2. Šayḥ ʿIsa Ḥamza Alqatbare³² (1858–1941 E.C.)

The text presented to the readers by *Bilal*³³ is intended by the editorial office of the magazine to be only a short survey of the life of the *šayḥ*, written with the collaboration of the former vice chairman of the Ethiopian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (*YäItyopya yäəsləmənna guddayočč*

³⁰ In the text of the article a veiled hint may be found to the rumors that the sudden liberation of *haḡḡi* Bāšər probably arose among Muslims in Ethiopia. Suspicions on his loyalness to the Islamic faith are neatly dismissed as *tärät*.

³¹ It is worth while mentioning that on page 31 at the end of the article, a photograph of a decree of the Ministry of Justice apparently containing the conviction of *haḡḡi* Bāšər is badly reproduced.

³² HUSSEIN AHMED 1998, p. 99. The Amharic form Alqatbare resembles an Arabic *nisba* from Qatbare, the place where *šayḥ* ʿIsa founded his educational centre. In Arabic the magazine writes ʿĪsā al-qatbarā, but as the current orthography of the periodical does not distinguish alif *maqṣūrā* from *yāʾ*, we do not know the exact reading. HASSELBLATT 1974 contains a description of Qatbare and of the celebrations which take place there on occasion of the Mawlid.

³³ *Bilal*, 1, 4 (1985 E.C.), pp. 25–27. The brief Arabic version of the biography is published on p. 6 of the Arabic section of the magazine under the tile "Nubḍa min ḥayāt al-šayḥ ʿĪsā al-qatbarā".

käffatännä gubae) *hāḡḡ* Aḥmād Šafi and some of the members of his family, especially *ato* Muḥammād Wāfa *hāḡḡ* Sulṭan ʿIsa³⁴.

Šayḥ ʿIsa was born in 1858 E.C. from Ḥamza Bāṭure and Aḡyat Geswät in the *qābāle* of Abanḡa Kurəy in the region of Əža, one of the *səbat bet* of Gurage. He studied the Koran in Mäsqän under the guidance of the *šayḥ* of Bidara and then in Gädäbano with *šayḥ* Säʿid. According to the short Arabic version of our source biography it was *šayḥ* Säʿid Ḥaw, who is called “al-ʿālim al-kabīr al-maḡdūb al-šahīr” (the great alim and the famous mad saint)³⁵ and other scholars who taught *šayḥ* ʿIsa, that belonged to the legal school of al-Šāfiʿī³⁶, Islamic esoteric knowledge (*ʿilm al-zāhir*). Once he completed his basic education, he started travelling seeking to acquire a wider knowledge of the traditional Islamic disciplines. So he went to Yəfat Čänno where he studied with *šayḥ* Abbayye. There he heard about the *šayḥ* of Dana, northeast of Wäldiya, in Yäḡḡu³⁷ whose fame was growing. He thus stopped his studies and set out to Dana to visit *šayḥ* Čämalu Daniy (this is the name of the *šayḥ* of Dana mentioned in the Amharic text), who impressed him with his learning and attitude. After this *ziyāra*³⁸ to the Daniy Sani (this is how the Amharic text calls the *šayḥ*)³⁹, *šayḥ* ʿIsa went back to Čänno and finished his curriculum studiorum. He deepened his Islamic learning and he became a full-fledged *ʿālim*. He then decided to rejoin *šayḥ* Daniy Sani in Dana, who having proved his preparation, granted him the permit to teach.

As for this connection of *šayḥ* ʿIsa with the renowned cultural centre of Dana, a number of questions arise. The centre is linked to the name of its founder, *šayḥ* Aḥmad b. Ādam, commonly known with the nickname Daniyy Awwal, the first *šayḥ* of Dana, who was born in Bataho and died in 1903 A.D. in Anna, where his shrine became a destination for pious visitors⁴⁰. Šayḥ

³⁴ Muḥammād Wāfa should apparently be the grandson of *šayḥ* ʿIsa, being the son of the *šayḥ*’s son Sulṭan.

³⁵ For a definition of the concept of *maḡdūb* among Islamic holy men see GRAMLICH art. in EI² s. v. *Maḡdūb* and DOLS 1992, pp. 366–422.

³⁶ The *maḡhab* of al-Šāfiʿī is by far the predominant legal school in Ethiopia and in the whole region (Somalia and East Africa). See TRIMINGHAM 1952, pp. 231–32.

³⁷ On this famous Islamic cultural centre in Wällo see HUSSEIN AHMED 1988, pp. 102, 2001, pp. 88 and 90–91.

³⁸ The Amharic text uses the verb *zäyyärä*, derived from the Arabic word *ziyāra*. The *ziyāra* is the pious visit to a *šayḥ* or, more frequently, to his shrine, performed on different religious occasions or festivals.

³⁹ The expression Daniy Sani is to be understood as the “second *šayḥ* of the school of Dana”, i. e. the successor of its founder. The Amharic *sani* is to be derived from classical Arabic *tānī*: the use of *s* to render the unvoiced interdental *t* seems to be due to an Egyptian classicizing *naḥwī* pronunciation.

⁴⁰ O’FAHEY 2003 pp. 47–48.

Aḥmad b. Ādam, whose collection of poems in praise of the Prophet (*rāmsā*) is wide spread among Muslims in Ethiopia, was a disciple of *ṣayḥ* Ġamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Annī⁴¹, who initiated him to the Qādiriyya brotherhood.

In Anna, *ṣayḥ* Aḥmad b. Ādam (Daniy Awwal) was apparently succeeded by Muḥammad Yāsīn, who should thus be the *ṣayḥ* Daniy Sani (the second one) and who, according to Trimingham, died in 1924. The son of Muḥammad Yāsīn, Muḥammad Zayn, who died in 1975, was in his turn the *ṣayḥ* of Dana, perhaps therefore to be called *ṣayḥ* Daniy Salis (the third), and was visited by Hasselblatt in 1972⁴².

So, according to the available data, the Amharic text is clearly in error in calling *ṣayḥ* Daniy Sani by the name of Ġamālu. It seems that the anonymous writer mistook the *ṣayḥ* of Dana with Ġamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad, the *ṣayḥ* of Anna. Moreover, in the Arabic version of the text, it is said that *ṣayḥ* ʿIsa “took the noble *Ṭarīqa al-Qādiriyya* from *ṣayḥ* Aḥmad b. Ādam al-Dānī”⁴³, who was the Daniyy Awwal, thus contradicting completely the affirmation of the Amharic biography.

Even if we lack full certainty, due to the evident inaccuracy of the Amharic article, it seems sounder to take for good the Arabic presentation of the facts, which fits very well also from the chronological point of view. We are thus inclined to think that *ṣayḥ* ʿIsa went to Dana the first time to meet Aḥmad b. Ādam (Daniyy Awwal). He then came back to him once again and obtained the grant of his prestigious *iğāza*, who authorized him to teach in his name. During one of these two stays, *ṣayḥ* Aḥmad initiated *ṣayḥ* ʿIsa to the Qādiriyya brotherhood.

With the *iğāza* of the *ṣayḥ* of Dana, *ṣayḥ* ʿIsa became a teacher in the village of Lahme, near Čanno. He then went back to his native Gurage land and settled in the *kalal* of Mafed, in the *wārāda* of Ĥnnāmor. To spread Islamic

⁴¹ Ġamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad of Anna in Rayya, teacher, writer and holy man, died in 1882 at Korāme in Yäğgu (HUSSEIN AHMED 1988, p. 102; HUSSEIN AHMED 2001, pp. 69, 70, 90, 108, 175 and O’FAHEY 2003 pp. 51–52). He was a disciple of Muḥammad b. *faqīh* Zubayr, who initiated him to the qādiriyya brotherhood, he subsequently brought into Rayya. Ġamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Annī is traditionally considered a very prolific author. In particular, one of his works not previously mentioned in sources, is a printed edition of three collections of *ṣalāwāt ʿalā al-nabī* (prayers for the Prophet) which appeared at an unknown moment in Addis Ababa at the Addis Mattämiya Bet. The book contains the following titles: *Rawḍat al-asrār fī al-ṣalāt ʿalā al-nabī al-muḥtār* (main title of the collection), the *al-Tuḥfa al-rabbāniyya bi-al-ṣalāt ʿalā imām al-ḥadra al-quḍsiyya* and finally the *Miftāḥ al-madad fī al-ṣalāt wa-al-salām ʿalā rasūl allāh al-sanad*.

⁴² HASSELBLATT 1972, pp. 17–18.

⁴³ The Arabic text speaks of *ṣayḥ* Aḥmad b. Ādam in a very commendatory way, giving him the attributes of “*al-ṣayḥ al-fardānī wa-al-ʿallāma al-rabbānī*” (the unique *ṣayḥ* and the divine learned scholar).

learning in the region, *šayḥ* ʿIsa felt that a permanent base where he could concentrate all his activities was necessary. He thus founded an Islamic centre of learning, teaching and religious promotion in Qatbare, about ten kilometres from Wälqite. The Islamic foundation of Qatbare soon became a centre of study of *tawḥīd* (Islamic theology), *ḥadīṭ*, *fiqh* and also of *dīkr* and *awrād* (mystical practices). There it was also possible for Muslims to perform Friday's community prayer and the two ʿīd-s ceremonies.

In the frame of the activities realized by *šayḥ* ʿIsa to improve the life conditions of the Muslims in Ethiopia, he went to Addis Ababa to ask for the permission for Muslims to marry according to the Islamic law. Ḥaylā Səllase, who was at that time still the heir to the throne, did not answer at first to this request. But afterwards, thanks to the determination of *šayḥ* ʿIsa who did not loosen his pressure on the authorities, it was permitted that *qāḍī* were appointed in Ethiopia. According to our source, *šayḥ* ʿIsa was the first person in the history of modern Ethiopia to be named to such an office.

Another great achievement of the courageous attitude of *šayḥ* ʿIsa was the realization of a mosque in Addis Ababa. As the Muslims at that time did not have the right to perform their prayers in public (especially the *ḡumʿa* prayer on Fridays, and the two feast prayers), they were obliged to gather in private compounds, owned by Arabs in the Arada area. *Šayḥ* ʿIsa, considering this prohibition intolerable, overcame the resistance of Arabs who feared that even the private prayer might be forbidden, and dared to apply for the building of a mosque in Addis Ababa, directly addressing himself to *fitawrari* Habtā Giyorgis. After some incertitude, *šayḥ* ʿIsa was granted the permission, under the condition that the minaret of the mosque should not exceed in height the surrounding churches. He collected the money from the Arab donors who had promised to contribute economically to the building of the mosque and then started the construction of what is now called the *masǧid al-nūr* in Benin Säfär, Addis Ababa⁴⁴.

The minaret of the mosque was also built, and it stood higher than *fitawrari* Habtā Giyorgis had consented. The Ethiopian dignitary, filled with anger, ordered the mosque to be destroyed and summoned *šayḥ* ʿIsa to order him to raze the building to the ground. *Šayḥ* ʿIsa, with his characteristic calm and smartness, made clear to *fitawrari* Habtā Giyorgis, that at the point reached by the works in progress, it was not possible to destroy the building without arousing the rage of the Muslim masses. So Habtā Giyorgis admitted that it was better for the good of all to continue the building. The mosque was saved. Muslims started to pray freely in public and foreign teachers were allowed to come into Ethiopia to teach the Koran.

⁴⁴ One of the Arab donors who contributed to the financing of the mosque was the yemeni trader ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Bā Zarʿa (HUSSEIN AHMED 1997, p. 340).

The frank and challenging character of *šayḥ* ʿIsa caused him many difficulties, especially in his relationships with the Ethiopian authorities. He was put into prison several times, but this never effected his eagerness to see the rights of the Muslim people in Ethiopia officially recognized. In particular, during his imprisonment in Goḡgam, he managed to have a mosque and an Islamic cultural centre built in Däḡān, which was to become the cradle of Islamic learning in the whole region.

In 1941 E. C. *šayḥ* ʿIsa died at the age of 83, leaving as a sort of spiritual and material successor, his son, *šäläqa ḥāḡḡ* Sultān ʿIsa, who was a great contributor to the strenghtening of the Muslims in Ethiopia.

3. *Šayḥ* Säyd Mähämmäd Sadiq (1889–1969 E. C.)⁴⁵

This very renowned scholar was born in the area called Goḡgam in the *kaläl* of Čəfita in the *wäräda* of Tähulädäre in the *awraḡḡa* of Ambassäl (Wallo), from *šayḥ* Mähämmäd Sadiq and Zämzäm Säyd.

A part of the *šayḥ* genealogy, which is said to have been transmitted by *šayḥ* Säyd himself, is given in the Arabic version of the article and runs: “Muḥammad Šādiq b. ʿAbd al-Mālik b. al-Saḥāb ʿAlī b. al-Šādiq b. Faqīḥ b. al-Šiddiq (or Šadīq) b. ʿAbdallāh b. al-Sayyid Kabīr Šāliḥ b. *faqīḥ* Mūs (sic!) b. *faqīḥ* Ismāʿīl b. *faqīḥ* Muḥammad b. ʿUmar b. Abādir ʿAlī al-hararī b. ʿUmar b. ʿAbdallāh b. Aḥmad b. Sulaymān b. Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-amīn b. Nāšir b. Idrīs b. ʿAbd al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm b. Ḥāmid b. Sulaymān b. Aḥmad b. ʿAbd al-Nūr and so on ...”.⁴⁶

It appears from this *nasab* that *šayḥ* Säyd was a descendant of the famous saint Abadir of Harar. In the *nasab* the holy man is called Abādir ʿAlī al-hararī ibn ʿUmar, whereas the most common form of his name in Harar is Abadir ʿUmar al-riḏāʾ. After this name the succession of Abādir’s forefathers is left unconcluded at 14 generations before Abadir with a certain ʿAbd al-Nūr. We thus can not know whom the *nasab* considered the founding ancestor of *šayḥ* Säyd, and *šayḥ* Abadir, family⁴⁷.

⁴⁵ *Bilal*, 1, 9 (1985 E. C.), pp. 21–23. The article is by *ḥāḡḡ* Mähämmäd Wäle. The Arabic version, also authored by *ḥāḡḡ* Mähämmäd Wäle is on p. 37 (not pp. 37–39 as in O’FAHEY 2003, p. 59), under the title “*Nubḏa min ḥayāt al-šayḥ al-munāḏil ʿalā izḥār al-ḥaqq al-šayḥ al-labīb Sayyid Muḥammad Šādiq*” (A fragment from the life of the *šayḥ*, the fighter for the exposition of the truth, the sensible *šayḥ* Sayyid Muḥammad Šādiq); according to O’FAHEY 2003, p. 59, this article was also published in the *Manḥal al-ʿaṣṣān fī taʾrīḥ al-ḥubšān* by Muḥammad Šādiq). HUSSEIN AHMAD 1998, pp. 99–100 mentions these two articles.

⁴⁶ *Bilal*, 1, 9 (1985 E. C.), p. 37.

⁴⁷ WAGNER 1974, pp. 98–111 discusses at length the traditional genealogy of *šayḥ* Abādir, which makes him a descendant of Abū Bakr al-Šiddiq. There is no correspondence between

Šayḥ Säyd learned Arabic and the whole series of Islamic traditional sciences in different centres of Wallo, then he went to Dese where he finished the Wazayro Mannen training school for teachers. When he was 23 years old, he engaged in trade and settled in Harar, after a stay in Addis Ababa. In 1926 E.C. šayḥ Säyd went back to Addis and started teaching the Amharic language in the school founded by the Islamic concord council (*Yä' əslam səməmənnät mabbär*), and thus proved in practise that learning Amharic was very useful for all Muslim pupils and did not cause any damage to their Islamic education⁴⁸. He also inspired a periodical public meeting of students coming from Islamic, State and Missionary schools, who every Sunday gathered at Täfäri Mäkwonnən school to discuss their problems. He tried to use these meetings to foster a sense of equality among all students, as he thought that this could be the way to remove the social discrimination practiced against Muslims.

According to the Arabic version of the article, where Mähämmäd Sani Ḥabib is mentioned as a source, šayḥ Säyd also allegedly had secret contacts with *amir* Šakīb Arslān (1869–1946), the champion of pan-Arabism and of what was called more or less accurately Islamic nationalism⁴⁹.

Since the Wälwäl incident, during the whole war against the Italians, he took part in the resistance as a member of the *yä'agär fəqər mabbär*, and he delivered public speeches in favour of the mobilization of the whole country to repel the invasion. Under Italian occupation, he was kept in prison in Näfas səlk and then in the island of Nakura for two years. At the end of the colonial period, suspected to have secretly acted to spread Islam, he was put under town arrest (*yäqum əsər*). After having endured this severe hardship, he was subsequently allowed to use his house in Dese as an office for the post of *qāḍi* of Wallo, which he managed to establish.

In this period he made the general *qāḍi* of Addis Ababa accept his proposal to fix the Islamic judge's reward in five percent of the revenue of the land of his jurisdiction and to have this amount placed at the Ministry of Justice.

In his fight against old misconceptions existing inside the Islamic community of Ethiopia, he stressed the necessity and the utility of modern education, and in particular of a good knowledge of the Amharic language for the Ethiopian Muslim youth. He proved that the idea, circulating in the most narrow-minded Muslim scholars, that Muslims would become apos-

the names mentioned in that genealogy and those reported here, with the only exception of the father of šayḥ Abādir, 'Umar Aw Quṭb, and of one of his sons, 'Umar Quṭb al-Dīn. Other descendants of šayḥ Abādir were found by CERULLI 1933, pp. 130–131, in Limmu. No study has been made yet on the diffusion of Abādir's family outside Harar.

⁴⁸ According to our source the school founded in 1924 E.C. by the *Yä'əslam səməmənnät mabbär* aimed to create a sense of unity between Muslim and Christian Ethiopians.

⁴⁹ CLEVELAND 1985.

tates of their faith should they learn Amharic at school, was completely devoid of sense⁵⁰. In 1938 E.C. he asked that Amharic lessons would be given in the school of the Shewa Bär mosque in Desse, but his request was not fulfilled due to some opposition. He then obtained from the state 10 *gasha märet* to help Muslim pupils in their studies, especially young girls, whom he wanted to study on an equal level as boys.

Some time later however, thanks to *šayḥ* Säyd's undiminished zeal and continuous striving, a modern and organized school was opened next to the Shewa Bär mosque in Dese, where 1500 students were given the possibility to study up to the sixth class. This Islamic school was the second to be built in Ethiopian Islamic history after Addis Ababa's Islamic council's school. Besides the traditional religious topics, also Amharic, English, mathematics and geography were taught there. Pupils who had best results at the end of the sixth year of their schooling could be admitted directly into the *wäyzäro Səhən* school of Dese, where, according to the Arabic text, *šayḥ* Säyd also taught.

Šayḥ Säyd worked as a teacher in Dese until 1950 E.C. He then worked for the Ministry of Interior (*agär gəzat* minister) in translating Arabic writings on Ethiopia. In 1956 E.C. when Ḥaylā Šəllase ordered the Koran to be translated into Amharic, he was chosen as official translator together with Mäḥammäd Sani Ḥabib⁵¹.

Šayḥ Säyd died on the 7th *yäkkatit* 1969 E.C. (15.02.1977). He wrote many books, most of which remained unpublished manuscripts until now.

Among his works: an Arabic history of Ethiopia in 450 pages, with special regard to the Islamic side and his role in the evolution of the country⁵²; an Amharic book called "*ʿİsləmännanna Misyonaʿwəyan*", which was prepared and conceived as an answer to Gwäbäze ʿTaffäṭä's book "*ʿİsləmännanna Afrika*", that aroused great discontent among Ethiopian Muslims, when it appeared translated from English into Amharic, because it contained passages that were considered insulting to the figure of the Prophet. Ethiopian Muslims appealed to the Negus Ḥaylā Šəllase and obtained the prohibition of the distribution of the book.

Other didactic books written by *šayḥ* Säyd and still unpublished are "*Agärəḥən əwəq!*", apparently on history and/or geography and "*Yätəwḥidənnə yäfiqḥ məmmariya*", apparently a manual for learning the principles of Islamic theology and law.

⁵⁰ "*Muslim təmaročč amarəñña kätəmaru yəkäfrallu*" was the statement made by opponents of the introduction of Amharic in the syllabus of Muslim students (*käffärä* derives directly from Arabic *kafara*).

⁵¹ On the translation of the Koran in Amharic see RICCI 1969–70.

⁵² Published with the title *Manḥal al-ʿaṭšān fī taʾrīḥ al-ḥubšān* in Šanʿāʾ 1422 A.H./2000 A.D. (O'FAHEY 2003, p. 55).

4. *Hāḡḡi* Muḥammād Sani Ḥabīb (1906–1981 E.C.)⁵³

We now come to the text on perhaps the most famous Ethiopian *‘ālim* of the past century⁵⁴.

Hāḡḡi Muḥammād Sani⁵⁵ Ḥabīb was born in the *qābāle* of Ančarro Kārabitti in the *awraḡḡa* of Qallu (Wallo) in 1906 E.C. The Arabic text indicates the village (*qarya*) of Adula Aḡar in the area (*nāḥiya*) of Karra Byet in Qallu in 1332h/1913–14 as birthplace and date of birth of *ḥāḡḡ* Muḥammād Sani. His parents were *ḥāḡḡ* Ḥabīb Bašīr and Fāṭima (Amharic Faṭuma) Malik. The Arabic version affirms that Muḥammād Sani’s grandfather, Bašīr, was originating from Wālqayt, and he came to settle in Wallo.

Hāḡḡi Muḥammād Sani studied all the different branches of Islamic traditional sciences: Koran, *fiqh*, Arabic grammar, *tafsīr*, *manṭiq* (logic), *uṣūl al-fiqh*, *ḥadīṭ*, *balāḡa*⁵⁶. According to the Arabic text, which is very detailed in giving the curriculum studiorum of the *ṣayḥ*, *ḥāḡḡi* Muḥammād Sani started studying the Quran when he was seven under the guidance of *ṣayḥ* Muftī Ibn Ibrāhīm al-Warabbābī⁵⁷ and then he continued with *ṣayḥ* Aḥmad Lāšī. He completed the study of the Kuran at 11 and then devoted himself to *fiqh*. He studied Islamic Law with *ṣayḥ* Aḥmad Qāllū ibn Bašīr who instructed him in the *madhhab* of Abū Ḥanīfa. He studied Arabic grammar with *ṣayḥ* Kammalaw ibn Muḥammad⁵⁸, who was named the *Sībawayh* of his time⁵⁹.

According to the Arabic source, in 1357 A.H./1938–39 A.D. *ḥāḡḡi* Muḥammād Sani intended to perform the *ḥāḡḡ* to Mekka. He went through Asmara and when he reached Massawa, the people of this harbour city, recognizing his wide and deep Islamic doctrine, stopped him from continuing his travel and made him *imām* of the mosque al-Mīrḡanī and teacher of Arabic

⁵³ *Bilal* 1, 1 (1985), pp. 16–17; Arabic text, authored by Māhammād Wāle, under the title *Nubda ‘an ḥayāt ṣayḥinā al-rāḥil al-ḥāḡḡ Muḥammad Ṭānī Ḥabīb*, at pp. 36–37. O’FAHEY 2003, pp. 58–59.

⁵⁴ The Arabic version of the text calls him very deferently *ṣayḥ al-mašāyih*. He authored many works but oddly enough none of them is mentioned in the article. His *Islāmanna anna yātallaqu nābiy yāMuḥammād tarik* appeared in its third edition in 1981 E.C. (the book first appeared in 1960 E.C.).

⁵⁵ The Amharic form Sani comes directly from Arabic Ṭānī, second, for which it represents a transliteration that apparently indicates an Egyptian classicizing pronunciation. Our source does not explain the reason for the introduction of the ordinal number in the name of this learned man: perhaps he had an older, homonymous brother.

⁵⁶ All these branches of learning are mentioned by HUSSEIN AHMED 1988, pp. 99–101.

⁵⁷ His *nisba* indicates his connection with Wārā Babbo.

⁵⁸ Both names are mentioned by HUSSEIN AHMED 1988, p. 102.

⁵⁹ This honorific epithet magnifies the exceptional knowledge *ṣayḥ* Kammalaw had of Arabic by making him equal to the famous *Sībawayh* (d. 796 A.D.), generally considered the founder of Arabic grammatical science (CARTER art. in EI² s. v. *Sībawayhi*).

grammar, *balāḡa* and *fiqh*. He stayed in Massawa more than two years and then he proceeded to Mekka and Medina where he made the *ḥāḡḡ*, the *‘umra* and the *ziyāra* to the shrine of the Prophet.

Hāḡḡi Muḥammad Sani came back to Ethiopia through Ḥiḡāz and went once again to the school (*maḡlis*) of his master *ṣayḥ* Aḥmad Qāllū and studied with him some commentaries on the books of *fiqh*. In particular he devoted his attention to the *Durr al-Muḥtār*, that is the commentary of Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-Ḥaṣḡafī (d. 1677 A.D.) to the *Tanwīr al-abṣār wa-ḡāmi‘ al-biḥār*, a well known manual of Ḥanafī Jurisprudence of *furū‘ al-fiqh* (branches of Law) written by Muḥammad b. ‘Abdallāh al-Timirtāṣī (d. 1595 A.D.)⁶⁰. The 16 *muḥarram* 1361 A.H./ 3 February 1942 A.D. *ṣayḥ* Aḥmad Qāllū gave *ṣayḥ* Muḥammad Sani the *iḡāza*, the permission to teach the texts he had studied under his guidance. The Arabic version of the article reports the full text of the document, which runs as follows⁶¹:

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم الحمد لله الذي جعلنا ورثة سيد المرسلين وجعلنا حملة شريعته ومبلغ احكامه للعالمين
صلى الله عليه و على آله و حذبه المفلحين
اما بعد فقد اجزت لولد محمد ثانی بن الحاج حبيب بشير جميع ما قرنه على من متون وشروح و حواش بالنشر والافادة
عموما اجازة صحيحة وذلك يوم الاثنين المبارك السادس عشر محرم الحرام من عام ١٣٦١ هـ وفق الله لما يرضاه

“In the name of God the Merciful, the Compassionate. Praised be God who made us the heirs of the Lord of the Messengers and made us the bearers of his Law and the conveyers of his rules to the world, God pray for him, for his family and his party, who is the party of the prosperous.

I thus give my son Muḥammad Tānī b. *al-ḥāḡḡ* Ḥabīb Baṣīr the valid permit to spread and teach in public all the texts, the commentaries and the marginal glosses he studied under my guidance. Issued on the blessed Monday the 16th of the sacred month of Muḥarram of the year 1361 A.H. May God grant him the success in what pleases Him!”

He then went to Albukko⁶² where he studied under the guidance of *ṣayḥ* Aḥmad Nūrī the *tafsīr*, *balāḡa*, *manṭiq*, metres of versification (*‘arūd*), *taḡ-wīd* (reciting of the Koran) and *uṣūl al-fiqh*. In *rabī‘ al-tānī* 1363 A.H./March–April 1944 A.D., he obtained the *iḡāza* from Aḥmad Nūrī

⁶⁰ GAL II, p. 311; GAL S II, p. 428. That the *al-Durr al-muḥtār* is used in Islamic schools in Wallo is confirmed by HUSSEIN AHMED 1988, p. 100.

⁶¹ Due to the interest of this document, it seems useful to reproduce it here as it is in our source, without corrections.

⁶² Albukko in Qallu is linked with the educational and military activities of Muḥammad Ṣāfi (see HUSSEIN AHMED 1990, pp. 66–67 and 2001, *passim*).

too, thus completing his education. Our Arabic source reports the full text of the *iğāza*, which runs as follows⁶³:

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم الحمد لله وحده والصلاة والسلام على من لا نبي بعده بعد السلام وعلى ولدي الشيخ محمد ثاني مما اعرفك اني اجزت لك جميع ما قرعته على اجازة صحيحة وذلك في شهر ربيع الثاني من ١٣٦٣ هـ

“In the name of God the Merciful, the Compassionate. The praise belongs to God only. Prayer and salvation be for the one after whom there is no other Prophet. After the greeting also to my son Muḥammad Ṭānī Ḥabīb, what I inform you about is that I give you the valid permit to teach all that you studied under my guidance. Issued on the month of *rabi‘ al-ṭānī* 1363 A.H.”.

Having thus completed his studies, Muḥammād Sani married Kəbre⁶⁴ the daughter of the *ṣayḥ* Sa‘īd Maṣṣūr al-Warrahabbānī, and in 1945 A.D. he settled in Dese where he taught at the Islamic school near the Shewa bārr mosque. He also managed to acquire a secondary level degree in the state school and he thus started to teach in the general secondary school Səhən in Dese from 1951–67 A.D. In 1967 A.D. he was summoned to Addis Ababa to take part in the translation of the Koran into Amharic as a representative of Wallo’s scholars. He carried out this difficult task for almost three years⁶⁵. From 1969 to 1971 A.D., he taught at *Däğğazmačč* ‘Umār Sāmātar elementary and junior high school in Addis Ababa, near the Masğid al-anwār. He then became the representative of the *imām* at the Anwar mosque, where he gave Islamic religious courses in *ḥadīṭ*, *balāga tafsīr* and *manṭiq*. In 1396 A.H./1976 A.D. he became president of the High Council for Islamic Affairs, then *imām* and *ḥaṭīb* of the Anwar mosque and president of the administrative comitee of the mosques: he maintained these offices until his death.

Muḥammād Sani never stopped teaching at the mosque. Many of his disciples, who studied with him in Dese and in Addis Ababa became famous Islamic scholars in their turn. Among them, the Arabic text quotes: *al-ḥāğğ al-ṣayḥ* ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Naḥwī; *ṣayḥ* Muḥammad Buṣrā; *ṣayḥ* Muḥammad Ḥamza; *ṣayḥ* ‘Umar Idrīs; *ṣayḥ* Muftī; *ṣayḥ* Sa‘īd Yūsuf; *ṣayḥ* Muṣṭafā Ḥabīb; *ṣayḥ* Ġamāl; *ṣayḥ* Aḥmad Muḥammad; *ṣayḥ* Muḥammad Zayn Zahr; *ṣayḥ* Sa‘īd Aḥmad Muṣṭafā; *ṣayḥ* Muḥammad Wāle.

Muḥammād Sani became a nationally and internationally known personality. He was a member of the *shengo* and of the committee for the fighting against illiteracy. He travelled to the Soviet Union, Saudi Arabia, Kuwayt,

⁶³ Due to the interest of this document, it seems useful to reproduce its Arabic original text here as it is in the source.

⁶⁴ Written KBRÁ in Arabic script.

⁶⁵ See RICCI 1969–70.

Libya and Algeria, to take part in conferences on Islamic and international questions. He was particularly active in promoting international peace and disarmament.

Muḥammād Sani was hospitalized in the month of *ša^cbān* at the Ṭəqur Anbāsa hospital and treated for 23 days. He died at the age of 75, on Friday the 23rd of *ramadān* 1410 A.H. – 10 *Miyazya* 1981 E.C. (14.04.1989 A.D.) He left six sons, and on the occasion of his decease, Māhammād Wāle wrote these verses⁶⁶:

The mountain of science and discernment and piety died	لقد مات طور العلم والحلم والتقوى
The regions of the whole area darkened for his loss	واظلم ارجاء النواحي بفقدته
The tears of the people flowed like pouring rain	وسالت دموع الشعب كالغيث الهاطل
An <i>imam</i> whose death struck all the people	امام اصيب القوم طرا بموته
Let the mosque mourn for him day and night	ليبكه مسجد في يوم وفي ليل
Let the day of Friday mourn for him, and his sweetest sermon	لتبكه جمعة وخطبته الاحلى
Let the <i>tafsir</i> mourn for him with its pouring tears	ليبله تفسير بدمعه الهاطل
And a room and an office of the Council mourn for him	وتبكه غرفة ومكتب مجلس
And the Committee of the <i>da^cwa</i> ⁶⁷ , every late afternoon.	ولجنة دعوة في كل الاصائل

5. *Hāḡḡ* ʿAbdūlbaṣiṭ Māhammād (1920–1985 E.C.)⁶⁸

He was born in the *qābāle* of Minas, in the *wārāda* of Kālalla, *awraḡḡa* of Borāna (Wallo), from *ṣayḥ* Māhammād Ḥalimāt and Saliḥa Ġaʿfār, at an unknown date, but approximately four years before the battle of Sägāle⁶⁹.

After he completed his very first education in his paternal house, he went to the *qābāle* of Yāsola in the *awraḡḡa* of Dägär, where he studied *fiqh* under the guidance of *ṣayḥ* ʿAlī Dägär⁷⁰. He then moved to the *qābāle* of Sore, where he extended his knowledge of *fiqh*, studying with *ṣayḥ* Abdulsālam

⁶⁶ Due to the interest of even this little poem to improve our scanty knowledge of the Arabic literature of Ethiopia we reproduce the text here as it is in the source. The verses have no apparent rhyme nor metre.

⁶⁷ The *da^cwa* is the “calling” to Islam. With this word is usually termed the missionary activity to spread Islam among non-Muslims or to strengthen and improve the theoretical knowledge and the practical application of Islamic principles among Muslims.

⁶⁸ Bilal, 1, 10 (1985 E.C.), pp. 21–22. No Arabic version of this article is available. The Amharic text is authored by Māhammād Wāle. A short obituary of *hāḡḡ* ʿAbdūlbaṣiṭ Māhammād is contained in Bilal, 1, 8 (1985 E.C.), p. 35 where it is said that he died on the first of *Miyazya*. See also O’FAHEY 2003, pp. 45–46.

⁶⁹ The battle of Sägāle, during which *negus* Mikaʿel was defeated, took place on October 27th 1916 A.D. *Hāḡḡ* ʿAbdūlbaṣiṭ Māhammād should thus be born in 1920 A.D.

⁷⁰ According to HUSSEIN AHMED 2001, p. 91 the educational centre of Dägär was founded by Šaraf al-Dīn Ibrāhīm, in the second half of the 18th century. The shrine of this saint is still a destination of pious pilgrimages (see also HUSSEIN AHMED 1990, p. 65).

Bulbul. He was in his twenties at that time and did not want to stop learning, he burnt with desire for acquiring more and more knowledge. He thus went to Därra⁷¹, where he devoted himself to Arabic grammar (*naḥw*) and verbal morphology (*sorf*⁷²) following for at least 15 years the lessons of *ṣayḥ ḥaḡḡi* Ahmäd Därra⁷³.

Hāḡḡ °Abdulbaṣiṭ eventually became a teacher in his turn. He transmitted to his own pupils the teachings of his masters, especially those of *ḥaḡḡi* Ahmäd Därra, in his own lessons during his 30 years of teaching, 15 years in his native land and 15 years in Addis Ababa. He however was never paid for his educational activities, as he always used to give his lectures inside the mosques for free.

In his thirty years of teaching activity, *ḥaḡḡ* °Abdulbaṣiṭ had an enormous number of disciples, who became teachers afterwards in different parts of Ethiopia and even abroad. Among his most famous disciples the article quotes: *ṣayḥ* Ġämal °Umär, who taught in Qolle Ġäḡḡäba in Borana⁷⁴; *ṣayḥ* Mähämmäd Sä°id who taught in Därra; the already mentioned *ḥaḡḡi* Mähämmäd Wäle, author of the article; *ṣayḥ* Muḥammäd Sultan Gättira⁷⁵; *ṣayḥ* Muḥammäd Amin Gissir; *ṣayḥ* Ahmäd Mukḥəyldin Wärräbabbo; *ṣayḥ* Hasān Yələda; *ṣayḥ* Ahmäd Alfəya; *ṣayḥ* Sä°id Hasān Sulula, member of the *Rābiṭa* in Makka⁷⁶; *ṣayḥ* Ahmäd Mənaya; *ṣayḥ* Muḥammäd *ṣayḥ* Ali Adām, who lived in Makka; *ṣayḥ* Abdāllah Hamza; *ṣayḥ* Ali Kälala; *ṣayḥ* Siraḡuldin Bāḥat; *ṣayḥ* Ahmäd Aräbu; *ṣayḥ* Ali Näsir; *ṣayḥ* Sä°id Yusuf; *ṣayḥ* Ahmäd °Ali. According to the article, all the foregoing scholars were still alive in Säne 1985 E. C., while the following were already deceased: *ṣayḥ* Ali Adām, in Borāna

⁷¹ Därra is an Islamic educational centre in the northwestern part of Shewa: as HUSSEIN AHMED 2001, p. XVI points out, this centre is tightly linked to Wällo. In the fact narrated by our source we may see a concrete confirmation of this link.

⁷² *Sorf* is the Amharic form of the Arabic word *ṣarf*, with the velarization of the vowel due to the emphasis of *ṣād*.

⁷³ HUSSEIN AHMED 1989, p. 193 note 8 mentions a *ṣayḥ al-ḥaḡḡ* Aḥmad b. °Umar of Därra (d. 1905/06) as the author of the work called *Naṣr al-°anbar muḥtaṣar al-misk al-aḡfar*, which is an abridged version of the *Misk al-aḡfar*, the hagiography of *ṣayḥ* Ġa°far Bukko of Gättira (see under note 57). However, the chronological settings of this personage given by Hussein do not allow the identification with the Ahmäd of Därra mentioned in our source.

⁷⁴ The text uses in this passage the verb *aqärra*, as a causative form of *qärra* derived, as we saw before, from Arabic *qara°a*.

⁷⁵ Gättira, in highland Wallo was the birth-place of the famous mystic Ġa°far Bukko (HUSSEIN AHMED 1989 and HUSSEIN AHMED 2001, p. 101). Gättira was also the main centre of the Lägä Gora chiefdom (HUSSEIN AHMED 2001, pp. 126–127).

⁷⁶ That is *Rābiṭat al-°ālam al-islāmī* (Muslim World League), the Islamic International Organization founded in Mecca in 1962.

Ṭālanta; *ṣayḥ* Ṭukha in Begemder/Wəṣat; *ṣayḥ* Ibrahim Koreb; *ṣayḥ* Ahmād Ibrahim, who was *imām* of the mosque of Arāb Gānda in Dese; *ṣayḥ* Ali Muḡib; *ṣayḥ* Sā'id 'Umār, who was *qāḍī* in the general *ṣarī'a* court; *ṣayḥ* Ahmād Fādlu; *ṣayḥ* Muḥammād Awwāl Hasān.

In his public activity, *ḥāḡḡ* 'Abdulbaṣiṭ Māḥammād tried his best to enhance the preparation of Ethiopian '*ulamā'* and urgently invited them to go and teach in every part of the country, so as to strengthen the Islamic culture in the different Muslim communities. This effort also aimed at balancing the pressure continually imposed on Muslims by ruling authorities, who wanted to hinder a free blossoming of Islamic culture, and to overcome the educational difficulties faced by Muslims, due also to the prohibition to bring teachers from Arab countries to Ethiopia.

As for the quality of Islamic teaching in Ethiopia, *ḥāḡḡ* 'Abdulbaṣiṭ Māḥammād took a very strong position against some mystical brotherhoods which deviated from the principles of the *ṣarī'a*⁷⁷. In particular, he opposed the cultual practises of some so called scholars of Borāna, who did not fit the rules of the Islamic faith. He was threatened but he managed to change the situation and to restore the normal way of the cult. We are not told who these deviated people were nor what their unacceptable practises were. We may surmise from the words used in the text that they could be the adherents of a mystical brotherhood whose devotional ceremonies were not completely in line with the more traditional Islamic religious practise.

Hāḡḡ 'Abdulbaṣiṭ Māḥammād had a perfect knowledge of classical Arabic grammar, and he was able to make use of all the nuances and refinements of Arabic better than many mother tongue Arabs. He thus wrote a huge number of Arabic works, in prose and in verse. Among his books, none of which had been published at the time our source was written, the article mentions the following ones:

YāMugni Nāzm. A work composed of verses in *raḡaz* meter, which gained him the admiration of many scholars. It is most probably a commentary of the *Muḡni al-Labīb 'an kutub al-a'arīb*, a handbook of Arabic syntax written by the Egyptian *faqīh* and grammarian Abū Muḥammad Ḡamāl al-Dīn 'Abdallāh b. Yūsuf b. 'Abdallāh b. Yūsuf b. Aḥmad b. 'Abdallāh Ibn Hišām al-Naḥwī (perhaps also al-Anṣārī; 1308–60 A.D.), which is a very renowned and wide spread textbook all over the Islamic world and, of course, also in Ethiopia⁷⁸. *Hāḡḡ* 'Abdulbaṣiṭ Māḥammād was the first Ethiopian to write a poetical composition on this Arabic work.

⁷⁷ The Amharic text literally says: "kāšārī'a yāmmiyafānāggətu andand tāriqawočč".

⁷⁸ For some general information on this author see FLEISCH art. in EI² s.v. *Ibn Hišām*; GAL II, pp. 23–25, GAL S II, pp. 16–20. Also HUSSEIN AHMED 1988, p. 100 men-

YäMārah Nāzm, which should apparently be a poetical commentary on the *Marāḥ al-arwāḥ*, a well known handbook of Arabic grammar written by Aḥmad b. °Alī b. Mas°ūd (fl. 8th century A.D.)⁷⁹. No other Ethiopian °ālim wrote such a work before ḥāḡḡ °Abdulbaṣiṭ. The writer of his biography and chief redactor of *Bilal*, ḥāḡḡi Māhammād Wāle was the first to study this book under the guidance of the ṣayḥ.

Nukbātālfikr, a composition on the rules of *ḥadīṭ*⁸⁰, was the first of its genre in Ethiopia.

Nāzmu Bafādl, a verse commentary on the very wide-spread manual of Islamic jurisprudence according to the *madḥab* of al-Šāfi°ī, *Muqaddima al-ḥadramiyya fī fiqh al-sāda al-šāfi°iyya* written by °Abdallāh b. °Abd al-Raḥmān Bāfaḍl al-Ḥadramī⁸¹, which is currently in use also in Islamic educational centres in Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia⁸².

Durrul Fārid, which is defined as a book of historical genealogy (*tawḥīd*), which was the first of its genre to be written in verse by an Ethiopian °ālim⁸³.

Moreover the article also mentions some poetry in praise of the Prophet Muhammad (*madḥ/šamā°il*) which aroused the admiration of every listener.

Ḥāḡḡ °Abdulbaṣiṭ Māhammād was also very famous for his wide knowledge of traditional medicine. He healed many people using remedies drawn from herbs and roots and wrote some works on this topic. Ḥāḡḡ °Abdulbaṣiṭ knew also *qane* and he wrote on this topic too, especially during his youth.

As far as we know none of his works have been published to this date. It goes without saying that the study of the apparently huge production of this scholar would be of great interest.

tions this same text as used to teach Arabic grammar in Wollo Islamic schools. O'FAHEY 2003, p. 46 thinks that the *Nāzm al-muḡnī* of ḥāḡḡ °Abdulbaṣiṭ could be a versification of *al-Ġarabardī al-Muḡnī fī °ilm al-nahw*.

⁷⁹ GAL II, p. 21; GAL S II, p. 14. O'FAHEY 2003, p. 46.

⁸⁰ We did not manage to ascertain whether this poetical composition by ḥāḡḡ °Abdulbaṣiṭ Māhammād is an original creation of his own or whether there is an Arabic work in its background.

⁸¹ GAL S II p. 555 states that the author lived in the 10th century of the *hiḡra* (1494–1591 A.D.), without further detail, and qualifies the *Muqaddima* as a “Widerlegung des Sufismus”, which seems to be totally wrong. The famous *faqīh* Ibn Ḥaḡar al-Ḥaytamī (or perhaps better al-Ḥaytamī, d. 1565 A.D.) wrote a commentary on the *Muqaddima* (GAL S II, p. 528).

⁸² The *Muqaddima* was even published in Ethiopia by the same al-Naḡāšī publishing house in 1988 A.D. together with *al-Ġāya wa-al-taqrib*, another manual of *fiqh* by Abū Šuḡā°a.

⁸³ We did not manage to identify an Arabic original, if any, for this work by ḥāḡḡ °Abdulbaṣiṭ Māhammād.

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Summary

The article aims at giving some information about Ethiopian Muslim scholars of the past century, so to enhance our general knowledge of Ethiopian Islam, and, moreover, to contribute to a better prosopographical understanding of the Muslim presence in Ethiopia. In this endeavour, it explores the data scattered in Ethiopian Islamic periodical press, which flourished in that country after the fall of the *Derg* regime in 1991. In particular, the monthly magazine *Bilal*, which contains in almost every issue a biographical note devoted to some learned man of the recent past, is used to collect material on the scholars. Biographical articles in Amharic and Arabic which appeared in the magazine are summarized and commented upon.