



**Aethiopica 8 (2005)**  
International Journal of Ethiopian and Eritrean Studies

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**Article**

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Aethiopica 8 (2005), 72–94

ISSN: 1430–1938

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Published by

Universität Hamburg

Asien Afrika Institut, Abteilung Afrikanistik und Äthiopistik

Hiob Ludolf Zentrum für Äthiopistik

## 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 Muslims<sup>1</sup>.

Particularly, the monthly *Bilal*, which took its name from the first *mu'addin* in Islamic history, the Abyssinian freedman Bilāl b. Rabāḥ<sup>2</sup> 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" (*Nägaši Islamik Asättämi Däräggät*)<sup>3</sup>, 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 Islam<sup>4</sup>. The magazine editor in chief, starting with the third issue, was the renowned Wallo scholar, *hāgg* Muḥāmmād Wāle<sup>5</sup> *hāgg* Ahmād 'Umār, disciple of *hāgg* 'Abdālbasīt, Māhāmmād and of *šayb* Muḥāmmād Sani Ḥabib, *imām* of the al-Nūr mosque in Addis Ababa<sup>6</sup>; his first assistant editor was Ġāmil Śārif Sāyid,

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> For some information about this famous personage see 'ARAFAT art. in EI<sup>2</sup> s. v. *Bilāl*.

<sup>3</sup> In Arabic the firm was called *Mu'assasat al-Nägaši li-al-tawzī'*, *wa-al-tasqīlāt 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 *Nägaši islamik asattaminna yā'odiyovižewal agälget däräggät*.

<sup>4</sup> See for instance VAN DONZEL art. in EI<sup>2</sup> s. v. *al-Nägaši*.

<sup>5</sup> In Arabic alphabet written *Walī* or *Walā*, as the orthography used in the magazine does not distinguish final *yā'* from *alif maqsūra*.

<sup>6</sup> *Hāgg* Muḥāmmād Wāle Ahmād 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 *Yāhāgganña 'umra guzo səna sər'at bā'arattu mäzhaboč* (title in Arabic:

then from the fourth issue on was Zäkäriya Muḥammäd Yasin, while the publishing house and media company manager was Sä'id Muḥammäd Nurye<sup>7</sup>. The Nägaši 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 Oromo<sup>8</sup>.

20 issues of *Bilal* were published. The last issue of the series was the one sent forth in ተerr 1987 E.C. (January 1995 A.D.), 28 months<sup>9</sup> after the foundation of the periodical<sup>10</sup>. Many issues of the magazine apparently remained unsold, thus creating a unsustainable economic situation for the publisher who subsequently was forced to stop the publication<sup>11</sup>. 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 adā' al-hāgg̃ wa-al-'umra 'alá al-madāhib al-arba'a*; in the Arabic front page the author is given also the title of *šayb*) published in Addis Ababa in 1412h/1991–92 A.D., in which he briefly explains, following apparently the famous *šāfi'i* 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 *hadrīt*, *Riyād al-salihīn*.

<sup>7</sup> *Nūrī* or *Nūrā*, in Arabic script.

<sup>8</sup> Among the books printed and distributed by Nejashi Publisher, we may mention here: *Yā'imam Nāwāwi arba' hadis* (an abridged translation of the well-known collection of forty sayings of the Prophet Muhammad by the above-mentioned *imām al-Nawawī* (*al-Arba'in al-nawawiyya*); *Al-Tāwhid. Islamawi ṣonsā hassab* (an Amharic version of *al-'Aqa'id 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: *Hundeewwan Aqiida*, on the basic elements of Islamic creed and *Takkāa ol fuudha seera islaamatti*, on matrimonial rules in Islam (O'FAHEY 2003, p. 40: the author of this book is Muhammad 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*.

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

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

<sup>11</sup> 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 shape<sup>12</sup>. The kind of study that Hussein Ahmed did for the weekly *al-‘Ālam*<sup>13</sup>, 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 countrymen<sup>14</sup>.

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

<sup>12</sup> HUSSEIN AHMED 1998, p. 104, says that the same publishing house of *Bilal* started in April 1993 a second magazine, called just *Nağāši*, under the editorship of Ḥāgg̃ Muḥammad Wāle Ahmād, 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*, *Da‘wa*, *al-Manār*, *Salām*, and *Adān* are mentioned and briefly analyzed in HUSSEIN AHMED 1998 pp. 103–105 and in HUSSEIN AHMED 1998b. The Markaz al-Qur‘ān of Dese published a magazine called *Furqān*, whose only first issue came out in Mäggabit 1985 (March 1993).

<sup>13</sup> HUSSEIN AHMED 1994.

<sup>14</sup> 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 scholar<sup>15</sup>, 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 learned<sup>16</sup>. 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-

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

<sup>16</sup> This is evident in *šayb* Säyd Muhamäd 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 Ahmed<sup>17</sup>.

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 Muḥammad Sani Habib, 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. *Haġgi Bäšər Ali Tiġani* (1859–1973 A.D.)

The biographical article published in *Bilal*<sup>18</sup> is based on the historical report given to the magazine by the son of the *šayb*, *haġgi* Muḥammad Bäšər, who is presented as the very best source of knowledge of his father's life, which has sometimes been narrated in an uncorrect way.

*Haġgi Bäšər* was born in 1858 A.D. in the village of Čullənqe in Yäggū – Wäldiya (Wallo), from Ali Haydär and Rahma Adäm. As his *nisba* shows, he was a member of the Tiġāniyya brotherhood, founded by the famous North African scholar and saint Ahmād b. Muḥammad al-Tiġānī (1737–1815), and well established in all the Maghrib, in Sudan and in West Africa.<sup>19</sup> The Tiġāniyya has been strongly present in Ethiopia, particularly in Jimma where, according to Trimingham, it was brought by the local scholar *al-*

<sup>17</sup> HUSSEIN AHMED 1988.

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

<sup>19</sup> For the biography of al-Tiġānī, the history and principles of his *tariqa* see ABUN-NASR 1965.

*ḥāġġ* Yūsif at the beginnig of the XX<sup>th</sup> century<sup>20</sup>, and in Gomma Gera and Guma and among Banī Ṣanqūl, where it arrived from the bordering Sudan.

As for Wallo, as we shall see, it was *haġġi* Bāšər who introduced the brotherhood, to which he had been initiated in Sudan, spreading it to Bo-rana Warra Himano and Warra Babbo<sup>21</sup>. As a child, *haġġi* Bāšər studied the Qur'an in Čullənqe under the guidance of his first teacher, *šayb* ‘Umar, and he managed not only to master the simple reading of the sacred text<sup>22</sup>, but also to learn it by heart<sup>23</sup>. Once he finished this basic level of learning, he went in Wärababbo, to the village of Igärsa, where he studied Islamic jurisprudence according to the Hanafī school<sup>24</sup>, with *šayb* Ali Surur<sup>25</sup>. Moreover in the village of Tatessa, he deepened his linguistic skills in Arabic, by studying Arabic grammar *nahw* (morphology and syntax), *balāqā* (eloquence) and *badi*<sup>c</sup> (metaphors and other rethorical expressions)<sup>26</sup>, under the guidance of *šayb* Ali Bušra. *Haġġi* Sä‘id Ibrahim (the *šayb* of Čalle) and *haġġi* Abdulwähab (the *šayb* of Oda)<sup>27</sup> 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 Tiġāniyya brotherhood, by the intermediation of Sa‘id Muḥammad ibn al-Muhtār. He thus started teaching in his turn the *tiġānī awrād*<sup>28</sup> and spent half of his life teaching and acquiring more and more Islamic learning, especially in the field

<sup>20</sup> TRIMINGHAM 1952, p. 246. *Al-ḥāġġ* Yūsif was initiated to the Tiġāniyya 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 *tarīqa* the sultan Abba Dula, so paving the way for the further spread of the brotherhood. CERULLI 1933, p. 96 maintains that the Tiġāniyya was brought to Jimma by a *šayb* coming from Sudan.

<sup>21</sup> HUSSEIN AHMED 2001, pp.70-71.

<sup>22</sup> The text uses the Amharic form *aqqärar*, derived form the verb *qarrä*, calqued on Arabic *qara'a*. *Aqqärar* is explained in the article by current Amharic *tära nabab*.

<sup>23</sup> *Baqalaččäw hafzäw* (calqued on the Arabic verb *hafiza*) and explained in Amharic as *šämdädäw*.

<sup>24</sup> According to HUSSEIN AHMED 2001, pp. 66-67, the Hanafī 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 currrents in Ethiopia is still very uncertain.

<sup>25</sup> HUSSEIN AHMED 1988, p. 101 mentions an ‘Umar Surūr, teacher in Lagot in Warra Himano: we do not know the relationship between the two learned men.

<sup>26</sup> HUSSEIN AHMED 1988, pp. 100-101, shows almost the same curriculum studiorum.

<sup>27</sup> HUSSEIN AHMED 1988, pp. 101-102, refers to this *šayb* of Oda (‘Abd al-Wahhāb ‘Abd al-Ğalīl Muṣṭafā, underlying that he was a famous hanafī teacher who had several hundreds of students under him).

<sup>28</sup> *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 *hadīt*. Beside his deep knowledge of Islamic religion and culture, *haġġi* Bäšər was a very fervent (*qāna’i*) 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 Ḥaylä Šəllase.

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

The first was in 1352 A.H./1933–34 A.D. when *haġġi* Bäšər guided an Islamic movement<sup>29</sup> 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 *haġġi* Bäšər and his followers were compelled to flee and hide. Negus Ḥaylä Šəllase promised a reward to the one who would deliver *haġġi* Bäšər to the authorities, but the *haġġi* and his companions were able to remain concealed for four years. Four months before the Italian invasion in Ethiopia, in the same spot, Mehone, *haġġi* Bäšər prepared once again to fight, but at the last moment, for unknown reasons, he withdrew.

In 1947 A.D. *haġġi* Bäšər went to battle for the third time. He prepared a more organized alliance of local personalities, who signed an agreement to fight against Ḥaylä Šəllase. Among the participants of this group there were, significantly, not only Muslims but also Christians. The son of *ləg* Iyāsu and the son of Tayyä Guləlläte, Malāku Tayyä were part of the group. Famous Yāġġu Muslim exponents as *ato* Muhammäd Gəbril and *šayb* 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, *haġġi* Bäšər and his companions decided not to give up and they began the battle. The forces led by *haġġi* Bäšər reported a momentary success. At that point, the ruler of Yāġġu, *däggazmacč* Gäläta, sent supplementary troops and the rebels were easily defeated, many of them were killed, and the others were dispersed. *Haġġi* Bäšər 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 Aläm bäqqaññ

<sup>29</sup> The text uses the words *yätəgəl መqəsəqqəse*, 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, *haġġi* Bäšər was summoned by Ḥaylä Šəllase.

The article reports at a certain length the dialogue between *haġġi* Bäšər 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. Ḥaylä Šəllase was deeply impressed by this statement of courage and fear of God. He stood up and immediately ordered to set *haġġi* Bäšər free. This Imperial personal step was surprising and shocking. As the magazine says: "Allah set him free!"<sup>30</sup>. *Haġġi* Bäšər 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 *haġġi* Bäšər 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 *haġġi* Bäšər was generally recognized and appreciated<sup>31</sup>.

## 2. *Šayb* Ḥamza Alqatbare<sup>32</sup> (1858–1941 E.C.)

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

<sup>30</sup> In the text of the article a veiled hint may be found to the rumors that the sudden liberation of *haġġi* Bäšər probably arose among Muslims in Ethiopia. Suspicions on his loyalty to the Islamic faith are neatly dismissed as *tärät*.

<sup>31</sup> 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 *haġġi* Bäšər is badly reproduced.

<sup>32</sup> HUSSEIN AHMED 1998, p. 99. The Amharic form Alqatbare resembles an Arabic *nisba* from Qatbare, the place where *šayb* Ḥamza founded his educational centre. In Arabic the magazine writes "Isá al-qatbará, but as the current orthography of the periodical does not distinguish alif *maqsūrā* from *yā*, 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.

<sup>33</sup> *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 "Nubda min ḥayāt al-šayb "Isá al-qatbará".

*käffätäñña gubae) hāgg̍ Ahmäd Šafi* and some of the members of his family, especially *ato* Muhammäd Wāfa hāgg̍ Sultan ‘Isa<sup>34</sup>.

Šayb ‘Isa was born in 1858 E.C. from Hamza Bäture and Agyat Geswät in the *qäbäle* of Abanä Kuray in the region of ወንደ, one of the *säbat bet* of Gurage. He studied the Koran in Mäsqän under the guidance of the šayb of Bi-dara and then in Gädäbano with šayb Sä‘id. According to the short Arabic version of our source biography it was šayb Sä‘id Ḥaw, who is called “al-‘ālim al-kabir al-mağdūb al-ṣahir” (the great alim and the famous mad saint)<sup>35</sup> and other scholars who taught šayb ‘Isa, that belonged to the legal school of al-Šafi‘i<sup>36</sup>, Islamic esoteric knowledge (*ilm al-żāhir*). 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 Čäanno where he studied with šayb Abbayye. There he heard about the šayb of Dana, northeast of Wäl迪ya, in Yägg̍u<sup>37</sup> whose fame was growing. He thus stopped his studies and set out to Dana to visit šayb Ĝämalu Daniy (this is the name of the šayb of Dana mentioned in the Amharic text), who impressed him with his learning and attitude. After this *ziyāra*<sup>38</sup> to the Daniy Sani (this is how the Amharic text calls the šayb)<sup>39</sup>, šayb ‘Isa went back to Čäanno and finished his curriculum studiorum. He deepened his Islamic learning and he became a full-fledged ‘ālim. He then decided to rejoin šayb Daniy Sani in Dana, who having proved his preparation, granted him the permit to teach.

As for this connection of šayb ‘Isa with the renowned cultural centre of Dana, a number of questions arise. The centre is linked to the name of its founder, šayb Ahmäd b. Ādam, commonly known with the nickname Daniyy Awwal, the first šayb of Dana, who was born in Bataho and died in 1903 A.D. in Anna, where his shrine became a destination for pious visitors<sup>40</sup>. Šayb

<sup>34</sup> Muhammäd Wāfa should apparently be the grandson of šayb ‘Isa, being the son of the šayb’s son Sultan.

<sup>35</sup> For a definition of the concept of *mağdūb* among Islamic holy men see GRAMLICH art. in EI<sup>2</sup> s. v. *Mađdūb* and DOLS 1992, pp. 366–422.

<sup>36</sup> The *madhab* of al-Šafi‘i is by far the predominant legal school in Ethiopia and in the whole region (Somalia and East Africa). See TRIMINGHAM 1952, pp. 231–32.

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

<sup>38</sup> The Amharic text uses the verb *zäyyära*, derived from the Arabic word *ziyāra*. The *ziyāra* is the pious visit to a šayb or, more frequently, to his shrine, performed on different religious occasions or festivals.

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

<sup>40</sup> O’FAHEY 2003 pp. 47–48.

Ahmad b. Adam, whose collection of poems in praise of the Prophet (*rāmsā*) is wide spread among Muslims in Ethiopia, was a disciple of *šayb* Gamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Annī<sup>41</sup>, who initiated him to the Qādiriyya brotherhood.

In Anna, *šayb* Ahmad b. Adam (Daniy Awwal) was apparently succeeded by Muḥammad Yāsīn, who should thus be the *šayb* 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 *šayb* of Dana, perhaps therefore to be called *šayb* Daniy Salis (the third), and was visited by Hasselblatt in 1972<sup>42</sup>.

So, according to the available data, the Amharic text is clearly in error in calling *šayb* Daniy Sani by the name of Ġamālu. It seems that the anonymous writer mistook the *šayb* of Dana with Ġamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad, the *šayb* of Anna. Moreover, in the Arabic version of the text, it is said that *šayb* Isa "took the noble *Tarīqa al-Qādiriyya* from *šayb* Ahmad b. Adam al-Dānī"<sup>43</sup>, 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 *šayb* Isa went to Dana the first time to meet Ahmad b. Adam (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, *šayb* Ahmad initiated *šayb* Isa to the Qādiriyya brotherhood.

With the *iğāza* of the *šayb* of Dana, *šayb* Isa became a teacher in the village of Lahme, near Čanno. He then went back to his native Gurage land and settled in the *kələl* of Mafed, in the *wäräda* of Ḥinnämor. To spread Islamic

<sup>41</sup> Ġamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad of Anna in Rayya, teacher, writer and holy man, died in 1882 at Korāme in Yāğğu (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* 'alā al-nabī (prayers for the Prophet) which appeared at an unknown moment in Addis Ababa at the Addis Mattāmiya Bet. The book contains the following titles: *Rawdat al-asrār fi al-ṣalāt 'alā al-nabī al-muḥtār* (main title of the collection), the *al-Tuhfa al-rabbāniyya bi-al-ṣalāt 'alā imām al-hadra al-qudsiyya* and finally the *Miftāh al-madād fi al-ṣalāt wa-al-salām 'alā rasūl allāh al-sanad*.

<sup>42</sup> HASSELBLATT 1972, pp. 17–18.

<sup>43</sup> The Arabic text speaks of *šayb* Ahmad b. Adam in a very commendatory way, giving him the attributes of "al-*šayb* al-fardānī wa-al-*allāma* al-rabbānī" (the unique *šayb* and the divine learned scholar).

learning in the region, *šayb* ‘Isa 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), *hadīt*, *fiqh* and also of *dikr* and *awrād* (mystical practices). There it was also possible for Muslims to perform Friday’s community prayer and the two *īd*-s ceremonies.

In the frame of the activities realized by *šayb* ‘Isa 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 *šayb* ‘Isa who did not loosen his pressure on the authorities, it was permitted that *qādī* were appointed in Ethiopia. According to our source, *šayb* ‘Isa 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 *šayb* ‘Isa 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 *gūmā* prayer on fridays, and the two feast prayers), they were obliged to gather in private compounds, owned by Arabs in the Arada area. *Šayb* ‘Isa, 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* Habtä Giyorgis. After some incertitude, *šayb* ‘Isa 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 *masjid al-nūr* in Benin Säfär, Addis Ababa<sup>44</sup>.

The minaret of the mosque was also built, and it stood higher than *fitawrari* Habtä Giyorgis had consented. The Ethiopian dignitary, filled with anger, ordered the mosque to be destroyed and summoned *šayb* ‘Isa to order him to raze the building to the ground. *Šayb* ‘Isa, with his characteristic calm and smartness, made clear to *fitawrari* Habtä 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 Habtä 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.

<sup>44</sup> One of the Arab donors who contributed to the financing of the mosque was the yemeni trader ‘Abd al-Rahmān Bā Zar‘a (HUSSEIN AHMED 1997, p. 340).

The frank and challenging character of *šayb* ‘Isa 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 Goğgam, he managed to have a mosque and an Islamic cultural centre built in Dägän, which was to become the cradle of Islamic learning in the whole region.

In 1941 E.C. *šayb* ‘Isa died at the age of 83, leaving as a sort of spiritual and material successor, his son, *šäläqa hāgg* Sultān ‘Isa, who was a great contributor to the strengthening of the Muslims in Ethiopia.

### 3. *Šayb* Säyd Mähammäd Sadiq (1889–1969 E.C.)<sup>45</sup>

This very renowned scholar was born in the area called Goğgam in the *kələl* of Çəfita in the *wäräda* of Tähulädäre in the *awrağga* of Ambassäl (Wallo), from *šayb* Mähammäd Sadiq and Zämzäm Säyd.

A part of the *šayb* genealogy, which is said to have been transmitted by *šayb* Säyd himself, is given in the Arabic version of the article and runs: “Muhammad Şädiq b. ‘Abd al-Mälík b. al-Sahāb ‘Alī b. al-Şädiq b. Faqīh b. al-Şiddīq (or Şadīq) b. ‘Abdallāh b. al-Sayyid Kabīr Şālih b. *faqīh* Mūs (sic!) b. *faqīh* Ismā‘il b. *faqīh* Muhammād b. ‘Umar b. Abādir ‘Alī al-hararī b. ‘Umar b. ‘Abdallāh b. Aḥmad b. Sulaymān b. Muhammād b. Muhammād al-amīn b. Nāṣir b. Idrīs b. ‘Abd al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm b. Hāmid b. Sulaymān b. Aḥmad b. ‘Abd al-Nūr and so on ...”.<sup>46</sup>

It appears from this *nasab* that *šayb* Säyd was a descendant of the famous saint Abadir of Harar. In the *nasab* the holy man is called Abādir ‘Alī al-hararī ibn ‘Umar, whereas the most common form of his name in Harar is Abādir ‘Umar al-riḍā. After this name the succession of Abādir’s forefathers is left unconcluded at 14 generations before Abādir with a certain ‘Abd al-Nūr. We thus can not know whom the *nasab* considered the founding ancestor of *šayb* Säyd, and *šayb* Abādir, family<sup>47</sup>.

<sup>45</sup> *Bilal*, 1, 9 (1985 E.C.), pp. 21–23. The article is by *hāgg* Mähammäd Wāle. The Arabic version, also authored by *hāgg* Mähammäd Wāle is on p. 37 (not pp. 37–39 as in O’FAHEY 2003, p. 59), under the title “*Nubda min bayāt al-šayb al-munādil ‘alá iżħār al-haqq al-šayb al-labib Sayyid Muhammād Şädiq*” (A fragment from the life of the *šayb*, the fighter for the exposition of the truth, the sensible *šayb* Sayyid Muhammād Şädiq); according to O’FAHEY 2003, p. 59, this article was also published in the *Manħal al-‘atšān fi ta’riħ al-ħubšān* by Muhammād Şädiq). HUSSEIN AHMAD 1998, pp. 99–100 mentions these two articles.

<sup>46</sup> *Bilal*, 1, 9 (1985 E.C.), p. 37.

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

Šayb 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. šayb Säyd went back to Addis and started teaching the Amharic language in the school founded by the Islamic concord council (*Yä'əslam səməmənnät mahbär*), and thus proved in practise that learning Amharic was very useful for all Muslim pupils and did not cause any damage to their Islamic education<sup>48</sup>. He also inspired a periodical public meeting of students coming from Islamic, State and Missionary schools, who every Sunday gathered at Täfäri Mäkwon-nən 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 Mähammad Sani Habib is mentioned as a source, šayb Säyd also allegedly had secret contacts with *amir* Šakib Arslān (1869–1946), the champion of pan-Arabism and of what was called more or less accurately Islamic nationalism<sup>49</sup>.

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 mahbär*, and he delivered public speeches in favour of the mobilization of the whole country to repell 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 *qādī* of Wallo, which he managed to establish.

In this period he made the general *qādī* 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 šayb Abādir, 'Umar Aw Quṭb, and of one of his sons, 'Umar Quṭb al-Dīn. Other descendants of šayb 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.

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

<sup>49</sup> CLEVELAND 1985.

tates of their faith should they learn Amharic at school, was completely devoid of sense<sup>50</sup>. In 1938 E.C. he asked that Amharic lessons would be given in the school of the Shewa Bärr 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 *šayb* Säyd's undiminished zeal and continuous striving, a modern and organized school was opened next to the Shewa Bärr 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, *šayb* Säyd also taught.

*Šayb* 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 Ḥaylä Šəllase ordered the Koran to be translated into Amharic, he was chosen as official translator together with Mähammad Sani Habib<sup>51</sup>.

*Šayb* Säyd died on the 7<sup>th</sup> *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 country<sup>52</sup>; an Amharic book called "*Isləmənnanna Misyonawəyan*", which was prepared and conceived as an answer to Gwäbäze Täffäṭä's book "*Isləmənnanna 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 Ḥaylä Šəllase and obtained the prohibition of the distribution of the book.

Other didactic books written by *šayb* Säyd and still unpublished are "*Agärəhən əwəq!*", apparently on history and/or geography and "*Yätäwhidənna yäfiqb mämmariya*", apparently a manual for learning the principles of Islamic theology and law.

<sup>50</sup> "Muslim tämaročč amarəñña kätämaru yəkäfrallu" was the statement made by opponents of the introduction of Amharic in the syllabus of Muslim students (*käffärä* derives directly from Arabic *kafara*).

<sup>51</sup> On the translation of the Koran in Amharic see RICCI 1969–70.

<sup>52</sup> Published with the title *Manhal al-əatşān fi ta'rih al-hubşān* in Ṣan'ā<sup>o</sup> 1422 A.H./2000 A.D. (O'FAHEY 2003, p. 55).

#### 4. *Haġġi Muḥammad Sani Ḥabib* (1906–1981 E.C.)<sup>53</sup>

We now come to the text on perhaps the most famous Ethiopian *‘ālim* of the past century<sup>54</sup>.

*Haġġi* Muḥammad Sani<sup>55</sup> Ḥabib was born in the *qäbäle* of Ančarro Kärabitti in the *awraġġa* of Qallu (Wallo) in 1906 E.C. The Arabic text indicates the village (*qarya*) of Adula Āgar in the area (*nāhiya*) of Karra Byet in Qallu in 1332h/1913–14 as birthplace and date of birth of *haġġ* Muḥammad Sani. His parents were *haġġ* Ḥabib Bašir and Fātima (Amharic Fatūma) Malik. The Arabic version affirms that Muḥammad Sani’s grandfather, Bašir, was originating from Wälqayt, and he came to settle in Wallo.

*Haġġi* Muḥammad Sani studied all the different branches of Islamic traditional sciences: Koran, *fiqh*, Arabic grammar, *tafsīr*, *mantiq* (logic), *uṣūl al-fiqh*, *hadīt*, *balāġa*<sup>56</sup>. According to the Arabic text, which is very detailed in giving the curriculum studiorum of the *šayb*, *haġġi* Muḥammad Sani started studying the Quran when he was seven under the guidance of *šayb* Muftī Ibn Ibrāhīm al-Warabbābī<sup>57</sup> and then he continued with *šayb* Ahmād Lāšī. He completed the study of the Kurān at 11 and then devoted himself to *fiqh*. He studied Islamic Law with *šayb* Ahmād Qāllū ibn Bašir who instructed him in the *madhab* of Abū Hanīfa. He studied Arabic grammar with *šayb* Kammalaw ibn Muḥammad<sup>58</sup>, who was named the Sibawayh of his time<sup>59</sup>.

According to the Arabic source, in 1357 A.H./1938–39 A.D. *haġġi* Muḥammad Sani intended to perform the *haġġ* 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-Mīrğānī and teacher of Arabic

<sup>53</sup> *Bilal* 1, 1 (1985), pp. 16–17; Arabic text, authored by Mähammäd Wäle, under the title *Nubda ‘an hayāt šaybinā al-rāhil al-haġġ Muḥammad Tānī Ḥabib*, at pp. 36–37. O’FAHEY 2003, pp. 58–59.

<sup>54</sup> The Arabic version of the text calls him very deferently *šayb al-mašāyib*. He authored many works but oddly enough none of them is mentioned in the article. His *Isləmənna ənna yätallaqu näbiy yäMuḥammad tarik* appeared in its third edition in 1981 E.C. (the book first appeared in 1960 E.C.).

<sup>55</sup> The Amharic form Sani comes directly from Arabic *Tānī*, 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.

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

<sup>57</sup> His *nisba* indicates his connection with Wärra Babbo.

<sup>58</sup> Both names are mentioned by HUSSEIN AHMED 1988, p. 102.

<sup>59</sup> This honorific epithet magnifies the exceptional knowledge *šayb* Kammalaw had of Arabic by making him equal to the famous Sibawayh (d. 796 A.D.), generally considered the founder of Arabic grammatical science (CARTER art. in EI<sup>2</sup> s. v. Sibawayhi).

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

*Hāggī* Muhammād Sani came back to Ethiopia through Ḥiġāz and went once again to the school (*maġlis*) of his master *šayb* Ahmād Qāllū and studied with him some commentaries on the books of *fiqh*. In particular he devoted his attention to the *Durr al-Muhtār*, that is the commentary of Muhammād b. ‘Alī al-Ḥaṣkafī (d. 1677 A.D.) to the *Tanwīr al-absār wa-ğāmi‘ al-bihār*, a well known manual of Ḥanafī Jurisprudence of *furu‘ al-fiqh* (branches of Law) written by Muhammād b. ‘Abdallāh al-Timīrtāshī (d. 1595 A.D.)<sup>60</sup>. The 16 *muḥarram* 1361 A.H./ 3 February 1942 A.D. *šayb* Ahmād Qāllū gave *šayb* Muhammād Sani the *iğāza*, 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 follows<sup>61</sup>:

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي جَعَلَنَا وَرَثَةً لِسَيِّدِ الْمُرْسَلِينَ وَجَعَلَنَا حَمْلَةً شَرِيعَتِهِ وَمَبْلِغَ حِكَمِهِ لِلْعَالَمِينَ  
صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَعَلَى آلِهِ وَحَزِبِهِ الْمُفْلِحِينَ  
إِنَّمَا بَعْدَ فَقْدِ اجْزَتْ لَوْلَدِ مُحَمَّدِ ثَانِي بْنِ الْحَاجِ حَبِيبِ بْنِ شَيْرَى جَمِيعَ مَا قَرَأَهُ عَلَى مِنْ مَتَوْنَ وَشَرُوحَ وَحَوَشَ بِالنَّشْرِ وَالْإِفَادَةِ  
عَمَّا مَا اجْزَأَهُ صَحِيقَةً وَذَلِكَ يَوْمُ الْاثْنَيْنِ الْمَبَارَكِ السَّادِسِ عَشَرِ مُحْرَمَ الْحَرَامِ مِنْ عَامِ ١٣٦١ هـ وَفَقَ أَللَّهُ لِمَا يُرْضِاهُ

“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 Muhammād Tānī b. *al-hāgg* Ḥabīb Bašīr 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 16<sup>th</sup> 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 Albukko<sup>62</sup> where he studied under the guidance of *šayb* Ahmād Nūrī the *tafsīr*, *balāqā*, *mantiq*, metres of versification (*‘arūd*), *taġwid* (reciting of the Koran) and *uṣūl al-fiqh*. In *rabi‘ al-tānī* 1363 A.H./March–April 1944 A.D., he obtained the *iğāza* from Ahmād Nūrī

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

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

<sup>62</sup> Albukko in Qallu is linked with the educational and military activities of Muhammād Šāfi (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 follows<sup>63</sup>:

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم الحمد لله وحده والصلوة والسلام على من لا نبي بعده بعد السلام وعلى ولدي الشيخ  
محمد ثانٍ مما اعرفك اني اجزت لك جميع ما قرءته 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 Ḥabib, 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*<sup>c</sup> *al-ṭānī* 1363 A.H.”.

Having thus completed his studies, Muḥammad Sani married Kəbre<sup>64</sup> the daughter of the *šayb* Sa‘īd Maṇṣūr al-Warrāhabbānī, 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 years<sup>65</sup>. From 1969 to 1971 A.D., he taught at *Däggazmacč* ‘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 *hadīt*, *balāqā tafsīr* and *mantiq*. In 1396 A.H./1976 A.D. he became president of the High Council for Islamic Affairs, then *imām* and *baṭīb* of the Anwar mosque and president of the administrative committee of the mosques: he maintained these offices until his death.

Muḥammad 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-hāgg al-šayb* ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Nahwī; *šayb* Muḥammad Bušrā; *šayb* Muḥammad Ḥamzā; *šayb* ‘Umar Idrīs; *šayb* Muftī; *šayb* Sa‘īd Yūsuf; *šayb* Muṣṭafā Ḥabīb; *šayb* Ğamāl; *šayb* Aḥmad Muḥammad; *šayb* Muḥammad Zayn Zahr; *šayb* Sa‘īd Aḥmad Muṣṭafā; *šayb* Muḥammad Wāle.

Muḥammad 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,

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

<sup>64</sup> Written KBRĀ in Arabic script.

<sup>65</sup> 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.

Muhammad Sani was hospitalized in the month of *ša'ban* at the Təqur Anbasa hospital and treated for 23 days. He died at the age of 75, on Friday the 23<sup>rd</sup> 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, Mähammad Wäle wrote these verses<sup>66</sup>:

The mountain of science and discernment and piety died  
 The regions of the whole area darkened for his loss  
 The tears of the people flowed like pouring rain  
 An *imam* whose death struck all the people  
 Let the mosque mourn for him day and night  
 Let the day of Friday mourn for him, and his sweetest sermon  
 Let the *tafsir* mourn for him with its pouring tears  
 And a room and an office of the Council mourn for him  
 And the Committee of the *da'wa*<sup>67</sup>, every late afternoon.

لقد مات طور العلم و الحلم و النتقى  
 واظلم ارحاء النواحي بفقده  
 وسالت دموع الشعب كالغيث الهاطل  
 امام اصيبي القوم طرا بموته  
 ليكه مسجد في يوم وفي ليل  
 انتبه جمعة وخطبته الاحلى  
 ليبله تفسير بدممعه الهاطل  
 وتبكه غرفة ومكتب مجلس  
 ولجنة دعوة في كل الاصائل

### 5. *Hägg̊ Abdulbasit Mähammad* (1920–1985 E.C.)<sup>68</sup>

He was born in the *qäbäle* of Minas, in the *wäräda* of Kälalla, *awraqäga* of Boräna (Wallo), from *šayb* Mähammad Halimät and Saliha Ga'afär, at an unknown date, but approximately four years before the battle of Sägäle<sup>69</sup>.

After he completed his very first education in his paternal house, he went to the *qäbäle* of Yäsola in the *awraqäga* of Dägär, where he studied *fiqh* under the guidance of *šayb* 'Ali Dägär<sup>70</sup>. He then moved to the *qäbäle* of Sore, where he extended his knowledge of *fiqh*, studying with *šayb* Abdulsälam

<sup>66</sup> 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.

<sup>67</sup> The *da'wa* 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.

<sup>68</sup> Bilal, 1, 10 (1985 E.C.), pp. 21–22. No Arabic version of this article is available. The Amharic text is authored by Mähammad Wäle. A short obituary of *hägg̊ Abdulbasit Mähammad* 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.

<sup>69</sup> The battle of Sägäle, during which *negus* Mika'el was defeated, took place on October 27<sup>th</sup> 1916 A.D. *Hägg̊ Abdulbasit Mähammad* should thus be born in 1920 A.D.

<sup>70</sup> According to HUSSEIN AHMED 2001, p. 91 the educational centre of Dägär was founded by Šaraf al-Din Ibrāhīm, in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> 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 Därra<sup>71</sup>, where he devoted himself to Arabic grammar (*nahw*) and verbal morphology (*sorf*<sup>72</sup>) following for at least 15 years the lessons of *šayb haġgi* Ahmäd Därra<sup>73</sup>.

*Haġġ* ‘Abdulbasiṭ eventually became a teacher in his turn. He transmitted to his own pupils the teachings of his masters, especially those of *haġgi* 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, *haġġ* ‘Abdulbasiṭ 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: *šayb* Čämal ‘Umär, who taught in Qelle Čäggäba in Borana<sup>74</sup>; *šayb* Mähammäd Sä‘id who taught in Därra; the already mentioned *haġgi* Mähammäd Wäle, author of the article; *šayb* Muhammäd Sultan Gättira<sup>75</sup>; *šayb* Muhammäd Amin Gissir; *šayb* Ahmäd Mukhøyldin Wärräbabbo; *šayb* Hasän Yälada; *šayb* Ahmäd Alföya; *šayb* Sä‘id Hasän Sulula, member of the *Räbiṭa* in Makka<sup>76</sup>; *šayb* Ahmäd Mənaya; *šayb* Muhammäd *šayb* Ali Adäm, who lived in Makka; *šayb* Abdällah Hamza; *šayb* Ali Kälala; *šayb* Siräguldin Bähät; *šayb* Ahmäd Aräbu; *šayb* Ali Näsr; *šayb* Sä‘id Yusuf; *šayb* Ahmäd ‘Ali. According to the article, all the foregoing scholars were still alive in Säne 1985 E.C., while the following were already deceased: *šayb* Ali Adäm, in Boräna

<sup>71</sup> 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.

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

<sup>73</sup> HUSSEIN AHMED 1989, p. 193 note 8 mentions a *šayb al-haġġ* Ahmäd b. ‘Umar of Därra (d. 1905/06) as the author of the work called *Naṣr al-‘anbar muhtaṣar al-misk al-adfar*, which is an abridged version of the *Misk al-adfar*, the hagiography of *šayb* Čäfar 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.

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

<sup>75</sup> Gättira, in highland Wallo was the birth-place of the famous mystic Čäfar 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).

<sup>76</sup> That is *Räbiṭat al-‘ālam al-islāmī* (Muslim World League), the Islamic International Organization founded in Mecca in 1962.

Tälanta; *šayb* ታክحا in Begemder/Wəšat; *šayb* Ibrahim Koreb; *šayb* Ahmäd Ibrahim, who was *imām* of the mosque of Arāb Gända in Dese; *šayb* Ali Muğib; *šayb* Sä'id 'Umär, who was *qādī* in the general *šari'a* court; *šayb* Ahmäd Fädlu; *šayb* Muhammäd Awwäl Hasän.

In his public activity, *hāgg* 'Abdulbasiṭ Mähammäd 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, *hāgg* 'Abdulbasiṭ Mähammäd took a very strong position against some mystical brotherhoods which deviated from the principles of the *šari'a*<sup>77</sup>. In particular, he opposed the cultual practises of some so called scholars of Boräna, 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.

*Hāgg* 'Abdulbasiṭ Mähammäd 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 *rağaz* meter, which gained him the admiration of many scholars. It is most probably a commentary of the *Mugnī al-Labīb* *'an kutub al-a'ārīb*, a handbook of Arabic syntax written by the Egyptian *faqīh* and grammarian Abū Muḥammad Ḍamāl 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 Ethiopia<sup>78</sup>. *Hāgg* 'Abdulbasiṭ Mähammäd was the first Ethiopian to write a poetical composition on this Arabic work.

<sup>77</sup> The Amharic text literally says: “käšäri'a yämmiyafänäggätu andand täriqawočč”.

<sup>78</sup> For some general information on this author see FLEISCH art. in EI<sup>2</sup> s.v. *Ibn Hisbām*; GAL II, pp. 23–25, GAL S II, pp. 16–20. Also HUSSEIN AHMED 1988, p. 100 men-

*YäMärah Näzm*, which should apparently be a poetical commentary on the *Marâb al-arwâb*, a well known handbook of Arabic grammar written by Aḥmad b. Ḩāfiẓ al-Ḥāfiẓ Mas’ūd (fl. 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D.)<sup>79</sup>. No other Ethiopian ḥāfiẓ wrote such a work before ḥāfiẓ Ḩabdulbasiṭ. The writer of his biography and chief redactor of *Bilal*, ḥāfiẓ Mähammäd Wäle was the first to study this book under the guidance of the *šayb*.

*Nukbätälfikr*, a composition on the rules of *hadît*<sup>80</sup>, was the first of its genre in Ethiopia.

*Näzmu Bafädl*, a verse commentary on the very wide-spread manual of Islamic jurisprudence according to the *madhab* of al-Šâfi’i, *Muqaddima al-hadramiyya fi fiqh al-sâda al-ṣâfi’iyya* written by Ḩabdallâh b. Ḩabd al-Râhmân Bâfaḍl al-Hâdramâi<sup>81</sup>, which is currently in use also in Islamic educational centres in Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia<sup>82</sup>.

*Durrul Fârid*, which is defined as a book of historical genealogy (*tawlađ*), which was the first of its genre to be written in verse by an Ethiopian ḥāfiẓ<sup>83</sup>.

Moreover the article also mentions some poetry in praise of the Prophet Muhammad (*madhb/šama’il*) which aroused the admiration of every listener.

Ḩāfiẓ Ḩabdulbasiṭ Mähammäd 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. Ḩāfiẓ Ḩabdulbasiṭ knew also *qâne* 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 *Nazm al-muğnî* of Ḩāfiẓ Ḩabdulbasiṭ could be a versification of al-Ǧârabardi *al-Muğnî fi ‘ilm al-naħw*.

<sup>79</sup> GAL II, p. 21; GAL S II, p. 14. O’FAHEY 2003, p. 46.

<sup>80</sup> We did not manage to ascertain whether this poetical composition by Ḩāfiẓ Ḩabdulbasiṭ Mähammäd is an original creation of his own or whether there is an Arabic work in its background.

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

<sup>82</sup> The *Muqaddima* was even published in Ethiopia by the same al-Nâğâšî publishing house in 1988 A.D. together with *al-Ǧâya wa-al-taqrib*, another manual of *fiqh* by Abû Ṣuğâa.

<sup>83</sup> We did not manage to identify an Arabic original, if any, for this work by Ḩāfiẓ Ḩabdulbasiṭ Mähammäd.

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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.