

AAP N° 21



MÄRZ 1990

Herausgeber:

Matthias Brenzinger, Ulrike Claudi, Friederike Hünemeyer
und Raimund Kastenholz

Institut für Afrikanistik
Universität zu Köln
D-5000 Köln 41

Umschlagentwurf: Andreas Lessau

© bei den Autoren

ISSN 0178-725X

BIBLICAL TRANSLATIONS AND OTHER CHRISTIAN
WRITINGS IN SOMALI: A SURVEY

B.W.Andrzejewski

Introduction

As far as I have been able to ascertain, no comprehensive survey of biblical translations and other Christian writings in Somali has ever been published. There is a Somali section in Geraldine Coldham's bibliographies,¹ but it covers only biblical translations and stops at 1972; my aim here is to fill this gap in the documentation. In compiling the bibliographical materials for this article I have received help from the following people, which I gratefully acknowledge: Anne Ahern, Mark J.Hinton, Sue French, Dorothy Modricker and A.Keene Spittler.

The sizable volume of publications listed here might suggest that there is a correspondingly large readership. However, such an impression would be wide of the mark since the number of people who are reached by them is very small indeed. This is not surprising if we consider that Somalis have been a Muslim nation for many centuries and that the Christian minority among them probably does not exceed five hundred people out of the total population of between five and six million, living in Somalia and the adjacent territories of Kenya, Ethiopia and the Djibouti Republic.²

Somali Christians belong to either the Protestant or the Roman Catholic denomination. There may be a few individuals who are members

of the Ethiopian Church, but I do not have any information about them at my disposal.

It seems certain that the initiative and the requisite funding to produce the publications under discussion have come from expatriate missionaries from Europe and America, with the exception of Leo Reinisch's biblical translations which were used for linguistic description. The aim of the missionaries was, of course, to provide texts for the existing Christian communities and, hopefully, to reach out to potential inquirers. These works were the result of cooperation between expatriates and born speakers of Somali, since the standard of language competence in them is such that they could hardly have been made by any unassisted expatriate who learnt Somali as an adult.

Before 1972 the work of Christian translators and writers was greatly impeded by the lack of a generally accepted orthography for Somali. Although Somalis have always used their mother tongue when speaking to each other, all their communication in writing in private and public life was conducted in foreign languages: Arabic, Italian, English or French. There were exceptions to this, as some individuals or groups used private systems of writing, but these were not generally known.³

In Christian publications before 1972 ad hoc systems of transcribing Somali in Latin script were used which were comprehensible only to those Somalis who were literate in Italian, English or French or those who learnt the Latin alphabet from the missionaries. These systems of writing were

difficult to read since they were devised by expatriates who, with the exception of Leo Reinisch, ignored some of the essential phonemic distinctions in Somali, in particular the vowel length, which plays an important role in the lexicon and the grammar. But even if these systems had been accurate some instruction in their use would have been necessary.

When Somalia became independent in 1960 it was the intention of the government to introduce a national orthography but this plan met with serious obstacles since no consensus could be reached as to the choice of script, and violent disagreements ensued. It was only in 1972, when a military government came to power and ignored discordant opinions, that a national orthography in Latin script was introduced. Somali now became the official language of the state and within a few months it replaced foreign languages in all forms of administration and public business. It was immediately introduced into the school curricula and spread even to the rural interior through massive literacy campaigns. Within a few years Somali became the sole medium of instruction in schools and an auxiliary language in higher education.⁴

These spectacular changes, which put Somalia in the forefront of African countries as far as literacy in the mother tongue was concerned, created a large and avid reading public. Potentially this situation made biblical translations and other Christian writings, now all printed in the national orthography, accessible to all literate Somalis. Yet they have attracted only a small number of readers outside the Christian minority

since their distribution is seriously impeded by the negative attitude of the general public and particularly of its religious leaders towards any publications which stand in conflict with the Islamic faith.

In spite of this difficulty the new Christian publications have reached many members of the Christian minority. Nowadays even some individual Somali Muslims, both in their own territories and in Europe and America, have shown interest in them. It is not easy to assess their motivation. In some cases it is a matter of genuine spiritual quest but in others the attraction most probably comes from intellectual curiosity about Christianity as a major world religion. The translation of the whole Bible in 1979 was a particularly important addition to the corpus of biblical translations since the Old Testament does not essentially stand in conflict with Islamic teaching and some of its narratives have parallels in the Koran.

What is more, its translators have taken care to use the Somali forms of personal names, based on Arabic. Thus we have *Aadan* for Adam, *Xaawa* for Eve, *Muuse* for Moses, *Nuux* for Noah, *Ayuub* for Job, *Suleymaan* for Solomon, *Yuusuf* for Joseph and *Maryan* for Mary. Such names are familiar to Somalis not only from Islamic teaching but also because many of them are favoured as personal names. The 1979 translation of the Bible has impressed a number of Somalis by its style and diction and it seems that the translating team included Somalis of outstanding literary ability. Speaking about the translation of the Psalms one Somali poet remarked that it reads as if it had been originally written

in his mother tongue.

Arrangement of the bibliography

The bibliography given below is divided into two parts. The first lists translations of the Bible, partial or complete, while in the second are found miscellaneous Christian writings. For the convenience of readers who do not know the language Somali titles are translated into English but are placed in brackets to show that they do not belong to the title pages themselves. These translations of the titles will also give some indication of how the translators endeavour to indicate the contents of their works to the general public. Some of the bibliographical entries are accompanied by explanatory notes, also in brackets, to distinguish them from the rest of the entry. The following abbreviations are used:

- BFBS British and Foreign Bible Society
- BSK Bible Society of Kenya
- EPH Evangel Publishing House
- Ex. Excerpts from...
- NT New Testament
- Pam. Pamphlet
- POG The People of God (Series)
- OT Old Testament
- SGM Scripture Gift Mission
- SIM Sudan Interior Mission

Biblical translations

The list of translations is divided into two sections. In Section A are found those translations which are written in one of the pre-orthographic ad hoc scripts and in Section B those written in the Somali national orthography. It should be noted that all the translations of biblical texts in works published after 1972 are the same as in **Axdiga Cusub oo Rabbigeena iyo Badbaadiyeheena Ciise Masiix** (1976) and **Kitaabka Qoduuska ah** (1979). The only exception to this is **Injiisha waxa weye Axdiga Cusub e Yesuc Masiixa** (1983) which is also exceptional in its departures from the rules of the Somali national orthography applied to the representation of diphthongs.

SECTION A

Ahhdiga 'Usub o Rabbigena iyo Badbadiyyehena 'Ise Masihh
[The New Testament of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ]. Nairobi:
BSK, 1972.

Anjilka sidu digey Marko [The Gospel According to Mark]. London:
BFBS, 1915.

Anjilki ghudusah sidi udigey Yohana [The Holy Gospel According to
John]. London: BFBS, 1929 and 1949.

Baqninti habsijirka [The Fright of the Jail-Keeper]. London: SGM, n.d.
[Pam.Ex.NT.]

Biyaha nolosha [The Water of Life]. London: SGM, n.d. [Pam.Ex.N.T.]

Bukanka iyo buksinta [The Illness and the Healing]. London: SGM, n.d.

[Pam.Ex.OT and NT.]

Habeinka ad lo hususto [The Night that Is Very Much Remembered].

London: SGM, n.d. [Pam.Ex.NT.]

Injilka Qodusah e 'Isa Kristos Rabbigena o Badrinta iyo Kristanka Somalied e Missionka Berbera (ilama sannadii 1910) "Vulgate" kaga rogen af Somali [The Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ, translated from the Vulgate by the Fathers of the Mission at Berbera (till 1910) and Christian Somalis]. Diré-Daoua [Diretawa, Ethiopia]: Imprimerie St. Lazare, Mission Catholique, 1935. [Reissued by Catholic Mission Press in Aden, n.d.]

Injilka sida Lukos u qorey [The Gospel According to Luke]. Nairobi: BSK, 1969.

Ka so noqodka dauga gudurka [Return from the Road of Darkness].

London: SGM, n.d. [Pam.Ex.NT.]

Kolki Nabad-geliyuhu iss tâgey [When the Saviour Rose Up]. London:

SGM, n.d. [Pam.Ex.NT.]

Palermo, Padre Giovanni Maria da. "Narrazioni sacre." In his **Grammatica della lingua somala**. With a preface by Luigi Salol. Asmara: Tipografia Francescana, Missione Cattolica, 1914, pp. 277-289. [Ex. OT and NT.]

Reinisch, Leo. "Biblische Texte." In his **Die Somali-Sprache**. Vienna: Kaiserliche Akademie der Wissenschaften, Südarabische Expedition, Band I, Alfred Hölder, 3 vols, 1900, 1901 and 1903; vol.1, pp.1-73. [Ex. OT and NT.]

So noqodki hagga harada [Return to the Fold]. London: SGM, n.d.

[Pam.Ex.NT.]

Warki ugu wada wanâksana e Ilah [The Best of All News of God].
London: SGM, n.d. [Pam.Ex.OT and NT.]

SECTION B

Adhijirka wanaagsan [The Good Shepherd]. London: SGM, n.d. [Pam.
Ex.OT and NT.]

Ardiga Cusub oo Rabbigeena iyo Badbaadiyeheena Ciise Masiix
[The New Testament of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ]. Nairobi:
BSK, 1976.

Bilowgii: Kitaabkii kowaad ee Nebi Muuse oo la yidhaahdo
Bilowgii [Genesis: The First Book of Prophet Moses, Called Genesis].
Nairobi: SIM, 1981.

Biyaha nolosha [The Water of Life]. London: SGM, n.d. [Pam. Ex. NT.]
Goodman, Watson, ed. **Gargaar xagga sare ka yimid** [The Help Which
Came from Above]. New Paris, Indiana: World Missionary Press, n.d.
[Pam. Ex. OT and NT.]

Dembidhaafka [The Forgiveness of Sins]. London: SGM, n.d. [Pam. Ex. NT.]

Injiisha waxa weye Ardiga Cusub e Yesuc Masiixa [The Gospels,
That Is The New Testament of Jesus Christ]. Nairobi: EPH, 1983.

Injiilka sida Luukos u qoray [The Gospel According to Luke]. Nairobi:
BSK, 1981. [The Gospel According to Luke]. Nairobi: SIM, 1981.

Jidka badbaadada [The Road to Salvation]. London: SGM, n.d. [Pam. Ex..
OT and NT.]

Kanu waa Amiirka iyo Badbaadiyaha [This is the Ruler and the
Saviour]. London: SGM, nd. [Pam. Ex. NT.]

Kitaabka quduuska ah [The Holy Book]. Canada: SIM, 1979. [A translation of the whole Bible. The town where this work was published is not given but it should be noted that the Canadian Headquarters of the SIM is situated at 10 Huntingdale Boulevard, Scarborough, Ontario M1W 2S5.]

Kitaabkii Ishacyaah [The Book of Isaiah]. Krimpen, Holland: C.R.A., n.d. [I have been unable to establish the meaning of the abbreviation "C.R.A." in spite of extensive inquiries.]

Kitaabkii labad ee Muuse oo la yidhaahdo Baxniintii [The Second Book of Moses, called Exodus] South Holland, Illinois: World Home Bible League, n.d.

Maahmaahyadii laga helo Axdiga Hore ee Kitaabka Ilaah [The Proverbs Which Are Found in the Old Testament of God's Book]. Nairobi : SIM, 1981. [A translation of the Book of Proverbs.]

Markhaatiga iyo hadalka [The Witness and the Word]. Forestville, Australia: Multicultural People of the Book, 1986. [A Somali translation of the Acts of the Apostles.]

Nolosha cusub [The New Life]. London: SGM, n.d. [Pam.Ex.NT.]

Nuurka dunida [The Light of the World]. London: SGM, n.d. [Pam.Ex.NT.]

Sabuurrada laga helo Axdiga Hore ee Kitaabka Ilaah [The Psalms Which Are Found in the Old Testament of God's Book]. South Holland, Illinois: World Home Bible League, n.d.

Talogalkii Ilaah u talagalay Binu-aadmiga [The Plan which God Designed for Mankind]. London: SGM, n.d. [Pam. Ex. OT and NT.]

Miscellaneous Christian writings

This list is also divided into two sections. Section C contains pre-orthographic works and Section D those written in the national orthography.

SECTION C

- Dyer, K.G. **Ilah keliah, daw keliah** [Only One God: Only One Road].
 Trans. Anonymous. N.d.: Mal'āmadi Kitab Qodus e Emmaus [Emmaus Bible School], n.d. [An outline of Christian doctrine in two parts, the first of which contains the text and the second questions for students.]
- Haj-oirku-eh (gharko): "A Heaven's Pilgrimage". An Attempt to Render (So Far As May Be) in Somali the First Part of Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress".** Cairo: [printed at] Nile Mission Press, n.d. [Philip Cousins in his book **Ethelstan Cheese: A Saint of No Fixed Abode** (Worthing, England, Churchman Publishing, 1986, pp.69-70) states that this work was translated and published by Rev. John Ethelstan Cheese. The name of Cheese's Somali assistant is not known. Although the title is in Somali and English the text is in Somali only. On the cover the title is **Haj-osamad-eh** which has the same meaning as **Haj-oirku-eh** "A Pilgrimage to Heaven".]

Katekismka dabta Kristanka iyo tukashoyinka o af Somaliah

[The Catechism of Christian Doctrine and Prayers in Somali]. Aden: The Catholic Mission in Aden and the Sodality of St.Peter Claver, 1938.

Katekismka dabta Kristanka: Il catechismo della dottrina cristiana. Mogadishu: Vicariato Apostolico, 1953.**Kitab tukacho iyo heso Somaliah** [A Prayer and Hymn Book in Somali]. Rome: Sodalité de St.Pierre Claver, 1954.

Palermo, Padre Giovanni Maria da. "Narrazioni sacre." In his **Grammatica della lingua somala**. With a preface by Luigi Salol. Asmara: Tipografia Francescana, Missione Cattolica, 1914, pp.275-277 and 289-294. [Prayers and religious instruction.]

Qalbigi dad [The Heart of Man]. Pretoria: All Nations Gospel Publishers, n.d. [An adapted translation of an illustrated inspirational work with a Christian message published in Augsburg in 1824 by Johannes Evangelista Gossner (1773-1858) under the title **Das Herz des Menschen**. It was followed by several other editions and numerous translations. In the introduction Gossner states that the German version itself was a translation of a French text made in Würzburg in 1772 under the title **Geistlicher Sittenspiegel**. Neither the original author nor the translator are known. Earlier editions than that of 1824 have been reported but I have not been able to trace them.]

Shekada ilmiga tan yar [The Little Story of Knowledge]. Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder and Co., 1937. [On the reverse of the title page it is stated that the work is a "Translation into Somali language of

Knecht's Bible History."]

Section D

Badbaadiyaha dunida [The Saviour of the World]. Nairobi: Emmaus Bible School, Evangel Publishing House, n.d. [Correspondence lessons on the Gospel of St.Luke.]

Baadbaadiyaha dunida: Buuga imtixaanka [The Saviour of the World: An Examination book]. Nairobi: Emmaus Bible School, Evangel Publishing House, n.d. [A collection of questions relating to the item listed above.]

Ciise Masiixi oo lagu sheegay Quraanka iyo Baybalka. [Jesus Christ as Presented in the Koran and the Bible]. N.p.: n.p., n.d. [On the back cover the name of the printer is given as : A.I.C.Kijabe Printing Press. This press is situated in Nairobi. A translation of Anon. Isa (Jesus Christ) in the Quran and the Bible, Minneapolis, U.S.A.: Fellowship of Isa (Jesus Christ), n.d.]

Derbigii weynaa [The Great Wall]. Linfield, N.S.W.Australia: Paul White Productions, 1981. [A comic with a Christian message.]

Iska jira dabino! [Beware of Traps!]. Linfield, N.S.W.Australia: Paul White Productions, 1980. [A comic with a Christian message.]

Kitaab tukasho [A Prayer Book]. With a preface by Bishop Salvatore Colombo. Mogadishu: n.p. 1981.

Qasiidooyin Ilaah amaan ah [Hymns in God's Praise]. N.p.: n.p., n.d. [Christian hymns used by the Eastleigh Fellowship in Nairobi. Some

are most probably translations from English but others may be original compositions or adaptations. Alliterative verse is used in all of them. The name of the authors or translators of the hymns are not given.]

Shenk, D. assisted by a panel of consultants. **Bilowgii dadka: Casharro ku saabsan Kitaabkii Kowaad ee Tawreeddii Nebi Muuse, Koorsadii Kowaad** [The Beginning of People: Lessons Concerning the First Book of the Pentateuch of Prophet Moses. The First Course]. Trans. A.J.Faarax. Kisumu and Nairobi: EPH, POG Series, 1978.

Shenk, D. assisted by a panel of consultants. **Axdigii Ilaah la dhigtay dadka: Casharro laga soo guuriyey Kitabkii Labad oo Tawreeddii Nebi Muuse, Sabuurkii Nebi Daa'uud iyo nebiyo kale oo Ilaah. Koorsadii Labaad.** [God's Covenant with People: Lessons Gathered from the Second Book of the Pentateuch of Prophet Moses, the Psalms of Prophet David and from Other Prophets of God. The Second Course]. Trans. A.J.Faarax. Kisumu and Nairobi: EPH, POG Series, Publishing House, 1978.

Shenk, D. assisted by a panel of consultants. **Ilaahay dadka waa jecel yahay: Waa casharro laga soo guuriyey Injiilkii Ciise Masiix. Koorsadii Saddexaad** [God Loves People: These Are Lessons Gathered from the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Third Course]. Trans. A.J.Faarax. Kisumu and Nairobi: EPH, POG Series, 1979.

Shenk, D. assisted by a panel of consultants. **Dadka iimaanka leh: Casharro kale oo laga soo guuriyey Kitaabka Quduska ah. Koorsadii Afraad** [The People of Faith: Other Lessons Gathered from the Holy Bible. The Fourth Course]. Trans. A.J.Faarax. Kisumu

and Nairobi: EPH, POG Series, 1979.

Wootton, R.W.F., ed. **Ciise oo nebi ka weyn** [Jesus More than a Prophet].
Trans. Anon. Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1982. [Fifteen
testimonies of new Christians, each provided by the editor with a
biographical note].

The translators

As far as I have been able to ascertain all the translations listed in this article are a result of collaboration between expatriates who knew Somali but learnt it as adults, and born Somali speakers. In these cooperative enterprises the initiative, as well as all the logistic and organizational support, came from the expatriates who also, in view of their extensive knowledge of the source texts, were ultimately responsible for the fidelity of the translations. The Somali participants safeguarded linguistic correctness and the requisite literary standard of the translations since they obviously had superior knowledge of the language, based on their mother tongue intuition and acquaintance with its poetic and gnomic heritage. Since 1972 the introduction of the Somali national orthography has given Somali participants more independence and scope for their creative talents which all translation work involves to some degree.

In most of the translations listed here the names of their translators are not given, but some information on them is available from other sources. For works published before 1973 there are notes about trans-

lators in Geraldine Coldham's survey and for later works I have at my disposal some information which I obtained from personal inquiries. **Injiisha waxa weeye Axdigas Cusub e Yesuc Masiixa** (1983) was translated by A.Keene Spitler and a Somali assistant and so was **Qalbigi dad** while the translations of both **Axdiga Cusub oo Rabbigeena iyo Badbaadiyeheena Ciise Masiix** (1976) and **Kitaabka quduuska ah** (1979) were made by a group of expatriate and Somali translators led by its coordinator, editor, and participant translator Dorothy Modricker, (Mrs H.Warren Modricker).

A concluding observation

While all Christian writings in Somali translation would be of interest to anyone concerned with Christian endeavours in the Horn of Africa, biblical translations and the Somali version of **The Pilgrim's Progress** are also of some relevance to literary studies. On account of their aesthetic merit and the nature of their contents they can be regarded as part of Somali literature, side by side with creative writing and the translations of works on secular and Islamic subjects.⁵ In spite of the so far minute number of their readers they make some contribution to the growth of Somali literature by widening its thematic range and adapting the Somali language to new fields of discourse.

References

- Andrzejewski, B.W. 1983. "Language Reform in Somalia and the Modernization of the Somali Vocabulary." In **Language Reform: History and Future / La réforme des langues: Histoire et avenir / Sprachreform: Geschichte und Zukunft.** ed. István Fodor and Claude Hagège. Hamburg: Helmut Buske Verlag. vol.1, pp.69-84.
- Andrzejewski, B.W. 1985. "Translations of Works of Islamic Literature from Arabic into Somali: A Preliminary Survey," **Afrikanistische Arbeitspapiere**, 4 (1985), pp.53-65.
- Andrzejewski, B.W. 1986. "The Literary Culture of the Somali People." In Katheryne S.Loughran, John L.Loughran, John William Johnson and Said Sheikh Samatar, eds. **Somalia in Word and Image.** Washington, D.C.: Foundation for Cross Cultural Understanding in cooperation with Indiana University Press, Bloomington, pp.35-45 and 169-171.
- Antinucci, Francesco and Axmed Faarax Cali "Idaajaa". 1986. **Poesia orale somala: Storia di una nazione.** Studi Somali 7. Rome: Comitato Tecnico Linguistico per l'Università Nazionale Somala, Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Dipartimento per la Cooperazione allo Sviluppo.
- Banti, Giorgio. "Letteratura." 1987. In **Aspetti dell'espressione artistica somala: Scrittura e letteratura, strumenti musicali, ornamenti della persona, intagli del legno.** Ed.

- Annarita Puglielli. Rome: Università di Roma "La Sapienza", pp.33-77.
- Coldham, Geraldine E., comp. 1966. **A Bibliography of Scriptures in African Languages.** London: British and Foreign Bible Society.
- Coldham, Geraldine E., comp. 1975. **Supplement (1964-1974) to A Bibliography of Scriptures in African Languages.** London: British and Foreign Bible Society.
- Laitin, David D. 1977. **Politics, Language and Thought: The Somali Experience.** Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Laitin, David D. and Said S.Samatar. 1987. **Somalia: Nation in Search of a State.** Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press; London: Gower Publishing Company.

Notes

- 1 Coldham 1966 and 1975, see References.
- 2 General information about the Somali nation can be found in Laitin and Said S.Samatar 1987. The number of Somali Christians represents my own tentative assessment and is not based on any published sources.
- 3 This situation is described in Laitin 1977.
- 4 An account of these developments is given in Andrzejewski 1983 and Laitin and Said S.Samatar 1987.
- 5 For information about Somali literature see Andrzejewski 1985 and 1986, Antinucci and Axmed Faarax Cali "Idaajaa" 1986, Banti 1987 and Laitin and Said S. Samatar 1987.

ADDENDUM

Inğilka sidu uqoräy Markos [The Gospel According to Mark]. Addis Ababa: BSE [Bible Society of Ethiopia], 1971. [In Somali, written in Amharic Script.]

Inğilkä satu Yohanna u qoräy [The Gospel According to John]. Addis Ababa: Yä-Ityoppäya Maşaf Qaddus Maħbär [Bible Society of Ethiopia], 74 [1974]. [In Somali, written in Amharic script, a word for word transliteration of the text on pp.163-206 of **Axdiga Cusub oo Rabbigeena iyo Badbaadiyeheena Ciise Masiix**, 1976, pp. 163-206.]

Note: The address of the Bible Society of Ethiopia is P.O.Box 30750, Addis Ababa.