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NOTES ON THE ISLAMICIZATION AND THE MUSLIM  
SHRINES OF THE HARAR PLATEAU

The Harar plateau was a permanent object of struggle between Ethiopian highlanders and lowland peoples of the Horn during the entire period covered by historical sources from this area. The adversaries in this dispute which was inherited by the modern states of Ethiopia and Somalia have always rivalled in proving the legitimacy of their historical claims. In this respect it has been considered crucial to determine by which people the area was inhabited and where its cultural and political orientation was mainly directed. The adversaries being closely associated either with the cultural system of Orthodox Christianity or of Islam, religion has played a relevant role in this rivalry.

The history of the Christian-Muslim antagonism culminating in the 'holy war' (djihād) of the 16th century has been extensively analysed (see Ferry 1961; Davies 1963/64; Trimingham 1965: chapter 2.3.). The Harar plateau and the adjacent highlands east of the Rift Valley, strategically important and famed for their agricultural potential, were severely involved in those conflicts. Historiography gives the impression that the past of this area has been characterized predominantly by warlike actions. But there was also peaceful cooperation between the two antagonistic powers, the Christians of the western highlands and the Muslim of the eastern lowlands. My paper will mainly deal with this fairly unspectacular type of interaction.<sup>I</sup>

The Harar plateau as a geographical region extends from the Chercher mountains southeast of the Awash plain to the area of Hargeysa. A remarkable number of Muslim shrines is to be

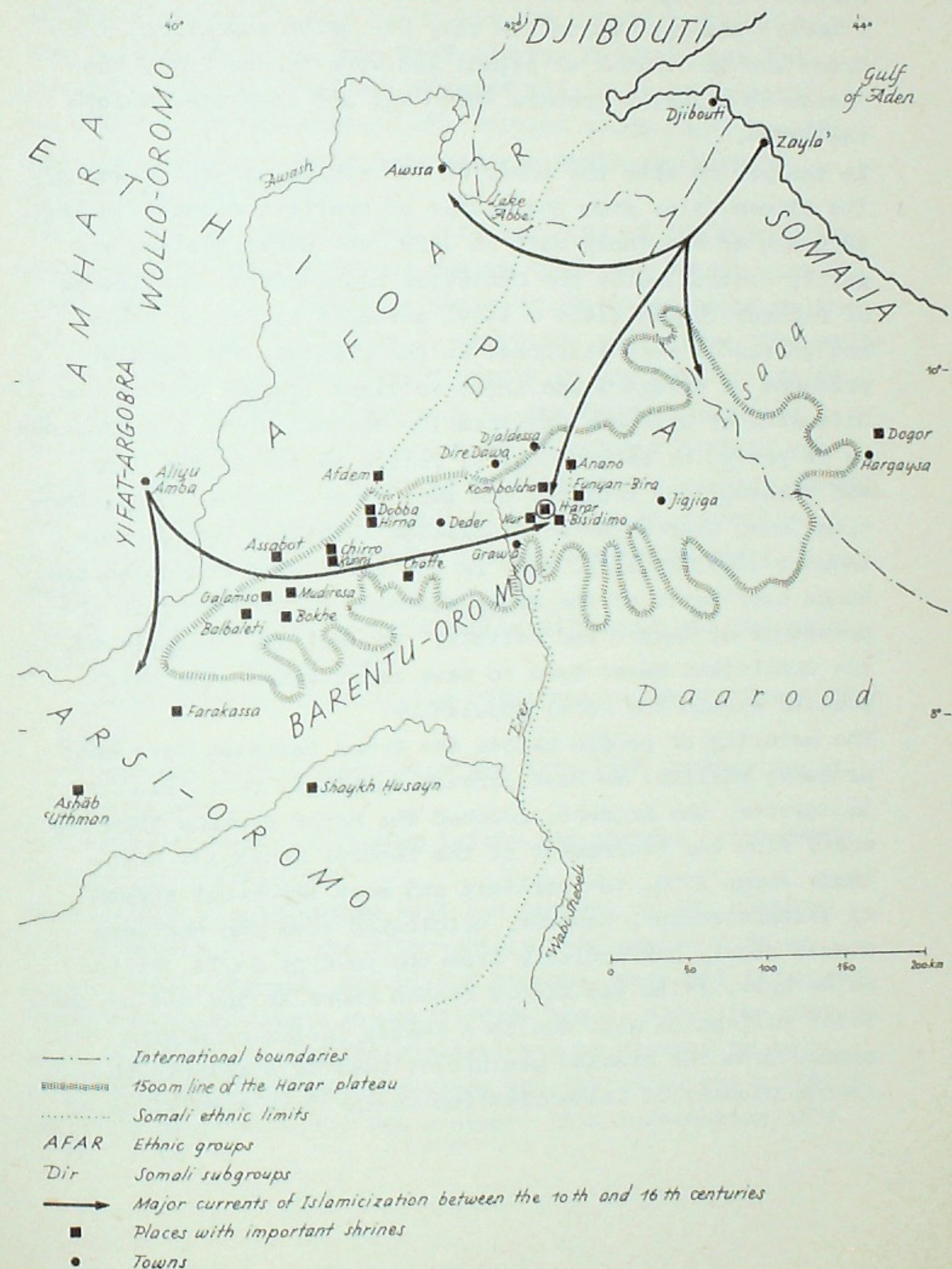


found there as well as in the adjacent Arsi-Bale massifs which are interlinked with it in their historical fate.

Harar has been an important outpost of Islamic-Arabic culture since it replaced the former Muslim centres on the plateau, Funyan-Bira and Dakar, in 1521. Its connections, politically as well as economically, with the northern Somali coast and particularly with Zayla, were at the very base of its existence up to this century.<sup>2</sup> The type of Islam here considered is that of a popular mysticism, as it was propagated mainly by followers of Sufi orders.<sup>3</sup> The aim of this paper is not to present a complete list of saints and their shrines, but to draw attention to a relevant aspect of culture history in the Somali-Ethiopian borderland.

The important question of ethnic continuity and change in the area of our concern will be dealt with only in a brief remark here. As far as it can hitherto be stated, the Harala were the oldest identifiable population in the Harar plateau. Between the 14th and 16th centuries they possessed a highly developed peasant civilization with urban centres and stone architecture. When Abādir (Umar al-Ridā), the legendary ancestor of the Harari, reached Harar in the early 13th century (see Wagner 1978:133), he was acknowledged by the Harala, the Gaturi and the Argobba, a Muslim people which originated from the Shawan escarpment of the central Ethiopian highlands (Cerulli 1941; Braukämper 1977:22-27). Most probably the present Harari are the last representatives of the ancient Harala whose majority was either wiped out by war and famine in the 16th century or subsequently assimilated by the invading Oromo in the west and by the Somali in the east.<sup>4</sup> After the Semitic speaking block had dwindled away to the small concentration of Harar town, the history of the plateau over the last 300 years was dominated by these two Cushitic speaking peoples.

Map I. Islamicization and Muslim shrines of the Harar Plateau





### Outlines of Islamicization

Most inhabitants of the Harar plateau mentioned above were Muslims as long as their history can be traced back in the literary sources. There was only one great exception, the Oromo who immigrated as pagans and were subsequently converted to Islam, a process which was not completed before the 1970s.

In the period when the power of the Ethiopian empire was at its climax, i.e. from the middle of the 14th century to the outbreak of the 'holy war' in 1529, the Harar plateau was partly controlled by the Christian highlanders. The troops of emperor Yeshāk (1414 - 1429) advanced as far as Zayla, and garrisons were stationed on the plateau. The massive presence of soldiers and armed settlers (chawā) led to the diffusion of Orthodox Christianity to that area. Its existence is proved by archaeological relics as far as the Erer and Gara-Mullata regions; its importance, however, has sometimes been overestimated (Soleillet 1886:150; Paulitschke 1888a:67, 209, 216, 223). Even in the times when Ethiopian dominance over parts of the Harar plateau, particularly in the provinces of Dawaro and Fatagar,<sup>5</sup> was solidly established, the Christians never seem to have constituted more than pockets within the local population.

The majority of people before the Oromo invasion were most probably Muslims. We have already mentioned that Islamic immigrants, the Argobba, reached the Harar plateau from the west, from the escarpment of the central Ethiopian highlands about 1200. The earliest and most important stream of Islamicization, however, originated from the northern Somali coast, particularly from the town of Zayla. As far as we know, Islam was firmly rooted there at the end of the first millennium A.D. due to a steady influx of Muslim people from the Arabian peninsula. Ismā'īl Djabarti, the famous pioneer of Islamicization in the folk traditions of

many peoples east of the Awash river, can be dated in the 10th/11th century (see Wagner 1978:133, 138; Braukämper 1980:60 sq.). By this time Islam had most probably expanded inland from the coastal areas and had gained a foothold in the Harar plateau. Fragmentary sources suggest that the spread of the new religion occurred mainly by migrations of traders and adventurers who settled among pagan peoples. How this process may be portrayed was aptly sketched by Trimingham (1965:149).

For the ethnic identity and life patterns of the respective peoples the infiltration of Muslim Arabs was hardly relevant. However, it exerted a decisive impact on their cultural orientation, tribal self-perception and values. The well-known tendency of many Muslim people in the Horn of Africa to trace their genealogies back to the Prophet Muhammad himself or to famous personalities of Islamic history can hardly ever be verified. If we would accept all those genealogies which lead back to Ismā'īl Djabarti as authentic, millions of Cushitic speaking people were descendants of this one person.

In the Harar plateau we can roughly differentiate two major phases of Islamicization:

- from the beginning of Muslim infiltration to the Oromo conquest;
- conversion of the Oromo from the late 16th century up to the present.

The classification of Muslim saints and shrines corresponds to this periodization.

When Abādir reached Harar with his company of 405 shaykhs at the beginning of the 13th century, the native peoples he met there, Harala, Gaturi and Argobba, were all islamized (oral communications; Wagner 1978:30 sqq.). Since the missionary campaigns of Ismā'īl Djabarti can be assumed to have taken place two centuries earlier and the sultanate of Shawa had been founded in the 9th century, this information fits



into the general context. That means, Abādir was not the pioneering missionary of Islam, but he and his group obviously acted for a strengthening of the institutional framework of religion. He apparently became the first saint in the Harar plateau to whom a particular cult was devoted. (Ismā'īl Djabarti's main shrine is situated outside the area of our concern near the village Hadaftimo in the district of Erigavo in northern Somalia.)

Islam had dominated in the Harar plateau almost half a millennium when it was severely struck by the invasion of the pagan Oromo from the 1570s onwards. The Muslim-Christian rivalry which resulted in occasional raids of the region by Ethiopian troops - Harar itself was sacked in 1559 - had not essentially endangered the Islamic positions. The south-eastern outposts of Christianity in Dawaro, Fatagar, Hadiya and Bale seem to have suffered from much more destructive blows in the course of the long-lasting conflict. With the Oromo, however, a massive immigration of a new ethnic element occurred, which either led to an annihilation or to an assimilation of the local population. Consequently, Islam was reduced to small pockets within a non-Muslim environment. The most important was the town of Harar which 'amīr Nūr b. Mudjāhid had ordered to be surrounded by a wall to make it inaccessible to invaders. (According to the oral traditions, 'amīr Nūr, the Adalite initiator of the 'second conquest' (sāhib al-fath ath-thānī) was born in Gara-Kununno near Funyan-Bira. His grave is in Harar (Wagner 1973:279).)

Other Islamic centres were situated in the Argobba villages of Bisidimo, in the region of Funyan-Bira, in places of Chercher and outside the Harar plateau in sanctuaries such as Shaykh Husayn in Bale or Ashāb Uthmān in the Shirka highlands or Arsi. Although there was a permanent state of hostility between the warlike Oromo, for whom the killing of alien people was an integral obligation of their gada-

system, and those Muslim centres, the latter were principally respected by the pagan people as places of higher civilization and commercial activities. Thus the Oromo were not interested in eliminating them. The more an economic symbiosis developed - the Oromo mostly exchanged agricultural products for tools and other objects by the local craftsmen - the greater the importance of the Muslim centres for religious diffusion became.

The Islamicization of the Oromo in the Harar plateau thus started first of all from within that area. Secondly, it came from outside, spread by their eastern neighbours, the Somali. The Somali and Afar nomads had been Muslims since centuries, but their missionary endeavour does not seem to have been very intensive. However, there were always religious-minded people, mainly originated from a sedentary peasant or urban commercial environment, who devoted themselves to the propagation of their Muslim faith. (This could of course at the same time be a lucrative source of prestige, power and material income.)

As long as the Oromo were pastoral nomads (Oromo: tifattu) with the gada order dominating their patterns of culture, it was impossible for Islam to gain a noteworthy foothold among them. When because of the increase of the population and of the growing scarcity of grazing areas they more and more became sedentary farmers (Oromo: kottu),<sup>6</sup> the readiness to abandon the gada-system and to turn Muslim increased. Islamic culture with its more developed material culture (for example the agricultural techniques of the Harari and Argobba with their terraced gardens, their intensive cultivation of khat (*Catha edulis*), vegetables, etc.), with its far-reaching commercial links and its supra-tribal cosmopolitan orientation represented an attractive model. Another factor favouring the spread of Islam among the Oromo was the westward push of the Somali. According to oral traditions of the Nole-Oromo,<sup>7</sup> their grazing areas stretched



as far as Hargeysa until the middle of the last century. The powerful advance of the Dir-Issa- and Issaq-Somali in the eastern part of the Harar plateau was also documented by the observations of European travellers. In the 1880s the Somali had pushed the Oromo back to the region of Djaldessa (Paulitschke 1888a:356 and 1888b:6,II,I7). The Somali expansion did not only result in the expulsion of the autochthonous inhabitants, but also in their assimilation and, at the same time, in a shift from nomadism to sedentary farming. Paulitschke (1888b:I3; translation by U. B.) described this process as follows:

"Where the (Somali) nomads advanced as far as the mountainous country, as in the Gurais and Fiambira hills (the southeastern foothills of the Kondela chain), their existence was transformed: they became sedentary agriculturists, like the Girri and Bertirri. Even where the Somali today exert pressure on the Galla (Oromo) living north of Harar, incessantly wresting pieces of land from them, it appears that after they have pushed back the Galla their nomadism comes to a standstill. The reason is that they gain control over places of commercial activity, such as Dzeldessa, and of stretches of land which have been rendered fertile and make it possible to cultivate durra".

The ethnic substratum of the Girri and the Babilie were Oromo who had been dominated and islamized by the Somali.<sup>8</sup> Although the 'Kottu' culture in the eastern part of the Harar plateau is marked by its uniformity and bilingualism frequently occurs, Somali ethnicity is the predominating one. This constellation is largely due to Islam, because Islamization is almost equivalent to Somalification in that area.<sup>9</sup>

Whereas this kind of Islamicization concerted with the spread of the Somali ethnos, there were also Somali who went as missionaries inside the Oromo-inhabited areas. The most active agents of Muslim diffusion were the Warra Kallu

(Oromo: priests) who seemed to have first settled among the Ala-Oromo. They started founding a new clan there which in the 1880s was still bilingual.<sup>10</sup> Later on they established themselves among other subgroups of the Barentu-Oromo as far as the Ittu in Chercher, but they all preserved the memory of their Somali origin. Wherever they lived in a purely Oromo speaking environment they occupied a position as shaykhs and outstanding representatives of Muslim religion.<sup>11</sup>

Another and more spectacular type of Islamicization was imposed on the surrounding Oromo by the Emirate of Harar which was able to consolidate its position in the 19th century. It is for example reported that Abdullahi, the last amir of Harar (1885 - 1887) initiated campaigns to strengthen Islam among the Oromo in the vicinity of the town.<sup>12</sup> His predecessor Muhammad (1856 - 1875) sent missionaries to the land of the Oromo subgroups Nunnu, Meta and Nole.<sup>13</sup> Whereas the rulers of Harar converted a number of Oromo by mostly peaceful means, the Egyptians, after their conquest of Harar in 1875, tried to do this by military force. Oromo representatives who had gathered for a meeting with the governor Rauf Pasha at Karra Fallana were incidiously killed by artillery in order to crash any sense of opposition against Egyptian rule and the conversion to Islam. A considerable number of tradition-oriented Oromo are said to have preferred death rather than to be islamized against their will (Martial de Salviac 1900:41). Nole and Ala informants told me that the circumcision of males above the age of c. ten years was sometimes carried out by force. Although these methods naturally provoked hatred against the representatives of Islam and led to a spontaneous revival of the gada-institutions in certain areas after the retreat of the Egyptians in 1885, the ongoing process of religious change was temporarily but not principally hampered. When two years



later king Menelik of Shawa conquered the Harar plateau, Islam was no longer the religion of the dominating group in a pluri-ethnic society. Among the subjected people it more or less consciously became an expression of cultural identity and self-perception with respect to the Christian conquerors.

European observers attest to a remarkable spread of Islam among the Oromo in the Harar plateau at the end of the 19th century (Robecchi-Bricchetti 1896:237; Paulitschke 1896:33, 36), but Islamicization was far from being completed by that time. The following report by the British traveller A. W. Hodson (1927:94) dates back to 1916 when ledj Iyasu, the ruler of Ethiopia, was openly favouring Islam in his empire and was also suspected of seeking to establish a coalition with the Central Powers in World War I:

"I had instructions to keep my ears and eyes open for any traces of Turco-German propaganda among the Muslims in these parts. I learnt that a certain sheikh, Hajji Mohammad Nur, had been sent down a short time previously by the Turkish consul in Harar to preach sedition. The Italian representative at Magalo succeeded on some pretext or other in enticing him down to Lugh, in Italian Somaliland, where he was immediately arrested by the Italian authorities and packed off to Mogadishu. By all accounts his mission was an utter failure, as the Gallas, unlike the Ogaden farther east, are not fanatical followers of the Prophet."

The spread of Islam in the Harar plateau proceeded in an east-western direction and it is generally more recently established the more we move westward. Whereas according to the genealogies the Islamicization of the eastern Barentu took place mostly in the time of their great-grandfathers it occurred among the Ittu only in the generation of their fathers. A relatively weak Islamicization of the Ittu in Chercher was still reported from the 1940s and 1950s (Scarlin 1942:173; Brooke 1956:294). When I travelled in this

area in 1973, I was told that some individuals were still Shanano (partisans of the old folk religion), but this information could not be confirmed. Although Islam in the fertile agricultural regions of Chercher was faced by a massive settlement of Christian Amhara colonists (Naftanya) after the conquest of 1886/1887 and also by the establishment of Roman-Catholic missions which had already started around 1880,<sup>14</sup> almost 100% of the native Oromo became Muslims.

#### Shrines of Muslim saints

The success of Islamicization was to a considerable extent initiated by those "saints" whose shrines are still to be seen as centres of religious veneration and social interaction. Within the walls of Harar and in its close vicinity, there is such a remarkable concentration of shrines that the town was called Madīnat al-awliyā, the 'town of the saints'. This phenomenon has attracted the attention of foreign researchers since the first European traveller, Richard Burton, reached Harar in 1854. Valuable information about the saints and their shrines was collected by Enrico Cerulli (1936:46-51) and Wolf Leslau (1965:200-207), and a comprehensive list of the saints of Harar was published by Ewald Wagner (1973). Thus, the state of documentation concerning Harar and its vicinity is sufficiently advanced to be excluded from a detailed consideration here. Wagner's list, which, as he announces himself, is not fully complete, contains 107 names. Some of them are mentioned twice or more times so that the actual number of saints with particular places of veneration may amount to c. 90 individuals. Sometimes, orally transmitted or written legends and songs tell about their deeds (cf. Wagner 1975 and 1978) but often hardly more than their names is remembered.



The term shrine may be defined here as any man-made sanctuary (sometimes associated with a natural object) devoted to a saint (walī). It can be a kubbah (dome; cupola-shaped stone-building) or a simple wooden construction, in both cases usually surrounded by a wall or a fence. It may shelter a real or a fictive grave of a saint. A pilgrimage to a shrine is properly described as ziyāra (cf. Patton 1920:67), though less frequently the term ḥadjj is employed. A great deal of the visits to a saint's tomb is made with the object of obtaining his help. The offerings are mostly votive in character, and when a prayer has been fulfilled, a vow is due. The sacrificial victim is usually a male animal which is slaughtered by the offerer at the door-step of the shrine.

Though Islam strongly opposes the cult of ancestors and sacrifices at their graves, these practices were still common among the peoples of the Harar plateau, including the Somali, in the late 19th century (Paulitschke 1893:205 sq.). The saint cult is a way of modifying the traditional customs towards a standard which becomes acceptable to Muslim orthodoxy.

Places like Aw Nugua near Kombolcha and Aw Alī Fīf in Anano became important for the Islamicization of the Oromo in the eastern parts of the Harar plateau.<sup>15</sup> Aw Nugus, where Buba Ibrāhīm, a contemporary of Abādir is said to be buried, developed as a focus of conversion of the Nole-Oromo.<sup>16</sup>

Aw Alī Fīf was a Harari saint whose shrine is situated in Anano, c. 25 km northeast of Harar at the border between the highlands occupied by Djarso-Oromo and the lowlands inhabited by Issa-Somali. He was one of the sons of Abādir. The local Oromo use to address him with the words 'Alī Fīf belā fīfī!' (Alī Fīf, take away misfortune) (cf. Wagner 1973: 275). A popular tradition reports that the saint once sent his daughter to fetch water for him which he needed for his

prayers. But she spent her time at the river playing with a young man and kept her father waiting. He then became furious, cursed his daughter and her friend and turned both of them into a rock which is still to be seen today. Then he took his spear and stuck it into the ground. Immediately a spring gushed out from the hole which was henceforth called Burka Alī Fīf. Oromo and Somali pilgrims mainly gather at the saint's shrine for the birthday of the Prophet (mawlūd al-nabī) and for thanksgiving after the harvest.

As important cults of the eastern Barentu-Oromo Shaykh Muhammad Khalaf, Shaykh Adam and Aw Uthman must also be mentioned.

As it has already been pointed out in the last chapter, Isma'īl Djabarti personified a particular Somali link with the Muslim history of the Harar plateau. Apart from his shrine in Hadaftimo/Erigavo, there are sanctuaries devoted to him in other places, for example, near the Erer gate of Harar (see Wagner 1973:269; cf. Lewis 1959:32 sq.).

A saint who is particularly venerated by the Somali is sharīf Muhyī al-Dīn Yūsuf al-Akwān Barkhadle Alī. According to materials I. M. Lewis (1969:75-81) collected and analysed, he immigrated from Arabia in the 13th century and presumably became one of the ancestors of the dynasty of Yifat/Adal. His main shrine is situated in Dogor northeast of Hargeysa. Secondary places of veneration can be found in Harar and in the village Garād Abd al-Kādir Nūr, c. 15 km southwest of this town.<sup>17</sup>

The veneration of aw Khutub (aw Kutb al-Dīn Umar) is also particularly associated with the Somali. As a relative of Abādir, he originated from the Hidjāz in Arabia and settled in Harar at the beginning of the 13th century. He married a local woman and went out for missionary campaigns as far as Mogadishu. He died in Bisidimo, southeast of Harar, where his main shrine was built.<sup>18</sup> His descendants and other pil-



grims pray and sacrifice there every year on a Friday after the 10th of radjab, the seventh month of the Muslim calendar. A secondary shrine is said to be found in Mogadishu.<sup>19</sup>

A Sufi saint of universal importance, not only in the area of our concern but all over Northeast Africa, is Abd al-Kādir al-Djīlānī. The founder of the famous tarīka (brotherhood) Kādirīyya lived in Baghdad (A.D. 1077 - 1166) and certainly never set his foot in Northeast Africa. However, people firmly believe in his presence and his activities here. Popular legends report that he possessed forty lives and stayed in many different places without needing any nourishment. Thus, all the numerous shrines where he is said to be buried are considered to be authentic ones. The sanctuary of the Kādirīyya in Harar is situated in the southwestern part of the town outside the wall where Paulitschke (1888a:map of Harar at the end) and Robecchi-Bricchetti (1896:map beside p. 122) already found it. Another important shrine of Abd al-Kādir was established by aw Muhammad, a Somali shaykh from Berbera in Shaykh Husayn of Bale around 1790.<sup>20</sup> The Kādirīyya shrines east of Harar and in Funyan-Bira played a role as focal points in Islamicization of the Nole- and Djarso-Oromo.

The greatest celebrations at the shrines of Abd al-Kādir are performed on the day of arafa (9 dhu' l-hidjdja), i.e. in the season of Muslim pilgrimage, on muharram (New Year) and on the birthday of the Prophet. Moreover, every third Friday within a month is specially devoted to the saint. On occasions of the main festivals pilgrims gather in the compounds of the shrines, play music with drums and wooden clappers (kaballa) and perform dervish dances.

One sanctuary of Abd al-Kādir is situated in Bokhe/Chercher. Whereas the cult of the saints and holy shrines in the eastern parts of the Harar plateau is relatively well documented, there has been a gap in their investigation in the

western areas. This section aims at providing some complementary information from oral traditions which I collected in 1973.

In the 1870s Hāmid Bulcha Buldidde, a pious herdsman of the Ba'e clan of the Ittu-Oromo slept under a tree in Bokhe. He had a dream which made him dig there. His imagination told him that he had discovered the burial place of Abd al-Kādir al-Djīlānī. He then continued his religious education in Harar and died around 1900. The tree where he had received his dream was surrounded by a fence and henceforth considered a shrine devoted to Abd al-Kādir. A small mosque was constructed there by shaykh Umar Alī, the imam of Galamso, about fifty years ago.

This Umar Ali originated from a Warra Kallu group which had settled among the Ittu-Ba'e. With shaykh Muhammad Harar (see below), he had obtained his religious training in Wollo. After his return from there, he established a centre of Muslim scholarship in his birthplace, Balbaleti. He was promoted imam of Galamso and acted for many years as the leader of the Kādirīyya brotherhood in the land of the Ittu. He preferred studying and meditating in a khalwa, in the seclusion of a small cell and ordered not to remove his body in case he happened to die there. When this occurred (in 1952), people respected his wish and built a mausoleum upon the khalwa. The leadership of the Kādirīyya was then exercised by his son shaykh Muhammad Siradj. The main occasions of pilgrimage at Umar Alī's shrine are the common ones associated with Abd al-Kādir al Djīlānī, i.e. arafa, muharram and mawlūd al-nabī. In the early 1970s, those feasts were sometimes frequented in Galamso by more than 10.000 visitors (personal communications).

Shaykh Muhammad Harar was a contemporary and companion of Umar Alī. He was born in Danabba east of the Ramis river. He originated from the Ba'e clan of the Ittu and had estab-



lished marriage connections with neighbouring Somali. As a young boy, he moved to the region of Mudirēsa, to the place of the ōda bultum, the holy tree (figus gnaphalocarpa) of the pagan past in Chercher. Together with shaykh Umar Alī he completed his religious education in Wollo. After his return to Chercher, he founded a Koranic school in Sakatta, a swampy place not far from the ōda bultum. His particular interest was the spread of the Kādirīyya order, which indeed became the most important Muslim brotherhood in the western Harar plateau. (The Tidjānīyya order gained a small foothold when a certain Sa'id Husayn from Gore/Illubabor in western Ethiopia introduced it to the Gara Mullata area in the early 1930s.)

Muhammad Harar died in the early 1930s and was buried in the town of Chirro. His companion Umar Alī succeeded him in leading the Kādirīyya. In Chirro, a shrine was constructed for him; additionally, a hadra, a place for religious gatherings, was established at a tree in Kunni, where shaykh Muhammad Harar had frequently prayed. It was by his teaching and instruction that the hadra type more replaced the 'half-pagan' galma type of meeting-place. The term galma refers to sacred localities with houses in the traditional style of the Oromo peasants which were always restored at the same places over generations. Muslims and non-Muslims gathered there for religious practices.

It is noteworthy that the Islamic missionaries often started their activities in the vicinity of sanctuaries of the pagan past. Muhammad Harar for instance chose the area of the ōda bultum, where the tribal law of the Ittu had once been established. As I could observe in 1973, it was still a widespread custom for many people - although they were nominally Muslims - when passing the tree to put grass on its lower branches or to smear butter in the hollows of its stem, just as the forbears had done in honour of the spiri-

tual beings associated with the old folk religion. Usually, it occurred by a smooth process of transformation that traditional religious beliefs and practices were integrated into an Islamic framework. Radical measures, such as the destruction of pagan testimonies and monuments (for example the cutting of holy trees which had been practised by Christian missionaries in various parts of the world), are not reported. In the country of the Ittu, there were sacred localities of the pre-Muslim time with trees and sometimes stone-circles in Shola, west of Hirna (Sharif Allī), in Duggo, south of Hirna (Aw Godara), in Laga Homacho, south of Kunni (Dabis Roba Illu), in Galesa (Roba Amba), in Assabot (Khalisse Assabot) and in Afdem (Walli Yuiye), which had all been transformed into Muslim places of worship.

Although the pioneers in the spread of Islam to a certain extent tolerated the pre-Muslim sanctuaries and tried to integrate them into their missionary strategy, their lives were permanently threatened by the agitation of tradition-oriented, i.e. non-Muslim, opponents. The case of an Argobba shaykh from Aliyu Amba (Shawa-Yifat), hadjdj Umar Sāwlāni, who was murdered with some dozens of followers by pagan Ittu in the 1870s was particularly remembered.

Pre-Islamic survivals and syncretistic features in the Islam of the western Harar plateau become obvious in the cult of aw Sa'id. Ittu oral traditions claim that he was a sharīf (descendant of the Prophet's family) from a Warra Kallu group. He lived in "the time of Abādir" and assisted in the foundation of the hēra, the tribal law, at the ōda bultum in Mudirēsa. This implies an anachronism, because Abādir's arrival in Harar can be dated at the beginning of the 13th century, whereas the ancestors of the Ittu-Oromo reached their present dwelling areas in the Chercher range only three centuries later (see Braukämper 1980:152).



However, informants sometimes expressed their opinion that aw Sa'id did not personally participate in the process of law-giving, but it was his spirit which imbued their ancestors to realize this task. His reputed connection with the tribal law makes us assume that his life-time can be dated closer to the 16th than to the 13th century. Anyway, he has to be considered a figure of old Islamic stratum of the Harar plateau. The essential contribution of a Muslim saint to a pagan law code is certainly an interpretation which arose only after the recent Islamicization of the Ittu. Aw Sa'id is venerated in two places, in Gubba Guto north-east of Bokhe/Harro Bareda and in a locality near Galamso, where, in former times, death penalties were carried out. The saint is said to have lived preferably there, but no shrines exist in those places. Traditions report that he was buried in Harar. However, in Wagner's (1973) list of saints, there is no reference to him. Muslims as well as members of the old Oromo folk religion used to gather around the galma houses devoted to aw Sa'id and celebrated with praying, singing, drumming, eating khat and imploring the saint's spirit. Certain people whose ancestors are said to have been blessed by aw Sa'id interact with him as a particular spirit. Despite the opposition they meet from the Muslim orthodoxy, those magicians are very popular in the area of our concern.

In the late 19th century when several Muslim missionaries went out to convert the pagan Oromo, sayyid Alī from Harar reached Kunni in the Chercher mountains. The Ittu were hostile towards him and his followers, and it is said that after some years of miserable life he returned to Harar where he died shortly afterwards. Alī left his son Idrīs in Kunni who begot Ahmad. By this time Islam had acquired a solid base in Ittu country. Ahmad married a Warra Kallu of Somali origin who gave birth to Shazelli. This man intro-

duced the cult of his great-grandfather sayyid Alī in Kunni and at the same time adopted a spirit associated with a possession cult. The informants believed that this spirit was not of the type of rūhanīyya,<sup>21</sup> a category of benevolent, angel-like spirits, but a real djinn. Many people, mainly women and children regularly, visited shaykh Shazelli to ask for his prayers and offered him their gifts for the fulfillment of their wishes. The main gathering was on mawlūd al-nabī, when a great feast was held with drums being beaten and animals being slaughtered.

Another saint of the 19th century, aw Alī (Alli) was a member of a Warra Kallu clan of the Ittu-Oromo. After having received a solid religious education in Harar he established a Muslim centre in the Chercher mountains, where he died shortly after the Amharic conquest, i.e. around 1890. In his burial-place Busoitu, c. 10 km east of Galamso, his followers erected a mausoleum, a galma and later also a mosque.

One of the remembered deeds of aw Alī was the conversion of a woman called Mūmina who stayed with him for a time as a servant. He is said to have transferred his spiritual power to her and thus enabled her to establish her famous cult in Farakassa, in the country of the northern Arsi-Oromo.<sup>22</sup>

Aw Alī's reputation was so widespread that even pagan Karayu-Oromo from the region west of the Awash came to receive his baraka, the beneficent force, he was believed to be endowed with. Muslim pilgrims used to visit his sanctuary, which was guarded in the 1970s by shaykh Muhammad Saradj, mainly on the day of arafa.

Chaffe - this Oromo word refers to a meadow or plain area which served as a meeting-ground - is the place where sharīf Nūri Alī(ye) is venerated. This Ittu man had received a high religious education and was appointed kādī of Chaffe in the decade after the Amharic conquest. He died around 1960 and was buried in a modest shrine near the mosque of



Chaffe. His karama, the miraculous gifts and graces with which Allāh equips his saints, is not regarded as very important. That is why only people of the vicinity of Chaffe came to pray and to celebrate at the shrine.

Kabīr Hasan was a Warra Kallu who traced his genealogy back to Abadir, the ancestor of the Harari people. He was reported by shaykh Muhammad Rashid, the imām of his shrine in Balbaleti-Cheratti in the early 1970s, to have come to Chercher from the region of Harar five generations ago, i.e. in the first half of the 19th century. Hasan was one of the first pioneers in the Islamicization of the Ittu-Oromo at a time when the hostility of the local people towards Muslim strangers rendered his enterprise highly dangerous.

The place where kabīr Hasan and his followers lived remained a small and continuously threatened pocket of Islam in a pagan environment up to the late 19th century. Then the karama of the saint, his miraculous support in earthly and transcendental matters, was widely accepted, and his shrine became one of the major centres of conversion of the Ittu. It is particularly frequented by the people of Balbaleti for their Friday prayers.

The ruined mosque of sharīf Ahmad in Manna Kallu near Dobba/Chercher is presumably one of the oldest places which has continually been a place of veneration for Muslims. Only the stone-built outer walls of the building, which was already visited by Azals and Chambard in 1922, remained.<sup>23</sup> The local people believe that the spirit of sharīf Ahmad is present there and can be invoked (own communication). He is reported to have been a leader of the Harala, who possessed such an enormous wealth of foodstuff that they arrogantly wasted parts of it. In order to punish their behaviour, God sent a long-lasting drought and most of the Harala perished in the subsequent famine (cf. above). Sharīf Ahmad had warned people to be careful with the gifts of nature and had particularly advised them to honour adja (tritium

dicoccum), a hitherto disdained species of grain, and not to neglect the breeding of sheep and goats, which are not as vulnerable to potential droughts as cattle are. By observing these objectives, sharīf Ahmad and his family managed to resist the famine for a considerable time. Among the inhabitants of the Dobba area, he therefore received a reputation as a kind of patron saint in periods of drought.

The shrines of sharīf Ahmad and of a second person, imām Abd al-Rahman, are situated inside a rectangular stone-wall some steps northwest of the main entrance of the mosque. Behind the eastern wall, there is a hadra where pilgrims can make fire and stay overnight. Except particular occasions, Oromo people use to go there in the month called birra (September/October) in order to implore sharīf Ahmad to support their prayers to God for a good harvest. In its semantic implications the place name Manna Kallu, meaning 'group of priests' in the Oromo language, is very close to Warra Kallu, referring to the descendants of Muslim Somali and Harari missionaries among the Barentu-Oromo.

### Conclusions

Islam in its popular mystic expression with the veneration of saints and the cult of their shrines is an essential part of the culture of people of the Harar plateau. Its effects on their history and social life are manifold. The shrines with the sequence of their foundation to some extent reveal the routes of diffusion which the Muslim faith followed. They acted as focusses of missionary activity and are still being established mainly in areas where the introduction of Islam does not date back very far and consequently is not yet solidly rooted. Although the cult of the saints is not conform with Muslim orthodoxy in its strictest sense, it is pragmatically accepted as a relevant vehicle



for Islamicization.

There is a more or less generally acknowledged but sometimes not undisputed hierarchy of the saints in the minds of people. Roughly three levels can be differentiated:

1. saints who are venerated in a locality and its nearby vicinity, such as sharīf Nūrī Alī in Chaffre;
2. saints who are regionally important, such as Umar Alī in Balbaleti/Chercher, aw Nugus near Kombolcha or Yūsuf Bakhadle in Dogor;
3. saints whose shrines are worshipped throughout the area of our concern, for instance Abd al-Kādir al-Djīlānī with his main sanctuary in Harar.

Apart from the territorial aspect, some awliyā are particularly associated as patron saints with families, clans or ethnic groups. Their karama and baraka is not only different with respect to its intensity but also to a specialization of competences and functions. Certain saints are particularly powerful in supporting prayers for rain (istiskā'), others for ameliorating the fertility of women, herds and crops, others for protecting enterprises such as journeys, commercial activities etc. Although no statistics of the request at any shrine are available, it can be taken for granted that those concerning earthly problems by far exceed those of theological and transcendental character.

Saints of the old period of Islamicization (10th - 16th centuries) are mostly regarded as more powerful than those of recent times. But there is no principal difference, and both categories are often closely interlinked in a way that shaykhs of the 19th/20th centuries became famous and were imbued with karama just by introducing the cults of Abd al-Kādir, Abādir, Ismā'īl Djabarti and others.

Psychologically, the veneration of saints fits into the patterns of pre-Muslim beliefs and practices. By stressing the intermediary position of the awliyā', it helps to bridge the gap between man and God and provides the believer

with a more concrete access to Allāh. Moreover, the deeply-rooted ancestor cult can smoothly be substituted by a type of veneration which is acceptable to Islam. For example, sacrifices which had formerly been offered to the ancestors at holy places of the pagan past such as ōda bultum are now considered votives for Islamic saints. Many sanctuaries of the old folk religion have thus been transformed into Muslim ones. The impact of the cult on the social structure may be exemplified with two aspects. The representatives of the saints receive most of the votive offerings which the pilgrims take to their shrines. Although the personal benefit of those shaykhs cannot be ignored, the system essentially implies a redistribution of those goods and objects rather than an accumulation of property in the hands of few people. Social solidarity is demanded as a basic obligation, and poor pilgrims can usually rely on material support. The better the redistribution functions the higher is the reputation of the respective shaykh.

Generally, the cult of the saints tends to be a cult of the poor and downtrodden, in material as well as in social terms.<sup>24</sup>

It also conforms itself to the religious desire of people who cannot afford the pilgrimage to Mecca. That is why the ziyarā is popularly called "the hadij of the poor". In the cult of the awliyā ethnic barriers are widely surmounted. Since olden times, people of different groups, Somali, Oromo, Harari and Afar, have peacefully gathered at the same shrines. They are places where the use of weapons is strictly banned. Also religious tolerance is observed, I saw Orthodox Christians at Muslim shrines in Chercher who were obviously hoping to get access to the baraka of the saint, and vice versa Muslims are said to visit the Christian pilgrimage centre at Kulubi. There is a widespread belief that whoever provokes violent actions at holy places is the devil's companion and will be condemned.

Although the cult of the saints is widespread throughout



the Islamic world, there are particular awliyā', as it has already been mentioned, to whom ethnic or national characteristics can be attributed. Saints like Ismā'īl Djabarti, Ahmad b. Ibrāhīm and Nūr b. Mudjāhid are honoured as national heroes by people throughout the Harar plateau. Abādir Umar al-Ridā can be regarded as the patron saint of the Harari, aw Nugus of the Nole, aw Alī Fīf of the Djarso, aw Sa'id of the Ittu and Yūsuf Barkhadle of the Somali (whereas sayyīd Muhammad Abdille Hasan is rather considered a national hero than saint).<sup>25</sup>

It is, among other factors, also in the names of those saints and heroes that a feeling of ethnic/national identity has increasingly developed during the last three decades. Islam is certainly one of the major factors which have activated pride in indigenous cultural values and a sense of opposition against injustice committed by the Ethiopian authorities. It is noteworthy that movements like the Somali Youth League (since the 1940s) and the predecessor of the Western Somali Liberation Front (1963) gained their stronghold in the eastern parts of the Harar plateau and the Oromo Liberation Front started its armed struggle in the Chercher region (1974).<sup>26</sup>

#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Oral data and personal observation date back to a stay in the Harar plateau from August to October 1973 in the course of a field research on the Hadiya sponsored by the German Research Association. I am indebted to Dr. E. Conte, Frobenius-Institut, Frankfurt a. M., for corrections and comments.

<sup>2</sup> The Zayla gate in Harar still recalls this connection. The federation of Zayla which comprised seven Muslim sulta-

nates in an area stretching from the Gulf of Aden to the lake region of the Rift Valley in today's central south Ethiopia between the 14th and 16th centuries (al-Umarī 1927:15-17; Makrīzī 1790:10-16; cf. Braukämper 1977 and 1980:chapter 3.2.) had its centre of power in the Harar plateau.

<sup>3</sup> For the characteristics of this Sufism see Andrzejewski (1974).

<sup>4</sup> For the history of the Harala see Futūh (Basset) 1897:II, 118, 124, 130, 150, 170 sqq.; Cerulli 1931:76; Cerulli 1957/1964 I:57 sq., 114; Azais/Chambard 1931:35; Huntingford 1965:31, 174; Swayne 1895:26 sq.; Yusuf Ahmed 1960:29 sqq.; Cervicek/Braukämper 1975:49; Braukämper 1980:chapters 3.1.4. and 3.4.1.

<sup>5</sup> For the localization of these areas see the respective chapters in my 'Islamic Principalities' (Braukämper 1977).

<sup>6</sup> The Oromo had rarely been pure nomads, and it can be concluded from the oral traditions and cultural data that in their country of origin between the upper Ganale and the upper Dawa they possessed a mixed economy of cattle-breeding and the cultivation of barley. See Haberland (1963:5 sq., 363 sqq.) and Braukämper (1980:chapter 3.4.2.).

<sup>7</sup> Personal communications by informants in the region of Dire Dawa in 1973; cf. also Lewis (1959:21 sqq.).

<sup>8</sup> Colli di Felizzano 1905:112; Azais/Chambard 1931:30; Brooke 1956:296. Paulitschke (1893:27) classified the Girri as Somali. Mizzi (1935:76) and Haberland (1963:map at end) thought of the Babile of being originally Oromo.

<sup>9</sup> The same phenomenon was observed in the Somali-Oromo frontier areas of northern Kenya by Baxter (1966:247).

<sup>10</sup> Paulitschke (1893:27). This was confirmed by personal communications.



- I1 Personal communication in Chercher, particularly in the regions of Galamso and Hirna.
- I2 Muhammad Hassan (I973:35 sq.). I am also indebted to this author for personal communications.
- I3 Muhammad Hassan (I973:I6). Personal communications.
- I4 Paulitschke (I888b:58). Menelik at first ordered those missions to be closed (Paulitschke I888a:29I), but they were later re-established and enlarged.
- I5 For the title aw see Leslau (I963:37).
- I6 This aw Nugus of Kombolcha may not be confused with the shrine of aw Nugus Habib, which is situated on the grounds of the old town of Dakar, c. I km southeast of Harar (cf. Wagner I973:283 sq.).
- I7 According to Wagner (I973:289) the inhabitants there identified Abd al-Kādir Nūr with Aw Barkhadle.
- I8 Important 'shaykh graves' in Bisidimo were already referred to by Neumann (I902:IO).
- I9 Communication by Abd al-Muhaimin Abd al-Nāsir in Harar.
- 20 For further information see Braukämper (I980:I52).
- 21 Ruhanīyya is derived from the Arabic word ruh(a) (spirit)
- 22 I visited Farakassa and observed the ceremonies on the feast of id al-fitr (the breaking of the Ramādān fasting) from October 28 - 30, I973.
- 23 See the descriptions by Azais/Chambard (I93I:I37-I39 and plates XXVIII, XXX).
- 24 A very similar phenomenon can be observed in Shaykh Husayn of Bale. See Braukämper n.d.
- 25 Some informants remembered the successful storming of the Ethiopian garrison at Jigjiga by the dervishes under

Muhammad Abdille Hasan. This occurred on March 5, I900. See Samatar (I982:II8).

- 26 At present religious leaders and the guardians of the shrines have frequently adopted relevant political positions. Personal communications by letters.

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