

NOTES ON THE SOCIAL ORGANISATION OF THE 'ĪSE SOMALI (*)

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RIASSUNTO. — Notizie sull'ordinamento gentilizio dei Somali 'Īse, non sufficientemente conosciuto finora, e su tratti sociali peculiari che distinguono gli 'Īse da altri contemporanei gruppi tribali somali del nord.

RÉSUMÉ. — Notes sur l'organisation généalogique des Somali 'Īse, sur laquelle on n'était pas renseigné suffisamment jusqu'ici. On donne aussi des renseignements sur des caractères culturels spécifiques, qui distinguent les 'Īse d'autres unités tribales Somali contemporaines du nord.

SUMMARY. — This article examines the genealogical organisation of the 'Īse Somali which has not previously been fully described, and notes some cultural features which distinguish the 'Īse from other contemporary northern Somali clans.

I.

The 'Īse Somali of French Somaliland, Harar Province of Ethiopia, and the north-western regions of the new Somali Republic, despite their proximity to the modern town of Jibuti are amongst the most conservative of the northern Somali and probably the most dedicated to their traditional nomadic life. Although foreign explorers have often traversed their country and although they have long been under foreign administration they still remain one of the least well-documented northern Somali groups ¹⁾. In these notes I record some new data on the genea-

(*) My data are based on a short stay of about five weeks in 'Īse country spent mainly among the coastal 'Īse of the Zeila area.

¹⁾ The main works on the 'Īse are: R. BURTON, *First Footsteps in East Africa* (1856), Everyman Edition, London, 1943, pp. 126-131; P. PAULITSCHKE, *Beiträge zur Ethnographie und Anthropologie der Somal, Galla und Harar*, Leipzig, 1880; G. FERRAND, *Les Çomalis*, Paris, 1903; A. DE LA RUE, *La Somalie française*, Paris, 1937; A. DE VILLENEUVE, *Journal de la Société des Africanistes*, 6, 1937, pp. 15-32; E. TASCHDJIAN, *Anthropos*, 33, 1938, pp. 114-117; H. DESCHAMPS, *Côte des Somalis, L'Union Française*, Paris, 1948, pp. 3-85; *Mer Rouge-Afrique Orientale: Etudes sociologiques et linguistiques etc.*, *Cahiers de l'Afrique et l'Asie*, no. V, Paris, 1959; articles by R. Muller ('Īse and 'Afar), pp. 46-102, and R. Lamy, pp. 163-212. For 'Īse genealogies see also P. Z. COX and H. M. ABUD, *Genealogical Trees of the Aysa and Gadabursi tribes*, Aden, 1894.

logical organisation of the 'Īse and discuss some of the more important aspects in which their culture and social organisation differ from neighbouring northern Somali.

The 'Īse in the west of what was formerly the Somaliland Protectorate are estimated to number some 55,000, and in French Somaliland some 17,000. I do not know their strength in Ethiopia but it seems likely that the total population of the clan is about 100,000. The immediate neighbours of the 'Īse to the west are the 'Afar (or Danakil) known to Somali generally as Ōd'ali (or Ōd 'Ali)¹) with whom the 'Īse frequently fight. Indeed it is probably legitimate to speak of an almost constant state of enmity between the 'Īse and the 'Afar, a situation which appears to contribute to the strong sense of clan identity which the 'Īse exhibit in such marked degree. Although the 'Īse despise the 'Afar, ridiculing those 'Afar customs such as the true levirate²) which are different from their own, and sometimes even say that the 'Afar are equivalent to *sab* bondsmen, Midgāns and the like, nevertheless some intermarriage takes place between the two communities. 'Īse claim that occasionally 'Īse girls are married by 'Afar men but that they themselves very rarely marry 'Afar girls, an assertion which is born out in the few 'Īse marriage histories which I collected.

To their east the 'Īse are in contact with the Somali Gadabūrsi clan with whom they also frequently fight partly through competition for access to grazing and water, but to whom they nevertheless feel themselves much more closely akin. In general the two clans share

¹) According to Somali *Ōd 'Ali* refers to the turbulent character of the 'Afar. One explanation of the name is that it is a corruption of the Arabic *a-dh-a*, lit. 'he harmed' and means 'troubler', and the proper name 'Ali. There is dispute as to whom the name 'Ali refers. Some Somali hold that the reference is to 'Ali Samarrōn, ancestor of the Gadabūrsi clan, although the 'Afar and Gadabūrsi are not now in direct contact whatever may have been the case in the past. Others hold that the reference is to 'Ali Abū Ṭālib, cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet, equating the 'Afar with those who supported the Ummayyad rebellion against 'Ali in the struggle for the Caliphate about A. D. 657. An alternative etymology is from Somali *ōd*, the thorn-scrub fence surrounding the Somali grazing camp, and 'Ali is taken to represent an 'Afar ancestor. It seems however that the Somali word Ōd 'Ali is a corruption of Adali, the name of one of the most important 'Afar groups. Cf. J. L. KRAPP, *Travels, Researches and Missionary Labours during an eighteen years' residence in Eastern Africa*, London, 1860, p. 517.

²) Where a man marries the wife of a deceased kinsmen and rears children not to his own name but to that of the deceased. The Somali do not practise the true levirate.

peculiarities of dialect which differentiate their speech from that of the Somali spoken in the centre of northern Somaliland (e. g. by the Isāq). There is much inter-marriage between the two clans and certain sections of the western Gadabūrsi such as the Mahad 'Ase are in appearance, dress and accoutrements virtually indistinguishable from many of the 'Īse. The men of both the Mahad 'Ase and most of the 'Īse wear their hair long in the traditional Somali fashion, they also scarify their cheeks, and carry long spears, shields and long curved knives (sg. *billāwe*) quite different from those carried today by other northern Somali.

II.

The 'Īse trace descent patrilineally from their eponymous ancestor, 'Īse Maḥammad, whose grave ¹⁾ lies close to that of Šayḥ Isāq at Mait in Erigavo District of northern Somaliland. This is consistent with 'Īse traditions of a general movement of the clan from the east of northern Somaliland towards their present habitat in the west. This westwards expansion which involved moving into land earlier held by Galla groups seems to have been occasioned by the expansion of the Isāq and Dārōd communities in the east ²⁾. In addition to the expulsion of Galla groups and also probably the incorporation of some into the 'Īse clan, the westward thrust of the 'Īse impelled the 'Afar to move northwards into what are today the territories of French Somaliland and Eritrea. It has been claimed that as recently as one hundred and fifty years ago the 'Afar were still close to Zeila which with Jibuti is now well within the 'Īse orbit ³⁾. And still today the 'Īse pressure towards the north-west continues, one line of expansion being towards the Awash River ⁴⁾.

There is some confusion today as to the antecedents of the 'Īse clan founder. Some 'Īse regard their eponymous ancestor as a lineal descendant of Dir Somali and through the latter ultimately of 'Aqīl Abū Ṭālib, a view shared by other Somali and that ascribed to the 'Īse in the great national genealogy which links all the Somali clans and clan-families together and records their descent from Arabia ⁵⁾. More

¹⁾ Some 'Īse, however, say that the 'Īse shrine near Mait is not the true grave of their ancestor but only a *maqām* and state that he is actually buried in the Almis Mountains in the west.

²⁾ Cf. LEWIS, *RSE* (= *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici*), XV, 1959, p. 31.

³⁾ See *Mer Rouge-Afrique Orientale*, 1959, p. 117-179.

⁴⁾ *Ibid.*, p. 181.

⁵⁾ See LEWIS, *The Somali Lineage System and the Total Genealogy* (cyclostyled), Hargaisa, 1957, p. 74.

recently, however, 'Īse claim that their ancestor is a saint on a par with Šayḥ Isāq¹⁾ and indeed his brother. As one 'Īse clansman put it "although 'Īse was a saint (*weli*), his children forgot their ancestor's calling and became warriors (*waranleh*)²⁾ ignoring for many generations the holy works of the clan founder". Today there are a number of Sufistic hymns (sg. *qasida*) sung in praise of 'Šayḥ 'Īse' and there is a shrine where he is said to have appeared miraculously at Jibuti in French Somaliland. Here and in some other parts of 'Īse country remembrance services (sg. *dikri*) are held each week on Mondays and Thursdays. This cult has the appearance of being a fairly recent development; it is not mentioned by Burton³⁾, and it is not as strong or as widespread as that for Šayḥ Isāq. It appears indeed that the Sufistic cult of the 'Īse ancestor has arisen fairly recently partly as an expression of 'Īse clan solidarity in response to the Isāq cult of their ancestor, Šayḥ Isāq.

As an example of the growing but as yet not perhaps very extensive Sufistic literature praising Šayḥ 'Īse I quote in free translation a few lines from a *qasida* written in Arabic in honour of 'Īse by Šayḥ Awad Wa'ays of the 'Īse Mamāssan.

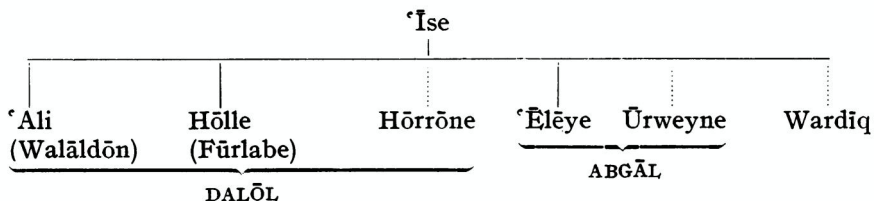
' In the name of God, the most merciful,
Oh God, be kind to our Šayḥ 'Īse, the generous,
For his sake give us abundant rain,
His praise is sung throughout the world,
He who is afflicted or in difficulties has
only to seek his aid,
His presence brings relief to all affliction,
Disappointment is the lot of those who forsake
the saints,
For God's mercy is by precedent with the saints,
His origins are noble, his sons leaders of
the faithful, and his bounty given freely to
all as it has been established '.

¹⁾ On Šayḥ Isāq see *RSE*, XV, 1959, pp. 33-34.

²⁾ Traditionally the occupations open to Somali fall into two classes: priests (sg. *wadād*) and warriors (sg. *waranleh*). Still today, however else he may obtain his livelihood, a man who practises as a *šayḥ* is regarded as a *wadād* and by definition, though not always in practice, excluded from direct participation in fighting. This is the business of warriors.

³⁾ *First Footsteps in East Africa* (1856), Everyman Edition, London, 1943, p. 126.

'Īse is said to have had three sons: 'Ēlēye (also known as Abgāl), 'Ali (also known as Walāldōn and Holleqade), and Hölle (also known as Fūrlabe). These three sons and their descendants are known as Bah Madigān because their mother was a woman of the Madigān Dir clan small scattered groups of which still survive in parts of western and eastern northern Somaliland ¹). In fact today, however, there are six main branches of the 'Īse clan which I shall refer to as 'primary lineages' and these are divided into two groups. The first the so-called 'three 'Īse' (*saddeḥda 'Īse*) comprises the lineal descendants of 'Īse's three sons 'Ēlēye, 'Ali, and Hölle. The second, known as the 'three followers' (*saddeḥda so'rā'*) consists of the Hörrōne, Ūrweyne, and Wardīq. 'Ali's descendants are generally referred to today as the Walāldōn, and Hölle's as the Fūrlabe. Hörrōne is grouped with these two primary lineages in a loose association called the Dalōl while the Ūrweyne are loosely attached to the 'Ēlēye, this association being called the Abgāl. Finally the Wardīq stand alone as a separate group. These divisions are shown in the diagram.



'Ali, Hölle, and 'Ēlēye are the 'three 'Īse';
Hörrōne, Ūrweyne, and Wardīq the 'three followers'.

The ancestors of the primary lineages described by 'Īse as the 'three followers' are said to be of extraneous origin and not to be descended from 'Īse's sons. According to some the Wardīq are of Šayḥāš origin ²); the Hörrōne of Isāq origin; and the Ūrweyne said to be descend-

¹) See *Mer Rouge-Afrique Orientale*, 1959, p. 181.

²) The Šayḥāš are a clan of *wadāds* distributed widely in Somaliland. The majority trace descent from Šayḥ Fiqi 'Umar, whose genealogy goes back to the first Caliph Abū Bakr aṣ-Šaddīq and are accordingly sometimes known as the Rēr Abū Bakr Šaddīq or Rēr Fiqi 'Umar. They probably total about 20-30,000 persons and live as pastoral nomads many of whom practise as *wadāds*. The Rēr Šayḥ Aw Quṭub are an important branch living amongst the Somali Ogādēn. Šayḥ Aw Quṭub's tomb is at Šayḥ close to the border between Burao and Berbera districts in northern Somaliland. See LEWIS, *The Somali Lineage System*, op. cit., pp. 91-93.

ed from the 'Afar. Other 'Īse again state that the Wardīq are of Isāq descent, indeed of the Habar Tol Ja'lo clan, and derive from captives taken in war by the early ancestors of the 'Īse. There are no doubt other traditions describing the origin of the three followers but those recorded here appear to have a fairly wide currency among the 'Īse. These traditions, however, usually recalled by the members of one lineage about another, are not, as far as I am aware, the basis of any effective social ties between the 'Īse groups concerned and those from whom they are said to have sprung.

Despite the division of the six 'Īse primary lineages into two categories — the 'three 'Īse' who are 'Īse by birth (*ḍalād*) and the 'three followers' who are 'Īse by adoption (*ḍaqad*) — all the 'Īse have a strong sense of clan identity in relation to outsiders. Within the clan the association of the Walāldōn, Hōlle, and Hōrrōne as Dalōl in opposition to the 'Ēlēye and Ūrweyne united as Abgāl, relates largely to numerical and fighting strength. The 'Ēlēye are the most numerous of the 'Īse fractions and to offset their power the Walāldōn, Hōlle and Hōrrōne have combined. The Wardīq who stand alone and belong neither to the Dalōl or Abgāl division are said to be the smallest numerically of the 'Īse primary lineages and their isolation is consistent with their unique political role in the clan. They traditionally supply the clan-heads of the 'Īse (*Ugāsyō*, sg. *Ugās*) and are regarded as endowed with blessing (*baraka*) by virtue of which they fulfill a mediatory role in relation to the other 'Īse lineages. Thus though they are weak in fighting power they are strong in ritual and their alleged derivation from the Šayḥās clan of *wadāds* is particularly appropriate.

As with other northern Somali clans each of these six primary lineages is segmented into a large number of smaller patrilineal groups. Segmentation is most extensive and widely ramified in the 'Ēlēye who are numerically the 'long branch' (*lānḍēr*) of the 'Īse and the clan's largest fraction. Within the 'Ēlēye lineage living adults count between ten and eighteen generations to their eponym 'Ēlēye according to the size of the segment to which they belong.

All three divisions, Dalōl, Abgāl, and Wardīq intermarry. Within the Dalōl, the Walāldōn, Fūrlabe and Hōrrōne all intermarry but there is little internal marriage within either the Walāldōn or Fūrlabe. Within the Abgāl, the 'Ēlēye and Ūrweyne intermarry, and inside the large 'Ēlēye lineage some intermarriages take place between its two main segments the Mūse 'Ēlēye and Mamāssan 'Ēlēye. Marriage within the Wardīq segment now takes place between its two chief fractions, the Rumawāq and Waḥtišīl.

III.

As with other northern Somali none of the six 'Īse primary lineages is firmly localised nor are the movements of its members restricted to specific lineage areas. 'Īse insist most strongly, perhaps more strongly than other northern Somali, that the land which they occupy is for the purpose of grazing open to the livestock of all 'Īse without respect to their lineage affiliation. However, there is a general geographical division of the 'Īse clan as a whole into two groups — the 'Black 'Īse' ('*Īse Madōbe*) and the 'White 'Īse' ('*Īse 'adde*). The 'Black 'Īse' are those who live and move with their stock mainly in the west towards the 'Afar and in Ethiopia: the 'White 'Īse' lie to the east towards the Gada-būrsi and pasture their livestock along the coastal *Guban*¹⁾ plains. It is apparently partly their movement over this scalding white sandy terrain which earns them their name, and in addition the fact that since water is widespread and plentiful on the coast they wash their clothes more frequently. The 'Black 'Īse' on the other hand who move in country where water is less widely distributed are said to wash less frequently. They oil their hair heavily with ghee which stains their clothes, especially the shoulders of their 'tobes', black. The application of ghee to the hair is said to promote good health and longevity, an idea apparently connected with the use of ghee as a medicine and tonic, and of course as a foodstuff.

In keeping with this vague geographical division there is a corresponding difference between the 'White' and 'Black' 'Īse in their economy. The 'Black 'Īse' are said to possess more cattle and camels than the 'White 'Īse' whose chief wealth is in sheep and goats. However, after rain has fallen on the coast and vegetation is abundant large herds of camels are seen grazing there as well as often considerable numbers of cattle.

The distinction between the 'Black and White 'Īse' does not correspond exactly with the genealogical divisions of the clan. Some lineages are divided between the two geographical areas and groups may change their patterns of movement over the years and according to the distribution of rain and pasture through the seasons. However, the 'Black 'Īse' usually comprise the following — the Wardiq; the following sections of the Mūse 'Ēlēye, Aḥtimahure, Bede Mūse, Ḥarla Mūse, Rēr Gūlane Mūse, Rēr Aṣḥir Mūse, Abīb Mūse, Rēr Kūl, and Rēr

¹⁾ Literally the 'burnt' land, from *gub*, to burn.

Ma'allin; the Hörrōne as a whole; some segments of the Fūrlabe i.e., Rēr Hannas, Bōdbōd, 'Ēlēye, Rēr Nūr, Rēr Haği, and the Rēr Gēsaleh; finally the Walāldōn are represented by the Rēr Bulbul, Rēr Qoti, 'Ali Gadid, 'Ali Hayil, and 'Ali Gāl. The 'White 'Īse' usually include some of the Fūrlabe, i.e., the Fāraḥ Matān, 'Ali Ğire, and Nebi Same; parts of the Mūse 'Ēlēye, e. g. parts of the Rēr Kūl, Rēr Galān, and Rēr Ūran; and of the Mamāssan, the Bah Abdaraḥmān, Rēr Fātaḥ, Bah Gurgure, Bah Fūrlabe, Bah Ḥarla, Rēr Allāle, Rēr 'Olow, and the Rēr Fiqi Yūnis; there are also some Walāldōn.

IV.

As a whole the 'Īse have the same basic social structure and culture as the other northern Somali. Like the latter and unlike their neighbours the 'Afar and Galla the 'Īse do not have age-grades; boys are initiated usually individually by circumcision and this is not a matter of entry into an age-set organisation¹). There are however a number of points at which they do differ from other northern Somali. For example, as is well-known, the 'Īse build elaborate graves, usually encircled by rings of stones some of which represent success in battle²). Their men also still generally follow the traditional northern Somali hair style in which the hair is allowed to grow into a wide mop, although most of the other northern Somali clans, with some exception among the Ogādēn and Hawiye, have now discarded this style and shave their hair short. In addition to the large knives they carry and long spears, and the scarifications on the cheeks, chest, arms and legs which they sport as decorations, 'Īse warriors also wear bracelets signifying their success in war especially against the 'Afar.

Thus traditionally I was told a youth does not shave his pubic hair until he has made a successful killing. Then a bronze bracelet called *māldaye* is worn on the left wrist. The warrior with two murders to his credit wears another bracelet called 'āg on the upper arm. When

¹) It is not clear to what extent the 'Afar as a whole have an age-set organisation or indeed what its social importance is amongst those 'Afar groups which appear to possess it. See DESCHAMPS, *Côte des Somalis*, 1948, p. 32; W. THESIGER, *The Awash River and the Aussa Sultanate*, "Geographical Journal", 85, 1935, pp. 1-23; I. M. LEWIS, *Peoples of the Horn of Africa*, 1955, p. 166; and *Mer Rouge*, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

²) See R. E. DRAKE-BROCKMAN, *British Somaliland*, London, 1912, pp. 172-4, for a good description of 'Īse graves.

a man has killed ten people the 'āg armlet is opened and thrown away and the *māldaye* transferred to the right wrist, all other armulets and bracelets being discarded at the same time. Such a warrior with ten killings to boast of is called *mirre*. Not surprisingly with the strong propensity of the 'Īse for war many 'Īse poems and songs take as their theme the successful murder of enemies, especially of the 'Afar. The following is I think a fairly typical 'Īse *gērār* celebrating the murder of an 'Afar tribesman by an 'Īse. This was collected at Luḡaye on the coast to the east of Zeila and composed by Ibrāhīm Beqsi.

Odayī ina Mumin ē
Mūdka ¹⁾ *gēla lahā*
Haddū gēri ²⁾ *na'āyo*
Dihda gēdaha weynleh
Mū gōfkēda ³⁾ *kabaydo*

The old man, Mūmin's son,
 Who had the benefit of camels,
 If he doesn't like death,
 Why didn't he avoid,
 The dried-up water hole,
 Of the valley with the tall grass?

Like most northern Somali clans the 'Īse have developed their own particular dance forms and songs within the general Somali pattern. One of the most interesting of what they describe as 'amusements' (sg. 'ayār) is a game which they share with some sections of the Gada-būrsi but which is not as far as I am aware found elsewhere in northern Somaliland ⁴⁾. This is a form of touch rugby called *go'onso* (see illustrations) played with a ball made from a cow's tail, or the fibre of the *hig* "alloe", or from cloth. The teams (sg. *dun*) usually of equal or approximately equal numbers are often picked on a basis of maternal affiliation. Thus one side may be *qūdo* — those whose mothers are Ga-

¹⁾ *Mūd*, benefit, enjoyment of wealth (here literally of camels *gēl*).

²⁾ *Gēri-da*, death.

³⁾ *Gōf-ka*, an abandoned or dried-up well or hole. For the construction *mū ka baydo* cf. M. H. I. GALĀL and B. W. ANDRZEJEWSKI, *Ḥikmad Sōmālī*, Oxford, 1956, p. 76, note 6-7. I am most grateful to Mr. Andrzejewski for advice on the translation of these lines.

⁴⁾ Cf. DRAKE-BROCKMAN, *op. cit.*, pp. 135-137, where an excellent description of the game is given. On Somali games in general see G. MARIN, "Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute", 61, 1931, pp. 499-512.

dabürsi, while the other 'ankābo — those whose mothers are 'Īse. Or again the two teams may be composed respectively of those whose fathers are dead and those whose fathers are alive, or on an age basis of young unmarried men (*dōb*) and married men (*gobane*). The game starts by both sides assembling in the middle of the field and one man of one side throwing the ball to another of his team. If this man receives it without being intercepted and succeeds in passing it to another of his side and the latter is able to bounce the ball and catch it on the back of his hand without losing it a point is scored for his side. If this process is not accomplished the ball is given to the opposing team for them to attempt to score a point. In every case the ball must pass through the hands of two team-mates of the original thrower before a point is scored. The scoring is usually up to ten and there is no umpire, the spectators being entrusted with keeping the score. Injuries sustained in the game which is as lively as rugby do not entitle the injured person to claim damages; it is a 'game' and nothing more.

Outside this sport the 'Īse pay blood-money and compensation on the same principles as other northern Somali. Amongst 'Īse a man's blood-wealth (*mag*) stands at a hundred camels and a woman's at fifty ¹). Between 'Īse and 'Afar, however, the standard blood compensation for a man's life is usually fifteen camels and for a woman's half that figure. Between the 'Īse and Gadabürsi again blood money is usually less than the full rate paid within the 'Īse clan ²).

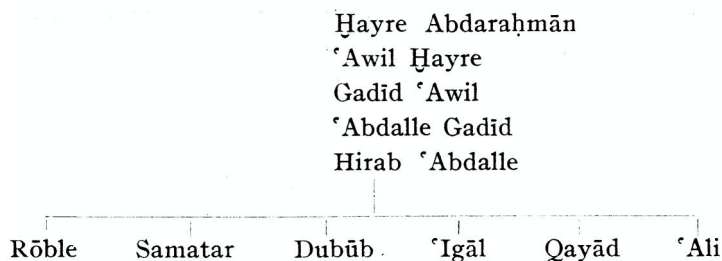
Dia-paying groups whose members pay and receive damages in concert are organised amongst the 'Īse on the same principles as amongst other northern Somali ³). The 50,000 or so 'Īse until 1960 under British Protection were in 1958 divided into approximately fifty-seven separate dia-paying groups. As a typical example I discuss the organisation of the Hirab 'Abdalle dia-paying group, a segment of the Abdaraḥmān 'Ēlēye some 2,000 strong in male population. Their genealogy is as shown:

'Ēlēye 'Īse
Abdaraḥmān 'Ēlēye

¹) Amongst the 'Īse as amongst the northern Dārōd Somali, but not amongst the Isāq, a married woman's own kin are responsible for her life, not her husband. If a married woman commits homicide, compensation is payable by her own kin not by her husband. But when she is killed some of the blood money may be given to her children.

²) Cf. *Mer Rouge*, *op. cit.*, pp. 85, 86.

³) See I. M. LEWIS, *Clanship and Contract in Northern Somaliland*, "Africa", XXIX, 1959, pp. 274-293.



The largest of these six lineages are the 'Ali Hirab who in cases of external homicide pay and receive the largest single amount of the hundred camels due, usually one quarter of the total amount paid or received by the dia-paying group as a whole. The remainder is contributed by or distributed among the other five collateral segments according to their wealth¹⁾. Internally blood-wealth for a man is valued at fifty camels. Thus for example, if the 'Ali Hirab kill a man of the Rōble Hirab ten camels are contributed by the Rēr 'Ali of which one is paid by the murderer himself. The remaining forty camels are paid by the Hirab as a whole. Of the total fifty camels, fifteen are taken by the Rōble Hirab as *ḡiffo*²⁾, seven and a half being taken by the orphans of the deceased. The balance of thirty-five camels are then shared amongst the Hirab as a whole.

Disputes between dia-paying groups within the 'Īse clan are as amongst other northern Somali clans referred to *ad hoc* panels of arbitrators (sg. *guddi*). Traditionally amongst the 'Īse a dispute is not considered insoluble until it has been referred successively to twelve such arbitrating bodies. The final court whose decision has more authority than that of an *ad hoc* panel is a court composed of forty-four members representative of all sections of the clan. This body is known as the *Rēr Gendi* and although something similar appears to have existed amongst the neighbouring Gadabūrsi³⁾ in the past it is today virtually

¹⁾ This procedure known as 'wealth reckoning' (*qabno*, *ḥōla tiris*, etc.) is followed by groups poor in livestock. Amongst richer lineages assessment of group responsibility is based on male strength by 'penis count' (*qōra tiris*) which includes infants.

²⁾ This term is explained in LEWIS, *Clanship and Contract*, "Africa", XXIX, 1959, pp. 284-5.

³⁾ Amongst the Gadabūrsi a hundred elders are said to have been summoned as a clan parliament at the installation of each new clan-head (*Ugās*). These made any modifications in Gadabūrsi custom which were deemed necessary and from them an advisory council (*ṣirka boqorka*) was selected to assist the *Ugās* in his maintenance of law and order and prosperity within the clan.

unique in northern Somaliland. The remainder of this article is concerned with a discussion of this body and of 'Īse chieftainship, for the two are closely connected.

V.

Traditionally the *Rēr Gendi*, or central council of the 'Īse clan, consisting of forty-four elders, was first appointed at that period in the past when 'Īse's descendants had reached a strength of a hundred. According to oral tradition then, for the first time, a body of 'Īse customary law was established by the newly appointed council. My description of this body as it functions today and of the 'Īse clan-leadership is unfortunately second hand for I did not have the opportunity of meeting members of the council or of seeing it in action when I was amongst the 'Īse. Thus I have had to rely on descriptions from 'Īse clansmen without the added support of direct observation.

Today, I was told, the *Gendi* which is both a judicial court of appeal and a ritual congregation, is summoned only in times of national emergency or crisis. When, for example, a severe drought or epidemic ravages the country, or a serious external threat disrupts 'Īse security, then the *Gendi* is convoked. The council normally, if not always, meets at Waraf near Hardo Galle ¹⁾ in Ethiopia. The forty-four councillors are very carefully chosen. Each must have only one wife and one son ²⁾ and should possess cattle, ideally four or five head, and not sheep. Burden camels should be brought to the *Gendi* settlement so that trading caravans can be sent out when necessary.

Each member of the *Gendi* must have married with the consent of his own and his wife's kin. His mother may not be an inherited widow ³⁾. These conditions are designed to ensure that each member of the *Gendi* should be 'lucky' or 'blessed'. All moreover must be men noted for their regular observance of the daily prayers and other reli-

¹⁾ This place is mentioned in a Gadabūrsi traditional history as the scene of a battle between the Gadabūrsi and Galla in the 14th century.

²⁾ This idea of the blessedness of possessing only one wife and one son conflicts with the widespread Somali desire for many children, especially sons. I cannot explain this apparent contradiction.

³⁾ As is well-known Somali practise widow inheritance (*wā la dumālay*) where a man marries the wife of a deceased brother or other near kinsman. The children of this second marriage take the name and affiliation of their genitor and father, not of the deceased.



Fig. 1

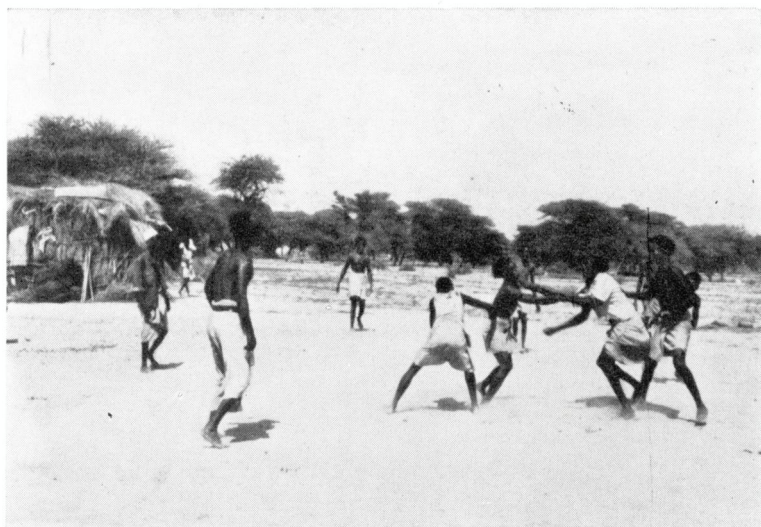


Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

gious tasks and of more than average piety. Somali usually refer to such devoted Muslims as *ḥalālmāl*, or *saḥīb al-salād*¹⁾, distinguishing them from *wadāds* and *ṣayḥs* with more expert religious knowledge. What is required here is not so much profound religious knowledge as elementary piety. One of the primary duties of the *Gendī* is to pray for the success and prosperity of the 'Īse people and much time is evidently spent in prayer. For their bodily sustenance the councillors depend largely on the milk of the cows they bring with them and on charity. The congregation is led in its affairs by a man appointed from the first-born lineage of the Yūnis Mūse 'Ēlēye. In addition to praying for deliverance from specific evils and interceding with God on behalf of the 'Īse, the *Gendī* attempts to settle serious disputes within the clan. It is not in permanent session but is summoned as need arises. Its composition changes quite frequently and a councillor must leave the *Gendī* settlement as soon as he bears more than one son or marries another wife. Such a person is said to have lost his 'blessing' (*du'o*)²⁾.

The *Gendī* which is thus partly a ritual congregation and partly a judicial organisation works normally in conjunction with the head of the 'Īse clan, the *Ugās*. His position is regarded by 'Īse as being very similar to that of the *Gendī*. As with other northern Somali clans which have, or have had in the past clan-heads, the office is chiefly that of a peace-maker, concerned with the maintainance of internal peace and cohesion and in a vaguely ritual sense with the general well-being and prosperity of his clan. It is hardly necessary to point to the crucial significance of peace in a society so often split by feud and war. Since success in battle is very largely a matter of superior strength, in company with other northern Somali 'Īse consider that those who are weak in arms have compensating virtues. In general the weak have blessing as their portion and the 'Īse say explicitly that it is because the Wardiq is the smallest and most endowed with blessing of the six 'Īse primary lineages that they choose their clan-heads from it.

From the first *Ugās*, *Ugās Ugāḍmāl* who is remembered as a saint with miraculous powers over game, to the present leader *Ugās Ḥassan Ḥirsi* there are said to have been eighteen clan-heads. The majority it

¹⁾ *Saḥīb al-salād* is Somalized Arabic and means 'friend of the prayers'; *ḥalālmāl*, one who avoids sin, literally he whose milking stock are *ḥalāl* not *ḥarām*, a man who does not steal livestock and if he finds stray camels tries to return them to their owners.

²⁾ Thus as noted above it appears that in the *Gendī* the normal Somali conception of the blessedness of many children, especially male descendants, does not apply.

appears have come from the Waḥtišil segment of the Wardīq ¹⁾. Today whatever may have been the position in the past the *Ugās* who lives in Ethiopian territory near Dire Dawa is regarded by the 'White 'Īse' as a somewhat distant and remote figure associated with the *Gendi*, acknowledged by all but rarely intervening in their affairs. And despite the title *Rōble* ('Rainy') which many European travellers have recorded the 'Īse clan-heads as bearing, I found no indication that the 'Īse *Ugās* is specifically a rain-maker. Rather, I think, he is regarded as a ritual leader to some extent charged with the duty of securing through his prayers and those of the *Gendi* the general physical and moral prosperity of his people ²⁾.

Traditionally the 'Īse *Ugās* is installed near Zeila, the ceremony involving the placing of leaves on the head of the candidate and his acclamation by his people as with other northern Somali ³⁾. After his installation the *Ugās* is said traditionally to be provided with a bride whose bride-wealth is paid by all the 'Īse as a sign of their interest in and loyalty to the *Ugās* whose children will also rule them.

In this brief sketch I have not attempted to present a full account of the ethnography of the 'Īse clan, but rather to document certain aspects of their culture and social organisation which differ from those of other northern Somali. I hope that these notes may encourage someone with a more profound knowledge of this proud Somali people to describe more fully the *Gendi* and its relation to the 'Īse *Ugās*.

¹⁾ As I was not able to visit the present *Ugās* and spent my time amongst the 'Īse with the 'White 'Īse' I was not able to obtain a full list of the names of the 'Īse clan-heads. I obtained the names of only eight former 'Īse *Ugāsyo* and my informants were not certain of their chronological order.

²⁾ Cf. *Mer Rouge*, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

³⁾ A fairly full account of the procedure of installation amongst the Gadabūrsi will be found in my book *A Pastoral Democracy: A Study of Pastoralism and Politics among the northern Somali of the Horn of Africa*, Oxford University Press, 1961. The act of acclaiming the new clan-head with fresh green leaves is known generally as '*alēmasār*' (putting on leaves). The ceremony ideally should take place after the rains in conditions of abundance and plenty (*bašbaš iyo barwāqo*) partly because such conditions are necessary for the gathering of a large assembly of people in one area and partly because the circumstances of the installation ceremony should be propitious.