

‘PROCLAIM TO THE PEOPLE’:
FIVE POEMS BY SAYYID MUḤAMMAD °ABD
ALLĀH ḤASAN OF SOMALIA (1856-1921)¹

LIDWIEN KAPTEIJNS

Sayyid Muḥammad °Abd Allāh Ḥasan, shaykh of the Ṣālihiyya brotherhood and leader of a holy war against the European colonizers of his country (1898-1920), has left a rich legacy of ideas in his poetry (in Somali) and his prose treatises (in Arabic). The importance of poetry in the Sayyid's career has been beautifully presented in Said S. Samatar's *Oral Poetry and Somali Nationalism: The Case of Sayyid Mahammad °Abdille Hasan* (Cambridge 1982), as well as in Abdi Sheik-Abdi's *Divine Madness: Mohammed Abdulle Hassan (1856-1920)* (London 1992), both of which contain poems in English translation.² It was Shaykh Jaamac Cumar Ciise, the leading oral historian of the Sayyid's movement and author of two histories of the Dervish movement,³ who in 1974 published the most comprehensive collection of the Sayyid's poems to date:

- 1 As I first translated these poems in 1975, when I wrote my M.A. thesis under the supervision of the late Prof. B.W. Andrzejewski, I gratefully acknowledge his help. I also thank Dr. Cabdisalam Yassin Mohamed, who was then writing his dissertation on Somali Sufi poetry at the School of Oriental and African Studies. I am responsible for any mistakes.
- 2 The literature on the Sayyid is enormous and cannot be summarized here.
- 3 *Ta'riḫ al-Ṣūmāl fī 'l-uṣūr al-wuṣṭa wa'l-ḥadītha*, Cairo 1965 and *Taariikhdii Daarawiishta iyo sayid Maxamed Cabdulle Xasan (1895-1921)*, Mogadishu: Wasaaradda Hiddaha iyo Tacliinta Sare 1976.

Diiwaanka gabayadii Sayid Maxamad Cabdulle Xasan (Mogadishu 1974). I present below English translations of five of the Sayyid's poems (four complete poems and a fragment of a fifth) included in the *Diiwaan*.

The Sayyid was good at many kinds of poems: poems to praise, to insult, to brag, to jeer, to incite, to challenge, to advise, to predict the future, and to share wisdom (*Diiwaan*, v). In the first three poems presented here the Sayyid insults, jeers at, and advises those Somalis who make common cause with the British. They illustrate the Sayyid's absolute refusal to be ruled by Christian foreigners or to regard those Somalis who collaborated with or tolerated them as Muslims. This uncompromising militancy is well documented both in his Somali poetry and his Arabic theological treatises (*risālas*), discussed in B.G. Martin's *Muslim Brotherhoods in Nineteenth-Century Africa*;⁴ it represents the intellectual and theological core of his message. The first poem, 'Proclaim to the People', was a message the Sayyid sent out to many groups of Somalis after he had been denounced by the head of the Ṣālihiyya brotherhood in Mecca, Shaykh Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ (1909). The second, 'A Man who is a Servant to the Europeans', concisely lists the kinds of activities that constitute in his eyes un-Islamic behaviour. The third poem, 'Parting Words of Wisdom', of which only the last part is presented here, was also written after the bombardment of Taleex; in it the Sayyid divines the future: that the colonialists do not mean well, but that his warning now comes too late, as they have already settled in their midst.

The fourth and fifth poems are very different. The fourth (Maryama Shiikh) shows the Sayyid in a less characteristic, gentler mood, as he humbly prays to God for the recovery of his sick wife, Maryama Shiikh. In the fifth poem ('Even if I failed...'), composed after the British air bombardments of the Dervish headquarters at Taleex in

1920, the Sayyid gives a moving retrospective of his life's work. Even if he failed to establish an independent state and to completely win Somalis over to his cause, he gained worldly honour as a courageous and competent warrior and religious honour before God's countenance as well as the reward of paradise.

1

*Maqashiiya uunka*⁵

Cabdalla maan qaboobiyo, Xirsi maakib laawow
 Mid yar waxaad tiraahdaan, murtadiinta reer Hagar
 Habaryoonis madasheeda, mariya weedha aan iri
 Toljeclaha muraadkaygiyo, masafadayda ula taga
 Maqashiiya uunkaba miyir inuu ku soo galo
 Mid mid waxow tiraahdaan, nimanka⁶ mooradii furay
 Mawaacidada diinkii, ma wax leysku maagaa?!
 Jahaadka moosinkii galay, ma wax laga maqnaadaa?!
 Mushaaharada beeniyo, ma wax lagu mannaagaa?!
 Loxodkii madoobaa, ma lays moogadeeyaa?!
 Muufada cadaabeed, maw adkaysanaysaan?
 Gaal nin u midiidimay, maqaan naara inuu tegi
 Kutubtaa u maragee, ma wax lagu murmaa baa?!
 Mushrik inaad jeclaataan, amaad mudan ku sheegtaan
 Haddeydaan mujrim ahayn, masala maad u haysaan?!
 Masala-gaabyadiinnaa, meel daran idiin dhigay
 Muftiga waanadiisii, idinkaa ka maagtoo
 Macbuudkii Rabbi ahaa, idinkaaba moogoo
 Maxsharkiyo qiyaamaha, idinkoo munkirayoo
 Muqfiradii Ilaahay, idinkaa ka maarmoo
 Macaankii fidowsana, idinkaa muraystoo
 Muuminnimada laabtaa, idinkaa mantagayoo

5 The Somali text is from the *Diiwaan*, 274-5.

6 The *Diiwaan* has a misspelling (*mimanka* instead of *nimanka* 'men') here.

Minadiinna gaalowday, idinkaa muquunshoo
 Kufriga i mahoobbiyey, idinkow miciinoo
 Makaankii shareecada, idinkaa matamiyoo
 Muslinkiyo qusuusida, idinkaa makalayoo
 Maalkii agoomeed, idinkaa malhabayoo
 Masxafkiyo quraankii, idinkaa maljadayoo
 Waxse mowtigiin galay, ama meleg idiin yimi
 Markaad Maxammadkiinnii, malcuun uri ka raacdeen!
 Mariyoo macneeyaya, mid kaleeto wuxuu yahay
 Waxaan maqallay⁷ ferenjigu, inuu miiri idin qoray!
 Waxaan maqallay maalkii, inuu idinka meersaday!
 Waxaan maqallay ooryaha, mid tan inaad ka weydeen!
 Waxaan maqallay madaxdiinna, in midiidin laga dhigay!
 Aan miis yar mooyee, Maydho geel la siinayn!
 Waxaan maqallay maahyahow, magiciin inuu ba'ay
 Intaasoo masiibaa, waxa igala mead badan
 Maska iyo abeesada, magta aad ka bixiseen!
 Aanad midigta fidinayn, aar hadduu ku micdiyayn!

Proclaim to the People

You ʿAbd Allāh with your cool mind, and you Xirsi,
 with your deliberate judgement,⁸
 You should tell a small thing to the apostates of the Reer
 Hagar.⁹ Spread the words which I say at the assembly
 of the Habar Yūnis.
 Take my objective and my *masafo*¹⁰ poem to the Tolja'lo

7 The *Diiwaan* has a misspelling (*makallay* for *maqallay* 'heard') here.

8 These men are Cabdalla Shixiri, for a long time the Sayyid's well known minister of foreign affairs and Xirsi Afdiir; *Diiwaan*, 274.

9 The Reer Hagar, and the Habar Yunis and Habar Tolja'lo mentioned in the next line are clans that did not side with the Sayyid.

10 Religious poetry is often called *masafo*, even though the formal characteristics of the poetry indicated with that name differ. See Giorgio Banti, 'Letteratura' in Annarita Puglielli (ed), *Aspetti dell' Espressione Artistica in Somalia*, Rome: Bagatto Libri 1988, 48-50.

[clan].

Proclaim to all the people that they should use their discrimination and join me.

One by one you should tell them: Should men who have broken their oaths¹¹ and their religious commitments not be challenged?

Is the time of *jihād* something from which one can stay aloof?

Are corrupt wages something from which one can have lasting benefit?¹²

Can one pretend to be unaware of the dark gaping grave?

Can one endure the baking oven of eternal punishment?

That a man who is a servant to an unbeliever goes to a place of fire—to which the Qurʾān testifies—is this something one can argue about?

Can you give any theological argument that you are not guilty of a crime if you love a polytheist and regard him as an honourable person?

Your inability to do so has placed you in a weak position.

You have kept yourselves away from the advice of an expert in Islamic law [like myself].

You have been unaware of the Lord, who is worshipped.

You have denied the Last Gathering and Day of Judgment.

You have dispensed with the forgiveness of God.

You have taken as bitter the sweetness of paradise.

You have vomited up the sincere faith of the heart.

You have given support to your relatives who have become unbelievers.

You have given aid to the infidels who have attacked me.

You have endangered the position of the Islamic law.

It is you who have harmed the [ordinary] Muslims and

This also includes two examples of *masafo* poetry.

11 Literally 'circle'. This refers to the old Somali custom of placing oneself in a circle when taking an oath.

12 *Mannaagaa*, conjectural translation.

the high-ranking ones.¹³
 It is you who have looted the property of orphans.
 It is you who have disputed the [sacred] text of the Qurʾān.
 But when your last moment and the angel of death come, then, instead of your Muḥammad, you will accompany the bad-smelling accursed one.
 Convey and explain something else from me as well:
 I have heard that the Europeans have levied a tax on you.
 I have heard that your possessions have been confiscated by them.
 I have heard that you failed to keep even one of your wives.
 I have heard that your leaders have been made into menial servants.
 I have heard that they have given you but a few she-camels.
 I have heard, you mindless ones, that your blood money has become worthless.
 Among all those calamities, what I find most amusing, is that you have paid blood money for snakes and serpents,
 but when a lion is devouring you, you do not [even] stretch out your right hand.

II

*Nin aqdaamo ferenji ah*¹⁴

Nin aqdaamo ferenjiya maantiyo abuurriin
 Ama aaladduu sida ama awrtabuu rara
 Ama ariga buu qala ama laba ugaarsada
 Ama uba ilaalaa ama uurka kala jira
 Ashahaado beeniyo islaannimo ha lagu dhaqo

13 The Sayyid's special councillors were called *khusuusi* or *qusuusi*.

14 The Somali text is from the *Diiwaan*, 9.

Ilaahayna nama oran anna ma oggolaan karo!

A Man who is a Servant to the Europeans

A man who is a servant to the Europeans, from the day
 he was born until now,
 who carries their equipment or loads their camels,
 or who slaughters sheep and goats for them or hunts with
 them,
 or serves as a scout for them or who has in his heart
 a false profession of faith
 that [such a man] should be treated as a Muslim
 our God has not said and I cannot accept.

III

*Dardaaran*¹⁵

Dawo lagama helo gaal haddaad, daawo dhigataane
 Waa idin dagaayaa kufriga, aad u debcaysaane
 Dirhankuu idiin qubahayaaad, dib u go’aysaane

Marka hore dabkuu idinka dhigi, dumar sidiisiiye
 Marka xigana daabaqadda yuu, idin dareensiine
 Marka xiga dalkuu idinku oran, duunya dhaafsada e

Marka xiga dushuu idinka rari, sida dameeraaye
 Mar haddaan dushii Adari iyo Iimey dactal dhaafay
 Maxaad igaga digataan berruu, siin la soo degiye

15 This is the last quarter of the Sayyid’s famous and much quoted poem ‘Dardaaran’. The *Diiwaan* gives the Somali text on pp. 124-8. See Martin, *Muslim Brotherhoods* and Sheik-Abdi, *Divine Madness*.

*Parting Words of Wisdom*¹⁶

There is no remedy if you make common cause with the
Christian foreigners.

Once you let down your guard, the infidel will ensnare
you.

For the money he pours out for you [now], you will
suffer later.

First he will rob you from your firearms, as if you are
women.

Then he will brand you like cattle.

Next he will order you to sell the country [to him].

Then he will put loads on your backs as on donkeys.

However, once I have passed beyond Harar and Iimey,

How will you benefit from my warning, when he will be
laying his telegraph line?

IV

*Maryama Shiikh*¹⁷

Allahayow macbuudow adaan kuu miskiin ahaye
Muraadkii aan leeyahay adaan kuu miciinsadaye
Allahayow, Maryama noogu sahal, maalig baad tahaye

Muslin hooyadiisey ahayd, meeluu¹⁸ joogaba e
Kun lag muhaajirana waa, mahurihiisiye
Eebbow Maryama noogu sahal, maalig baad tahaye

16 My translation has benefitted from that by Sheik-Abdi, *Divine Madness*, 175-6. Martin, *Muslim Brotherhoods*, 194, gives the translation of a comparable text from Jaamac Cumar Ciise's *Ta'riikh*, 126.

17 The Somali text is from the *Diiwaan*, 286. In this poem, the Sayyid prays for his wife Maryama Cismaan Shiikh, who was ill, to be cured.

18 This should be *meeluu* rather than *meelu* (*Diiwaan*, 286).

Martidiyo manqada reerka iyo maatadiyo xaaska¹⁹
 Inta mudanaha oo idil qoftaa moosin u ahayde
 Eebow Maryama noogu sahal, maalig baad tahaye

Maryama Shiikh

Oh God, You who are worshipped, I am Your poor man.
 It is to You in turn for help in what I seek.
 Oh God, You who possess [all], show us clemency with
 regard to Maryama.

She was the Mother of Muslims everywhere.
 She was indispensable to thousand times ten-thousand
 emigrants²⁰
 Oh God, You who possess [all], show us clemency with
 regard to Maryama.

For guests, the extended family, defenceless [women,
 children and old people], as well as her own house-
 hold,
 for all honourable people this woman was a bastion.²¹
 Oh God, You who possess [all], show us clemency with
 regard to Maryama.

V

*Haddaan waayey...*²²

Haddaan waayey calan lay nashiro, tan iyo Nayroobi
 Miyaan waayey naamuus janniyo, daalac iyo naasil

- 19 This should be *xaaaka* rather than *xaska* (*Diiwaan*, 286).
- 20 *Muhaajir* can mean refugee; it can also refer to those who made the *hijra* from the land of the 'unbelievers' to join the Sayyid's *jihād*.
- 21 *Moosin*, the trench dug around the nomadic house to protect it from flooding.
- 22 The Somali text is from the *Diiwaan*, 293. I have added the question marks.

Haddaan waayey Ciidoo naqliyo inaan Nugaal daaqo
 Miyaan waayey neefaan xarbada, naallo ugu fuulo?
 Haddaan waayey ruux iga naxoo, ii nasabad sheegta
 Miyaan waayey naxariis Alliyo, Nebiga jaahiisa?

Even if I failed ...

Even if I failed to have a flag flown for me from here to
 Nairobi,
 Did I not gain religious honour and paradise, and victory
 and defeat [in war]?
 Although I failed to obtain the luscious pastures of the
 'Iid [region] and the Nugaal as grazing,²³
 Did I not successfully ride my steed out to war?
 Although I failed to get people to show me sympathy and
 to acknowledge their kinship with me,
 Did I not gain God's mercy and [the reward of seeing]
 the Prophet's countenance?