

# OROMO AJAMI

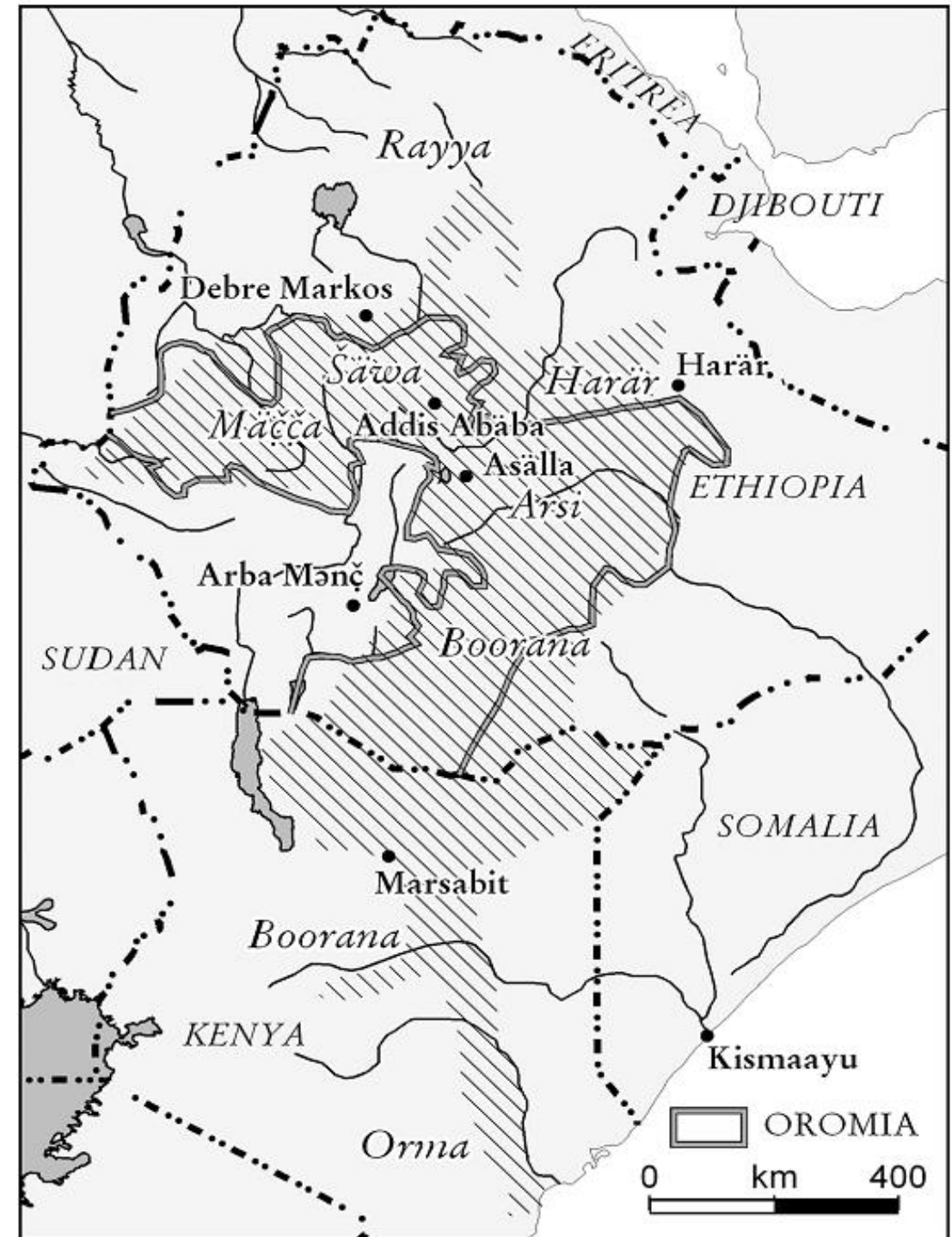
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Oromo (O.) is presently the L1 of more than 25.000.000 people in Ethiopia, N and C Kenya and S Somalia.

In Ethiopia most of the O.-speaking communities are either Christian or Moslem. Yet the traditional religion is still alive in several areas in the S, and the O. nationalist movement has tried to revive it.

In the E mass conversion to Islam took place in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.





O. words are first attested in Baḥréy's *Zenahu läGalla* 'History of the Galla', dated 1593.

A local grammatical tradition aimed at O. and based on the Ethiopian model of the *säwasəw* had developed by the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> cent., and is attested by Habtä Šellase's *Nägärä Galla*: an O.-Amharic work with basic grammatical data and word lists.

However, literacy in O. in the 19<sup>th</sup> cent. was spread mainly by missionaries:

- in adapted Latin orthographies or in adapted *fidäl* by Christian ones,
- in Arabic script by Moslem ones, especially for religious hymns that were sung during *zikri* and *hadra* ceremonies.

Even though O. now has an officially endorsed Latin-based orthography, the *qubee afaan Oromoo*, used in schools, administration, publications and in the media, O. Ajami thrives among Sufi congregations and some other Moslem groups: **digraphia** or **trigraphia** (because O. in *fidäl* is still used residually).

However, differently from Harari Ajami, I have not seen published materials in O. Ajami till now. Nor do I know of other scholarly works on O. Ajami beyond Mohammed Hakim's 2012 AAU PhD thesis (cf. later).

Nevertheless, there are several studies on Oromo Islamic religious oral poetry, such as Andrzejewski (1972, 1974), Baxter (1987), Ishihara (1996), and Stroomer (2001), that are quite useful also for studying O. Ajami religious hymns.

Funds of O. Ajami mss. exist in and around Harar, e.g., in the collection of Abdallah Sharif, that should be at the Rimbaud House still now. Elsewhere they have to be located yet.

I know of and have pictures of six O. Ajami mss. from different areas:

- 1) Vaticana Cerulli Etiopici 328 (= CE328);
- 2) IES263;
- 3) two witnesses of Ahmed Sh. Siraaj's *Kitāb Zuğāğat al-ṣafā'* (ASSM, ASMH);
- 4) an O. *Mawluud* from Harar (ST1);
- 5) an O. *zikri* book from Harar (ST2).



CE328 is probably the oldest known O. Ajami ms. It is a collection of two paper booklets of 9 and, respectively, 11 leaves of Oriental paper written on their recto and verso sides. Each leaf is ca. 18 x 12 cms. It was donated by Enrico Cerulli to the Vatican Library, but there is no indication of where he acquired it, nor any date.

Its general appearance is not much different from several other mss. from Harar from the 19<sup>th</sup> cent., when good paper was still available. Late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> cent. mss. from there were on poorer paper.



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ  
 فَأَنْوِثْ قَلْبِي نَحْشِبْ  
 طَنْوِثِي دَبَّ رِبِّ قَلْبِي كَوْحِي أَسْبَبْ  
 رَحْمَتِي وَبَوَّهْ سَوَلْ  
 أَمْوَصَا بَا فَنَسْ أَلْ  
 أَنْبِيَا قَدْ مَوَّهْ سَلْ  
 نَمَّ هَنْدَا مَا فَوْتَلِي رَحْمَةً بَكِّي لَمَانْ  
 رَحْمَتِي فَرْدِي دَوَّهْ  
 حَسْبِي كَرَوْنَفَقَمْ  
 جَالَا لَانْ هَكْرَمَمْ  
 قَبْرِ سَا مَنَوَمْ مَمْ بَرَكَا لَفَن سَا بَيْنْ  
 فَا رَفْ نَوَمْ حَسْبِي بَا دْ  
 بِر

F. 10v of CE328, with the beginning of the second hymn.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ جَرِي فَا رَوْنِي قَبْ  
 فَرْضَف سَنَا وَجِبْ نَحْت وَجِبْ  
 طَنْوَانْتَكْتَبْ نَنْبِسْ وَانْ دَبْ  
 غَرْ سَوَرَانْ جَلْقَبْ أَدَبْ نَنْبِي اَنَافْ اَمَلْ غَرْ سَوْنْ  
 هَدَا اَبْلِسُوا غَرْ سَكَا رَغْه  
 دَبِي رِي اَنِي كَتَا غَرْ جَابِلِي بُوَه  
 مَا لِي فَا نَغْدَلَرْ نَكْمَسَا مَهْ  
 الْفَن اَسِي رِي سِي اَخْرَاتْ مَوَهْ جَرِ فَا بِنِي تَهْ كَرَا سَا  
 يَانَمْ كَنْ رَفْتُولَفْ نَوَا سَسَا قْ  
 غَرْ دَغْدَوِي سِي اَجْمْ هَهِي قْ  
 رَفِي تَكِي رَفِي كَرْ وَفِي كَرْ كَقْ  
 يَانَمْ عَشَقْ طَوَا مِي نَتْ سَقْ رَحْمَةً اَبُو قْ نِيَا  
 اَم

F. 1v of CE328, with the beginning of the first hymn.



Each of the two booklets of CE328 appears to contain a religious hymn, the first one lacks its last page. Their graphic organization is similar: stanzas of 3 shorter rhyming lines followed by a longer line that rhymes with the subsequent long line: AAA B, CCC B, DDD B, etc.

Hassen Kawo, who inspected a copy of CE328 on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2015, pointed out that the second of these two *manzuuma*'s, is in praise of Sheikh Hussein, because most of its B lines end in phrases such as *nuura Huseyni*, *yaa nuura-naa sheykh Husayni*, *yaa shaykha Husayni*, etc.

If and when it will be published, linguistic, literary and orthographic analysis should make it possible to know a bit more about when and where CE328 was written.



IES263 is a small booklet of 15 folios of 16,5 x 11 cm. The paper comes from an old notebook with blue lines and one upper red line. The folios are numbered on both sides from 1 to 22, but there are several empty pages at its end.

An original shelfmark “Harar 29” on its front page shows that it comes from Harar, maybe brought by Drewes together with other mss.

Gori (2014) wrote that it contains “Oromo Islamic poetry”. More precisely, folios 1-6 are a poem with stanzas written continuously and separated from each other by a final star. Each of them includes several lines, all rhyming in *-ti*. Folios 7-18 contain a poem organized in stanzas of two shorter lines followed by a longer line, with the rhyming pattern AAA, BBB, CCC, etc. Its end is marked by *tammāt bi-l-ḥayri*, and *Alii Abraahim kataba kitaaba*. Folios 19 ff. contain shorter poetic texts.





F. 7 of IES263 with the beginning of the second hymn.



F. 1 of IES263 with the beginning of the first hymn.



ASSM and ASMH are two witnesses of the *Kitāb Zuğāğat al-ṣafā'* (aka *Birillee-Ṣafā*, BṢ), a long poem on the Prophet's life composed by Shaykh Ahmed Shaykh Siraaj (d. 1935), who lived near Huusoo in former Wollo:

- ASSM is a leather-bound copy in the possession of Sofia Mohamed Sheik from Kemise / Tajura. The pictures were taken by Andreas Wetter.
- ASMH is a photocopy made in 1425 (H. = 2005 CE) from a photocopy of a different ms. It was studied by Mohammed Hakim Ahmed Hasan in his PhD dissertation. His tutor was prof. Gori, and I took part in its discussion as an external examiner at AAU in 2012. Only some pages of the ms. are reproduced in his thesis.

Both mss. are beautiful and accurate witnesses, probably written by the same hand, that of Shaykh Abdu Khattaat (cf. Mohammed Hakim 2012: 84).





F. 1 of ASMH with the beginning of Ahmed Sh. Siraaj's *BŞ*.



F. 1v of ASSM with the beginning of the Ahmed Sh. Siraaj's *BŞ*.



The *BŞ* is a *manzuuma* formed by stanzas of different length of 12-syllable lines divided into two half lines of 6 syllables each. For instance the fist folio of ASSM in the previous slide has:

- *ti ti ti ti* (4 lines),
- *ni ni ni ni ni ni ni ni* (8 lines),
- *raa raa raa raa raa raa* (6 lines),
- *mu mu mu mu mu mu* (6 lines),
- *ti* (the first line of a 6-line stanza that continues on f. 2r).

In ASSM each line is marked by a final red comma, and a horizontal red line on the R side that separates each stanza.



*Bismillaahi 'r-raḥmaan ar-raḥiim jedheeti •*

*Jala qabuu kooti faaruu Musxafaati •*

*Obboleyyan-irraa madad kadhadaheeti •*

*Of bicha abdadhuu beeka likki kooti •*

‘Having said *bismillaahi 'r-raḥmaan ar-raḥiim*,  
I begin my praise of the Chosen one,  
Having asked for help from my brethren,  
I don't rely only on myself because I know my limit’.



ST1 is a paper-bound ms. obtained from a notebook with blue horizontal lines and 2 lateral vertical red ones, of 25,5 x 20 cm. It was written in 1971 (= 1964 Eth. calendar). It was photographed by Simone Tarsitani, an ethnomusicologist, in the area of Korommii (Harar) in 2012-13.

After the first two folios it is numbered continuously in Arabic from 1 to 135. Then there are 12 leaves with no numeration, followed by a third section with Arabic numbers at the top and Western ones at the bottom from 1 to 74. A final section bears no numbers, and is written with a ball pen in Arabic and *fidäl*.

The section numbered 1-135 contains an O. partially poetic translation of the Harari Mawlūd, a culturally and religiously important collection of Arabic and Harari prayers, religious hymns, and narratives. There are several ms. and printed version of the Harari Mawlūd, that partly differ from each other, and bear titles such as *Mawlid šaraf al-‘alamīn* or *Kitāb ‘unwān al-šarīf bi-l-Mawlid al-šarīf*. This “constellation of texts” has been discussed by Gori (2008, 2010).

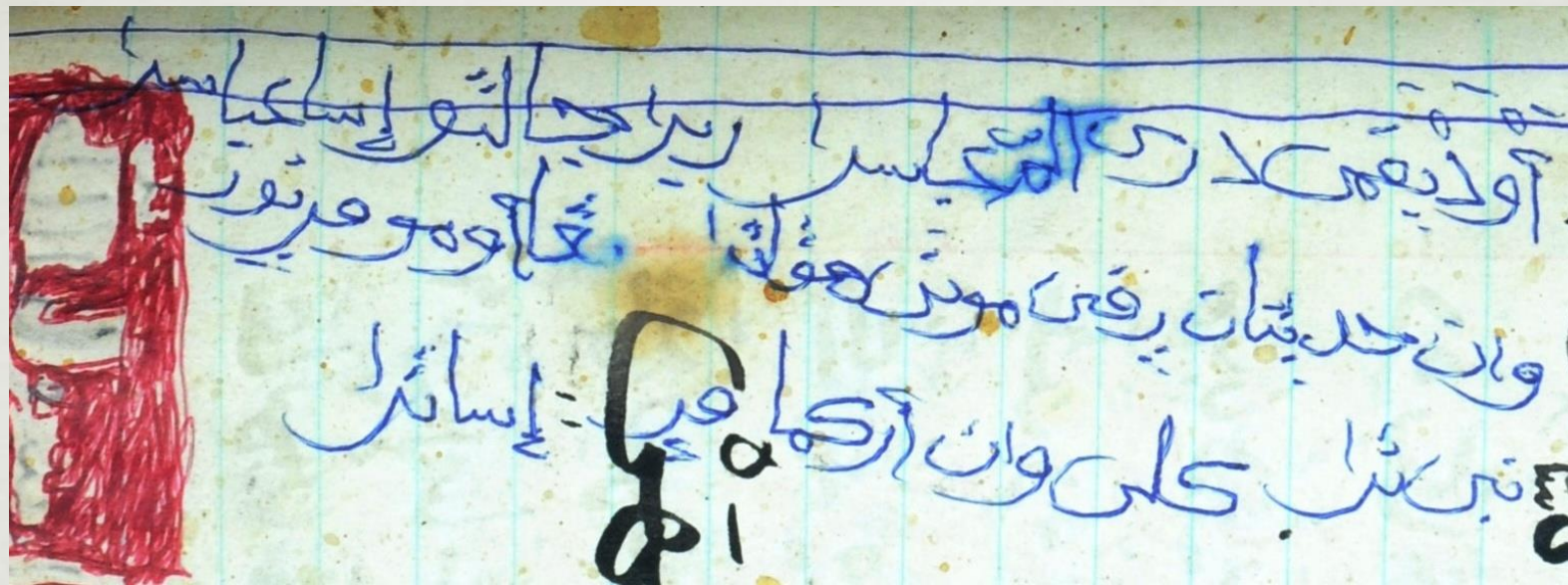
It has not been possible till now to check which is the version of the Harari *Mawluud* from which the O. one of ST1 has been translated. According to Tarsitani’s informant its author was *shaykh* Adam Gobba. The other sections of this ms. contain different zikris and qasidas.

I have been working with Tarsitani on leaves 24-25 of this O. *Mawluud*, that roughly correspond to p. 46 (= 111) in the 1992 version of the printed Harari *Mawluud*. It is the section on the creation of all things from the Light of the Prophet.





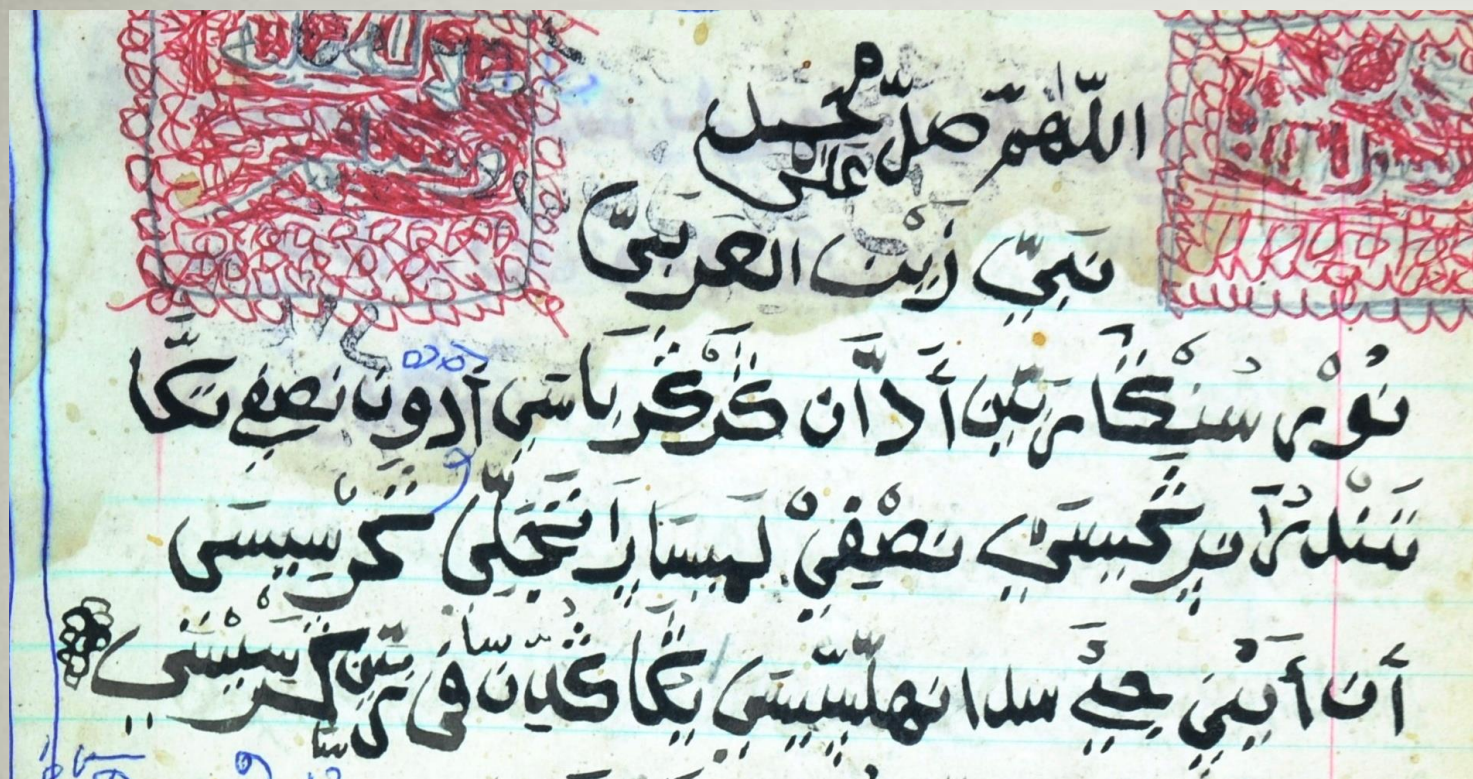




Odeeffame durii ilma 'Abbaasirraa  
 Rabbiraa haa-jaalatuu isaa 'Abbaasirraa  
 Waan hadiisaan dhufee Mootii Haqqaatirraa,  
 Yoggaa uumuu fedhee nuura Nabiitirraa  
 Kullii waan arkamaa fedhii isaatirraa

'It was narrated from the son of Abbas  
 May the Lord accept him and Abbas  
 Because it has come with the Hadith from the King of Truth,  
 When he planned to create from the light of the Prophet,  
 All the things that have been created by His will'.





*Allahumma ṣallâ 'alâ  
Muḥammadin  
Nabiyyi zayni 'l-'Arabiyyi*

Nuura san-gaa rabbiin addaan gargar baasee

Oduun nişfi takkaa tan duraa na dhageysee

Nisfii lammeysaadhaa tajallii garsiisee

Ani eenyu je'ee sodaan hollachiisee

Yoggaa guddina fii rabbiin (saa) garsiisee

‘The Lord divided that luminous body into two,

The story of the first half you already listened from me

Of the second half, He showed the manifestation’

He asked “Who am I?”, and caused (them) to tremble in awe

When (their) Lord displayed His own mightiness.’

The meter is that of the O. *manzuuma*: 12-syllable rhyming lines divided into 2 half lines of 6 syllables each. All the stanzas have 5 lines, and the rhyme changes at each stanza:

- -*irraa*, 1st stanza written on the margin,
- -*see*, 2nd stanza,
- -*ahee*, 3rd stanza,
- -*a'ee*, 4th stanza,
- -*anii*, 5th stanza,
- -*tee*, 6th stanza, &c.

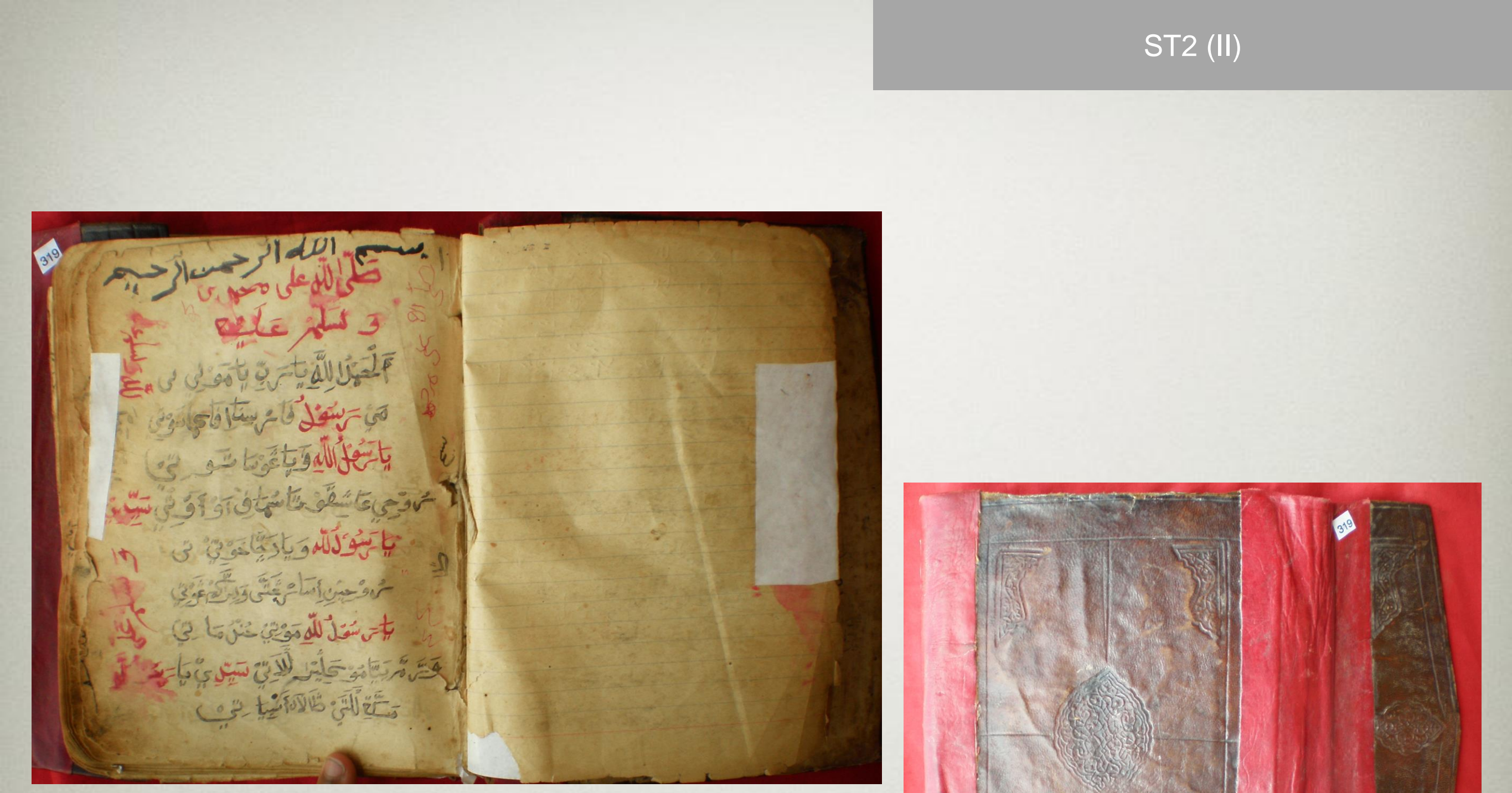


Finally, ST2 is a leather-bound ms. from Abdallah Sharif's collection (nr. 319). It is composed of different kinds of paper:

- from a notebook with black horizontal lines,
- white paper,
- from an arithmetic notebook,
- from a notebook with blue horizontal lines and a red line above.

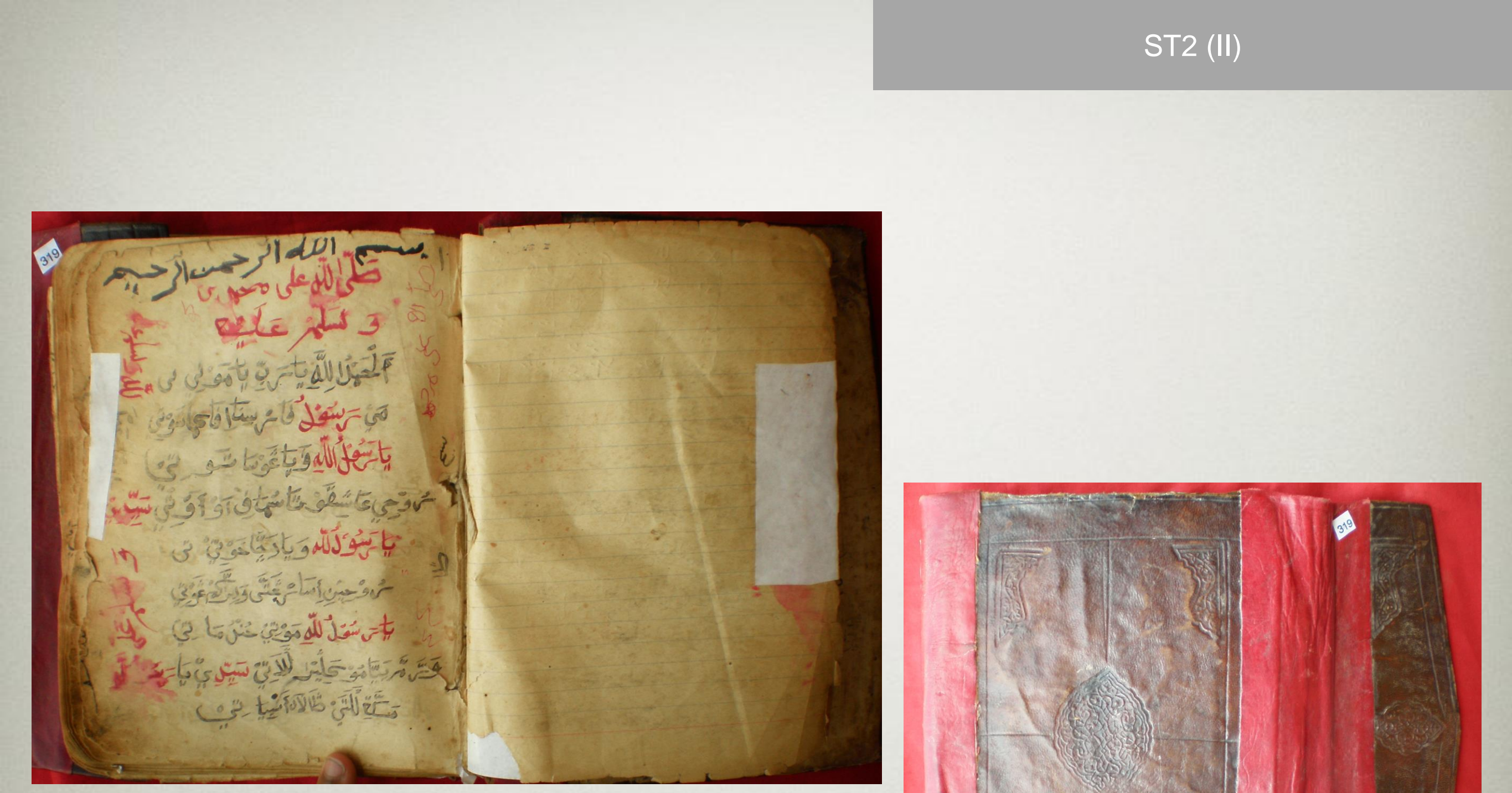
The leaves are not numbered, and have been written by different hands, both with a traditional pen and black and red ink, and with a ballpoint.





The l. 1r of the white-paper section of ST2, with the beginning of an O. religious hymn.

Part of the leather binding of ST2 with the signature 319



The l. 1r of the white-paper section of ST2, with the beginning of an O. religious hymn.

Part of the leather binding of ST2 with the signature 319







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