

Books and Networks in South Western Ethiopia

Report of the Second Mission of the *Islam in the Horn of Africa Project* (30 January -4 March 2016)

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Historical Framework

The region object of our study during the first two missions is central for the understanding of the diffusion of Islam among the Oromo of South-Western Ethiopia. The Islamization of the region is quite recent and coincided with significant political and social changes among the population. The process has developed at multiple stages and had different centers of propagation of the doctrines. For Jimma region we have already significant historical data. As for the other areas studied during the missions, there is still no significant study on them.

The first place visited has been the small town of Wolkite, located in a Gurage and Qabena area.¹ The city was originally the residence (*gēbbi*) of the *fitaurari*² Habte Gyorgis³ in the second half of the 19th century. Antonio Cecchi (d. 1896), fifty years earlier, did not mention Wolkite. The *Guida dell'Africa Orientale Italiana*, published in the 1938, describes it as a small city with telegraph, postal service and infirmary.⁴ From the notices given by Enrico Cerulli (d. 1988), is not clear if the Islamization of the area was already extended in the late '20s, while he mentions the presence of the tomb of a Saint not far from the city.⁵ The *ḥadra* of Zabi Molla was probably founded before Cerulli passed there, but he does not mention it, nor he mentions the

¹ Qabena is a Cushitic language spoken in the area, different from the most diffused Afaan Oromo; see Crass, Joachim, The Position of K'abeena within Highland East Cushitic, *Afrikanistische Arbeitspapiere* 67 (2001), 5-60; Cecchi, Antonio, *Da Zeila alle Frontiere del Caffa*, Roma : Società Geografica Italiana, 1885, 3 vols., II 26-29. From an administrative point of view Wolkite is part of the Oromo State.

² This term indicates an aristocratic title of the Solomonic monarchy, comparable to the European baron.

³ See Cerulli, Enrico, *Etiopia Occidentale (Dallo Scioa alla frontiera del Sudan)*. Roma : Sindacato Italiano Arti Grafiche, 1930-33, 2 vols., I 25.

⁴ *Africa Orientale italiana. Guida d'Italia della Consociazione Turistica Italiana*, Milano: Consociazione Turistica Italiana, 1938, p. 519.

⁵ Cerulli, I 25-26.

mosque or the Qur'anic school. The Islamization of this area cannot be directly connected to the events occurring on the West bank of the Gibe river, populated mainly by Oromo, while contacts among local *šayḥs* are attested in manuscripts belonging to the *Rašādiyya* sufi brotherhood. This order was founded by Muḥammad al-Rašād, student of the grand-father of the present keeper of the collection) and diffused also in the Jimma area.

The Islamization of the Gibe region followed a path that involved merchants coming from East (Harar, Yemen) and West (Sudan, Bornu).⁶ The Abba Mecha Oromo who moved in these areas at the beginning of the 18th century mixed with the local Sidama population through marriages and affiliation.⁷ This can be considered as one of the reasons behind the abandonment of the traditional *gadaa* political system and the adoption of monarchy. The majority of people of



Figure 1 Lawḥ, Jimma Museum. Ph. Michele Petrone

the five Gibe kingdoms (Limmu, Gomma, Jimma, Gumma, Gera) during the 19th century embraced Islam, under the pressure of local kings, who imposed (an at least formal) conversion to their subjects.

Jimma has been founded by Abba Jifar I (1830-1855) near the former Hirmata market, which was already the basis of intense commercial activities. The expansion of the reign (formerly known as Jimma Kaka) led to a conflict with the Limmu-Ennarea kingdom. The fame of Jimma is linked mainly to Abba Jifar II (1861-1932), who made it a shelter for Muslims seeking refuge from the expansion of the Solomonic Dynasty with Menelik, attracting both Sufis and jurists who promoted the diffusion of

⁶ See. Lewis, Herbert, Jima Abba Jifar. An Oromo Monarchy. Ethiopia 1830-1932, Asmara : Red Sea Press, 2001 [reprint of 1964 ed.], pp. 20-35; Trimmingham, Spencer, Islam in Ethiopia, London : Frank Cass & Co., 1965, p. 199.

⁷ See Abir, Mordechai, The Emergence and Consolidation of the Monarchies of Enarea and Jimma in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century, in *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (1965), p. 205.

Islam and Arabic language. Cerulli says that in the region flourished Qur'anic schools, while advanced Islamic studies were carried in sufi brotherhoods.

While Jimma became the main commercial center, Agaro (also spelled Haggaro), the capital of the small kingdom of Gomma, lost its importance and the reign was finally conquered by Menilek II (1886), while remaining under the influence of Jimma Abba Jifar. Its king Abba Manno (ca. 1733-75, belonging to the Awwalini/Awuliani dynasty)¹⁰ patronized the coming of Muslim clerics and the diffusion of Sufism, mainly of the Qādiriyya order.¹¹ The people of Gomma seems to believe that the founder of the reign was a *šayḥ* coming from Mogadishu and often identified or confused with *Šayḥ Ḥussayn* of Bale.¹² Cerulli describes the region as rich and populated, due to coffee production, while it was nominally under the double control of Abba Jifar and the *negus* Tafari of Addis Ababa. He passed through Tije,¹³ defining it a “remote location”, but he did not meet any notable Muslim of the region.

Sufi brotherhoods' role in spreading Islam in Gibe states is undeniable. Together with the Qādiriyya, in the area of Jimma the Tiḡāniyya was also diffused. Al-Qurarī (Shekota Tije, d. 1917?) was probably the first master of this order in Ethiopia, while he concealed it to the members of the court of Abba Jifar II. He was married with one of his daughters and lived in the city, where the Qādiriyya was the “official” sufi brotherhood. At a certain point he decided to move to Tije, but there is no proof of preaching activity.

The reign of Limmu Ennarea has a peculiar history, due to its role in managing trade during the 19th century. Before its decline, result of the emergence of Jimma Abba Jifar, this reign existed for almost two centuries. At the beginning of the 18th century some nomad Oromo tribes settled in the region and adopted a sedentary way of living. Its favorable position on the way to Kaffa markets made Limmu Ennarea a center for commerce and spreading of new beliefs. At the beginning of the 19th century Bofo (abdicated in 1825) took the power and through

¹⁰ Trimingham, Spencer, *Islam in Ethiopia*, London : Frank Cass & Co., 1952, pp. 199-200. Also Sheikh Nasir, one of our guides is linked to the Awwalini family and he is also the keeper of the site of Warukko, who is considered the founder of the dynasty and the one who introduced Islam in the region. See below for further details.

¹¹ See Hassen, Muhammad, *The Oromo of Ethiopia, A History 1570-1860*, Trenton: Red Sea Press, 1994, p. 110.

¹² Cecchi (*cit.*, II 239) says that they venerate a certain “Uariccò” as founder of the reign. Cerulli, in the late '20s refutes Cecchi's hypotheses, simply identifying the local Nūr Ḥusayn with the one of Bale Cerulli, *cit.*, I 196). Trimingham (*cit.*, p. 200) seems to trust Cecchi and defines Nūr Ḥusayn the qallichcha (sciaman) of the tribe, subsequently Islamized. The study of numerous invocations to this saints in Warukko's manuscripts will probably shed light on this point. *Šayḥ Nāšir*, our guide in the region, is considered by locals as a descendant of Warukko and of the Awwalini family: people greet him in every village and offer him food and help.

¹³ The location is also mentioned in the *Guida dell'Africa Orientale Italiana*, *cit.*, p. 523 (Tiggé).

military force and marriage proclaimed himself as king of Limmu. His successor, Abba Bagibo (r. 1825-1861), adopted Islam as state religion and promoted the presence of Muslim clerics at court, more than in separate buildings and institutions. This is probably the reason why Cecchi found only a single mosque in the reign and Cerulli does not mention any significant Islamic



building, with the exception of a “stabilimento”¹⁴ of the Sammaniyya brotherhood. The expansion of Jimma and the consequent shift of the commercial route that passed to Limmu to South caused the decline of the reign. When the land was conquered by the officials of Menilek (late 19th century), part of the population – and the son of the last king, also named Abba Bagibo who changed his name in in Gebre Selassie – converted to Christianity for personal advantages.¹⁵ From this moment on the political role of Limmu Ennarea became marginal, while there have been local *šuyūh* contributing to Islamic literary production, as it is shown by the Limmu Gannat collection briefly discussed later.

Figure 2 Anwar Abba Jamaal, Haro 2016. Ph. Michele Petrone

Actual situation and local networks

One of the elements that mostly influenced our mission, since its planning, has been the Oromo uprising in different areas of the country. These protests are a consequence of some political choices of the Federal Government of Addis Ababa and are not connected with religious issues.

¹⁴ Cerulli, *cit.*, I 129-30. “Stabilimento” means building, but it is not clear what kind of religious structure it alludes to in this context. Based on what survives nowadays, it can allude to a complex of huts including at least a mosque and the houses for the members of the order.

¹⁵ Trimmingham, *cit.*, p. 202.

Revolts have involved different cities and areas, mainly Woliso, Ambo, Shashamane and Adama, but small protests happened also in Jimma and other cities of the Oromia State. This diffused instability made new events almost unpredictable for us. We passed through Woliso some weeks after the main protests without problems. In Jimma, in the second half of February, students manifested in one of the University's campuses. We were based in Agaro and the head of local Tourism Office contacted our guide asking him to stop the mission. Nonetheless, the guide did not inform us about this point and we safely continued our activities.

Mobile network in Ethiopia is improving every year, but in some areas is still faulty. Dedo (40 Km South from Jimma) was unreachable for several days and the area of Limmu Sakka has not been reachable during the whole period of the mission. In the former case we have been able to arrange a single visit, but only on the very last day of the mission in Jimma. The latter area is near to places where protests were going on and the impossibility to contact local authorities prevented us from taking a trip to the region. Both Limmu Sakka and Dedo were part of the original plan of the mission: the former as a consequence of our first visit during last mission in Ethiopia; the latter for the importance of the site, while there was the necessity of finding a contact able to introduce us to the people keeping the site.

These events, while not actually harmful for us, forcefully led to a rescheduling of the mission and to the necessity of finding brand new contacts on site. This has been possible thanks to the help of our guide and to the efficacy of the Tiḡānī network in the region. New contacts and sites came all from this network and in almost all cases they were willing to collaborate with us after the very first meeting. The main consequence of this is that the new sites introduced in the mission plan are all related to the Tiḡāniyya. This order spread in South Western Ethiopia starting from the beginning of the 20th century. It can be subdivided in 2 main local lines: the first founded by Shekota Tije, who had to face an almost all Qādirī Sufī environment and, as informants in Ethiopia assess¹⁶, he had to conceal his belonging to the Tiḡāniyya. The other branch is related to better known figures of the Tiḡāniyya in Ethiopia: al-Faqīh Aḡmad b. ‘Umar (Faki Ahmad Omar, d. 1953?)¹⁷ and al-Ḥāḡḡ Yūsuf (Shekota Chekorsa, d. 1937-38?).

The *ḡalīfa* of the order in Addis Ababa led us to Anwar Abba Jamaal, who is linked both to the lineage of al-Faki and to the lineage of al-Ḥāḡḡ Yūsuf. Anwar was able to lead us to

¹⁶ Informant: Kemal Ibrahim.

¹⁷ On him see Ishihara, M., “Beyond Authenticity: Diverse Images of Muslim *Awliya* in Ethiopia”, in *African Studies Monographs*, Suppl. 41 (March 2010), pp. 82-84.

different places and personalities. The first was Abba Jabal grandson of Ḥāḡḡ Yūsuf and inheritor of part of his books. Abba Jabal is in his 70s and he is still active as a teacher in the Qur’anic school next to his house. We also met Ḥāḡḡ Sirāḡ (living in Chaggo, 50 Km Northwest from Agaro), who also belongs to the lineage of al-Ḥāḡḡ Yūsuf and, together with Abba Jabal, was one of the *muqaddams* of the area. He was informed of our presence in the region and was waiting for us to come by his house. He had prepared a selection of manuscripts and book to show us, including the one which is believed to be the very first Ethiopia Tiḡānī text. Anwar also provided contacts with Dedo, where Shekota Abba Mecha Abba Waji (Maḥmūd b. Sulaymān, d. 1950s?)¹⁹ the leading figure of the *ṭarīqa* after al-Ḥāḡḡ Yūsuf. He is the author of several works about the Tiḡaniyya, of which only few have been published²⁰ and studied.²¹

1. Shekota Gena 12-13 Feb:
 1. City: Limmu Gannat
2. Jimma Museum 14 Feb:
 1. City: Jimma
3. Abba Gulli 15 Feb:
 1. City: Agaro
4. Abba Dura 16 Feb:
 1. City: Haro
5. Shekota Adam Gumma 17-18 Feb:
 1. City: Tobba
6. Muhammad Sayf: 23 Feb:
 1. City: Agaro
7. Shaykh Kamal: 24-25 Feb
 1. City: Agaro
8. Abba Jihad 27-28 Feb:
 1. Jimmate (Daru)

¹⁹ About him see *ALA* 4, p. 53.

²⁰ Maḥmūd b. Sulaymān, *Jalā’ al-Fikr fī Tarḡamat al-‘Arif bi’Llāh Sayyd Aḥmad b. ‘Umar al-Barnawī al-Tiḡānī*, Cairo : M. Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1373/1953. lay

²¹ *ALA* (see previous note) lists only 4 works of Maḥmūd b. Sulaymān. Local informants affirm that he composed more than 50 works.

9. Muhammad Abba Jamaal 29 Feb

1. Jimmate

Zabi Molla

The visit to this site is the follow up of the previous mission in the Area (November-December 2014). The collection includes both manuscripts and several printed books, belonging to Badr al-Dīn al-Ubbiyy, founder of the *ḥaḍra* and father of the actual keeper, Muḥammad Amīn. During the first mission the digitization involved only manuscripts. During this mission we digitized mainly printed books, while other manuscripts (not displayed before or stored inside or along with printed books) have been discovered.

The whole collection has been included among the heritage sites of the National Library of Addis Ababa and some officers visited the sited and put shelf numbers on the volumes (mainly printed books), without re-shelving materials according to a common order. Numbers have been written on duct tape, then attached to the covers or directly to the unbound pages. Some shelf number have been written directly on the cover, with permanent red marker.

Comparing pictures from the last mission it has been evident that there have been added new elements, mainly brand new copies of the Quran. There are also new Xerox copies of manuscripts coming from other regions. Manuscripts (also photocopied) have been completely digitized. As for printed books we took pictures of the front/title page, of the last page and of places where handwritten notes, glosses, watermarks and dates. In the case of mutilated books pictures have been taken also of other pages, in order to be able to identify the work. The present keeper of the collection, Muḥammad Amīn, obtained also another manuscript (originally belonging to his manuscripts) from a nearby village.

The collection of printed books is one of the largest found in the region and shows the breadth of interests of Badr al-Dīn al-Ubbiyy: collections of *ḥādīṯ* (Buḥārī, Muslim, Nasā'ī, with different commentaries), books about Law and Sufism (Ibn 'Arabī's *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* among many others), and also Arabic poetry. Some of these books are fully annotated in a sort of *ḥāṣhiya*, containing also loose folios with handwritten notes. The manuscripts books discovered include mainly other versions of already identified texts, written by local authors. There are also short poems and *fawā'id* written on loose folios or written in the margins of printed books. Here

(as in other collections) bookshop watermarks, possession and book-transaction notes are of particular interest to reconstruct books supply channels. Almost all of the books (in the sites visited during this mission) have been printed in Egypt, but there are others (more recent) coming from Saudi Arabia and Lebanon or reprints of Būlāq editions made in Addis Ababa.

Muḥammad Abba Ruksī (Limmu Gannat)

The collection is preserved at some kilometers far from the city of Limmu Gannat (woreda of Limmu Kossa), in the house of the grandson of Abba Ruksi, Abba Karam Saʿīd. who



Figure 3 Limmu Gannat Mosque. Ph. Michele Petrone

is also the *imām* of the local mosque. The collection includes two boxes of manuscripts and printed books, where the former prevail in number, and of other 7 boxes of printed books only. The latter have not yet been digitized, because, as usual practice, owners initially show only part of the collection. Only after they feel they can trust us, they show us other materials or lead us to other

collections. This attitude, while expected and included in our schedule, is not always predictable and, in some cases, it led to a quick re-scheduling or to postpone part of the collection to another mission (like in the case of the books of Zabbi Molla). In Limmu Gannat we took pictures also of part of the printed books which came out later, with the help of our guide Kemal Ibrahim.

Among the books preserved in this collection, the ones bearing texts of Ğamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Annī (d. 1882)²² and of his pupil Muḥammad al-Dānī (d. 1924). Abba Karam

²² On him see ALA, 3A, pp. 51-52.

stated that this collection is the exact reproduction of the one in Annā (Rayya, Wollo)²³. It actually includes also general manuals of *fiqh*, *‘aqīda*, collection of prayers on the Prophet and other devotional texts, biographies of local and foreign saints and several official letters, bearing seals and signatures of later members of the royal family of Limmu-Ennarea.

Jimma Museum

Partial collection of the manuscripts belonging to Abba Jifar II (1878-1932). He was not an intellectual, but he promoted the diffusion of Islam helping and sheltering *‘ulamā’* coming from other parts of Ethiopia. Those books and manuscripts are, therefore, mainly donations. Manuscripts include only copies of the Qur’ān (three in a single volume and one, not complete, subdivided in *ağzā’*). Printed books (bearing also some handwritten notes) are mainly related to the Tiğāniyya, supported by Abba Jifar II as the “court *ṭarīqa*”.

This is only a small portion of the manuscripts and printed books formerly preserved in Abba Jifar’s palace. The custodian of the Museum informed us that a large part of the collection ended up in the hands of a lady who started selling them to earn a living. Unfortunately, it was not possible to arrange a meeting with this lady (no one told us also her name).

Shekota Gumma

The site of Shekota Gumma (Šayḥ Ādam ‘Abd Allāh)²⁴ is located in Toba, main city of the former reign of Gumma). It has been detected since last mission, but, due the absence of the owner (Abba Raaya, grand-grandson of Shekota Gumma), we have not been able to digitize the collection before the second mission. Materials are stored mainly in the house of Abba Raaya, who also managed to bring some books from nearby places around Toba, but whose owners have not been identified.²⁵ At 5 Km far from the house of Abba Raaya there is the shrine of Shekota Gomma and a mosque, built in the 1980’s. The former has been partially destroyed by extremists

²³ This has been also confirmed by the research of Keml Ibrahim and Kemal Abdulwahhab, of the Addis Ababa University. The latter found in Limmu Gannat at least a text of al-Annī, which was not present in the collection in Annā. (Source: oral information from Kemal Ibrahim).

²⁴ Not to be confused with *Shekii* Gomma (Ādam Ibrāhīm), who was his master; see Aman Seifedin, *Islam And The Muslim Community Of Gommaa: A Historical Survey (1886-1974)*, MA thesis, University of Addis Ababa, December 2006, p. 35.

²⁵ Abba Rayyaa is the local judge (*qādī*) and this prominent social position allowed him to have access to other collections and to avoid mentioning their owners.

in the first decade of August 2015; the latter is the battleground between some local *salafis* and a group belonging to the al-Ahbash movement²⁶.

The collection consists of 7 manuscripts and 36 printed books. The preservation status is pretty poor: manuscripts and printed book were preserved in jute bags, exposed to insects, humidity and mice. Materials bear clear signs of infestation and in some cases it has been impossible to open books, to avoid further damage, or also to collate quires or loose folios, because they were glued together by humidity and mold. Texts are almost all *fiqh* related, with the exception of some Arabic grammar manuals.

Abba Gulli

This site has been visited in the first mission and the owner has been willing to allow us to digitize his collection since the beginning. The tomb of Abba Gulli (d. 1960s) is in the northern outskirts of Agaro. He was among the few that took the *ṭariqa* Tiġāniyya from Shekota Tije and his collection of manuscripts is the only one that does not belong to the al-Faki - Ḥāġġ Yūsuf branch. Manuscripts and printed books are in good condition of preservation, as a consequence of the fact that some of them are still used.

Digitized materials belonged to Abba Gulli and to *ṣayḥ* Aḥmad Borena of Gomma (d. 1950s?), covering *‘aqīda*, *madīḥ* (of the Prophet and of Aḥmad al-Tiġānī), *mawlid*, biographies of local masters and other texts related to rules of the order (*fiqh al-ṭarīqa*). The importance of this site lays mainly in the fact that it is one of the few whose collection is directly connected with the Tiġānī branch of Shekota Tije. Here, for instance, it is preserved the latter’s *silsila* linking him to Mawlūd Fall (d. 1852) and West African Tiġāniyya.

Abba Dura (Haro)

In Haro, 15 Km North West from Agaro is kept the collection of Abba Dura, master of Anwar Abba Jamaal and direct disciple of Maḥmūd b. Sulaymān and of Abba Jamaal himself.

²⁶ For a background of this conflict see Mustafa Kabha and Haggai Erlich, “Al-Ahbash and Wahhabiyya: Interpretations of Islam”, in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 4 (Nov., 2006), pp. 519- 538. To have a more detailed and updated idea of the beliefs and practices of the Ahbash see their website (<http://www.aicp.org/>) with sections in English, Arabic and Spanish.

The books are kept in the house of one the disciples of Abba Dura.²⁸ The conditions of preservation of the collection are good. People gathered to welcome us and helped both in taking books from the closet they were stored in and in cleaning them from dust, insects and dry mold with a brush. This collection contains 22 manuscripts owned or written by Abba Jamaal and/or Abba Dura²⁹ and 78 printed books, covering different genres of Islamic literature. Manuscripts include texts about the Tiġāniyya, an history of the Oromo and a collection of poems ranging from al-Būṣīrī to Muḥammad Iqbāl. Printed books include not only the late 19th and early 20th century heritage, but also late 20th century books and magazines (in Arabic), showing the broad interests of the local community. The same attitude can be found in some literary printed texts, like the *Hāyat al-Ḥayawān al-Kubrā* of al-Ḍamīrī: Anwar Abba Jamaal told us that his master Abba Dur used to read his pupils some stories from this books, commenting them in a certain spiritual fashion. The collection of magazines and journals (mainly from Egypt and Saudi Arabia) shows a certain interest in being in touch with cultural trends of the rest of the Islamic world, mainly through Arabic language.

Muhammad Sayf

In this site, visited on February 23rd, are stored 16 manuscripts and 9 printed books, almost all in good conditions. Both manuscripts and printed books are actually used during *dikr* session hosted in the house near to the tomb of the *ṣayḥ*. During our stay at the site we had the possibility to attend a performance, led by *Ṣayḥ* Nāṣir (keeper of Warukko collection and our guide to some sites), where he read a section of the *Tanbīh al-Anām* and the audience recited the refrain. One of the elders returned the favor reciting some *du‘ā’* and *madīḥ* of the Prophet. The audience already knew by hearth the refrain and part of the poems, which they recited softly. These recitations were part of the welcoming and the first contact established by *Ṣayḥ* Nāṣir on the February 22nd, when we first met the people living there and the custodian Muḥammad Sayf, a young boy, grandson of the local *ṣayḥ*.

The collection covers different genres (theology, magic, medicine, linguistics and *taġwīd*). Despite the performance mentioned above, the presence of devotional literature appears to be quite limited here.

²⁸ It seems that Abba Dura resided there for a period of his life.

²⁹ Some manuscripts belonged to Abba Jamaal and then passed to Abba Dura. Others have been written by the latter.

Conclusions

This second mission in South Western Ethiopia highlighted a large network of relations among local Muslims, based on remembrance of old dynasties (like in Gomma) or on the active presence of Sufi orders (like the Tiğaniyya). The study of the texts cannot avoid to take in consideration this aspect and the relational database of the *IslHornAfr* project appears to be the best way to give account of this situation and its roots in the recent past.

The richness of materials discovered (both printed and manuscript) cannot be overestimated, considering that it is only part of larger heritage still to be located and studied. Future perspective of research in the area are affected by the development of the local political situation. Only the events of next months can tell us how the situation will evolve and how much this cultural deposit will be endangered.