



Faculty of Humanities



Languages and literatures of the Muslims in the Horn of Africa. Some first reflections

Alessandro Gori

IslHornAfr (EU 7th Framework Programme, ERC Advanced Grant 322849)

Dept of Cross-Cultural and Regional Studies

University of Copenhagen

Karen Blixens Vej 4

2300 Copenhagen S

Email frd322@hum.ku.dk

www.islhornafr.eu

Copenhagen, 7 November 2014

Dias 1



Research framework

Islam in the Horn of Africa: A Comparative Literary Approach

- Financing by the European Research Council
- Seventh Framework Programme (FP7)
- Advanced Grant no. 322849
- Period of financing: 2013-2018

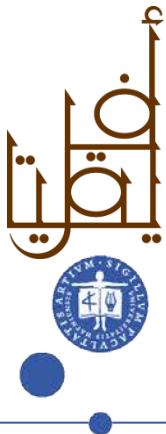
Originally based at the University of Florence (01.07.13)

Transferred to the University of Copenhagen on 01.02.14

Principal Investigator: Alessandro Gori

Researchers:

- Dr. Sara Fani
- Dr. Michele Petrone
- Dr. Anne Regourd
- Mr. Orhan Toy



Theoretical framework

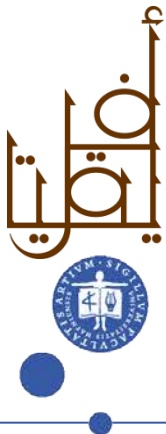
Linguistic situation in the Islamic world outside the Arab world

Some basic dichotomies:

- Classical Arabic/Local language (spoken and written)
 - Written Tradition in Arabic and in local languages
 - Higher culture/lower culture
 - Learned/popular culture
- Oral and written circulation of texts in both Arabic and local languages

Dachbegriff:

- Islamic Languages/Languages of Islam
- Not typical of Islamic civilization



Theoretical framework

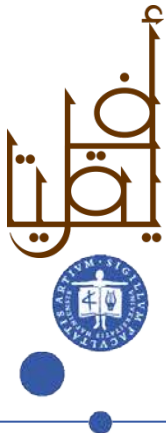
Same dichotomies in other traditions

Example: Jewish tradition

- Hebrew and Aramaic/ Yiddish (Ladino, Judeo-Arabic)
- Written tradition in the “Classical” /Written traditions in vernacular
- Higher vs. Lower/Learned vs. popular

Dachbegriff:

- Jewish Languages



State of research: Islamic languages

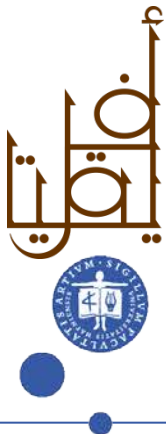
Alessandro Bausani, "Per una lettura comparata delle lingue islamiche", in *Atti del II Congresso di Studi arabi e Islamici*, Napoli, 1967, pp. 145-56

Alessandro Bausani, "Incontri linguistici in Asia: esperienze di un orientalista", in *Lingue a contatto nel mondo antico. Atti del Convegno della Società Italiana di Glottologia (Napoli, 12 e 13 maggio 1978)*, Pisa, Giardini (Orientamenti Linguistici 7), 1978, pp. 11-33

Alessandro Bausani, "Le lingue islamiche: interazioni e acculturazioni", in Id., Scarcia Amoretti B., (eds.), *Il mondo islamico tra interazione e acculturazione*, Roma, Istituto di Studi Islamici, 1981, pp. 3-19

Islamic languages:

- Written languages influenced by Arabic (Persian, Ottoman Turkish) models
- Bookish superstratum influences on other written traditions in different languages
- Oral literature, folklore is apparently less influenced by this learned superstratum



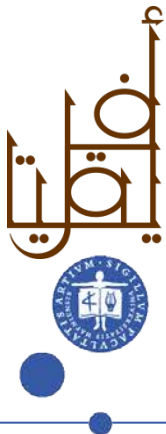
State of research: Islamic languages in Africa

Louis Brenner – Murray Last, "The Role of Language in West African Islam", *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 55/4, Popular Islam, (1985), pp. 432-446

- Local languages (Fulfulde then Hausa) become "learned dialects" for religious explanation
- Texts have basic oral diffusion but are under a strong Arabic learned influence (e.g. in the Fulfulde Kabbe)

Francesco Zappa, "Ecrire l'islam en bambara", *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, 147, 2009, 167-186

- Influence of Classical Arabic on local languages
- Creation of an «oral learned literature»
- Possible transition to the written form (no manuscript tradition)



State of research: Islamic languages in East Africa

Rex S. O' Fahey, *Islam language and ethnicity in Eastern Africa. Some literary considerations*, Harriet Tubman Seminar, Dept. Of History, York University, Toronto, Apr. 3, 2000

- Complementarity between «scribal fluency» in Classical Arabic
- and stable orality in a local language

Alamin M. Mazrui, *Swahili Beyond the Boundaries: Literature, Language, and Identity*, Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007

- Direct impact of Islam on the birth of Kiswahili
- Intervention of missionaries and colonial administrators (e.g. Johann Ludwig Krapf; Carl Meinhof)
- De-islamization of the language
- Passage from Arabic to Latin script



State of research: Islamic languages in the Horn of Africa

Bogumił W. Andrzejewski, *Islamic Literature of Somalia, African Studies Program*, Bloomington: Indiana University, 1983

- General analysis of the Arabic literary production in Somalia

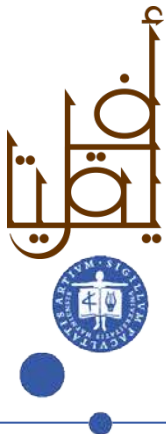
Abraham Johannes Drewes, *Classical Arabic in Central Ethiopia*, Leiden: Brill, 1976

- Harari, not Arabic has been the major language of Islam in the Harar area in the past three centuries
- The language of communication between the various groups in the Gurage area South of Addis Ababa is Amharic not Arabic

vs

Charles A. Ferguson, "The Role of Arabic in Ethiopia: A Sociolinguistic Perspective", in *Language Structure and Language Use*, Stanford, 1971, pp. 293-31

- Arabic as lingua franca of the Ethiopian Muslims (see also Ricci's review of the Qeddus Qur'an)



The status of Arabic

Modern Standard Arabic official language of Eritrea (of Somalia until 1972)

- Contemporary production of Arabic literature
- Quite widespread command of spoken Arabic

Arabic

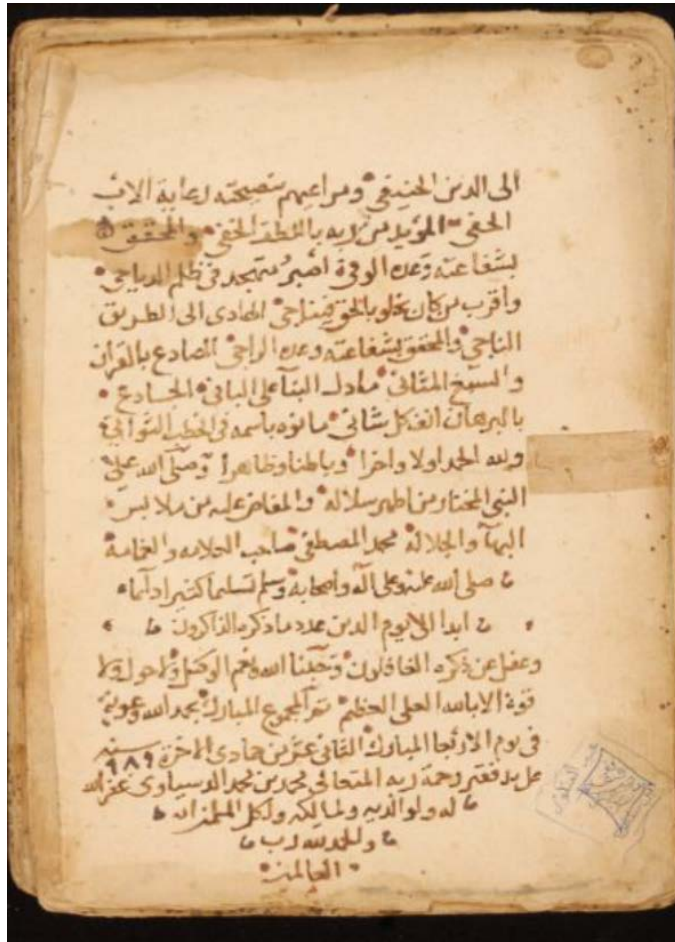
- Classical (written; sporadic oral usage: e.g. in religious sermons and exhortations)

Some kind of spoken Arabic

- Yemeni dialect
- Sudan dialect
- Egyptian dialect
- Gulf dialect
- Hybrid varieties of the learned milieu



Classical Arabic



Widely used in the Horn for teaching and learning

- Manuscripts since the end of the 17th century

Image:

Oldest so far found dated Islamic manuscript in Ethiopia
22 *ḡumādā al-āḥira* 989

A.H./14 July 1581 A.D. — IES 1852, colophon.

Egyptian origin

Acquired by the emir of Harar
Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Yūsuf
1212/1797-8

Classical Arabic

- Printed books since 1920
- Standard texts for instruction as everywhere else in the Islamic world
- Oral explanation of the texts in local languages
- No written commentaries in local languages on Arabic texts found so far

Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali Muslim learned men did/do write extensively in Classical Arabic

Huge production in:

- Historiography
- Hagiography
- Arabic grammar
- Tafsīr
- 'Aqīda
- Fiqh
- Pietistic literature



The case of Harar



Special case:
Walled town of Harar

Independent emirate 1647-
1885 and 1885-1887

Both Arabic and Harari
(*'aḡamī*) manuscripts copied
and produced in town



The case of Harar: Arabic manuscript tradition

وحسن توفيقه والحمد لله الذي جعلنا نلجوه ومكاننا المهندي لوان
 هذا نال الله وقد حزن الضمير وقت العصر يوم الاثنين في شهر
 عرفة بعد ما خلى به اربعة عشر يوما اجاز الفقه المصطفى عليه
 افضل السلام

١١٧٩
 واعلم يا اخي اذ ارايت شيئا من هذه الكتب تغيب الهمم
 او غير فاعلم اني واسترخاك وانصح باللطف والتجمل ولا
 تطالبه اسك وتزوجه اليه من مجلسك على وجه
 الازدراء والتكبر والحسد والتعاند فهذه علامة لعدم
 انصاف المعاندين واذ ارايت امرا يظهر لك صوابه فاصحبه
 بالهدى ولا تضلحه باللسان والعصر لان اللسان شين والعا
 دني وكن من اذاري باخيه شئنا ستر واذ اراي خيرا اظهر
 ولا تدخل يا اخي في باب لا تعرف ما فيه فتدخل بالحسد تحت
 قوله هتار مشايخهم مناع الخير معتد ايم والله من والهم
 صيحا وتهدى به رحمة العالمين

Huge Arabic manuscript
 tradition in Harar

Image:

First dated Arabic manuscript
 from Harar containing works of
 a local learned man:

VatAr 1791

Colophon June 4 1765

Harari as language of Islam



Old Harari: manuscript literature in Arabic script
 Manuscript tradition since 18th century
 Tendency to orthographic standardization

Harari as language of Islam

Harari

Pietistic literature

- Both written and oral circulation (e.g. recitation during *Mawlid*)
- Basic instruction texts in theology and law (*Kitāb al-farā'id*)
- Difficult to understand for contemporary Hararis
- Growing Modern Harari printed literature in *fidal*
- Spoken Islamic language

“Oral learned literature” in Harari?

- Harari language of the Harari people
- Practically unknown by other Ethiopian Muslims (also in the Harar area)



Amharic and Oromo as languages of Islam



Amharic (and Oromo)

Limited written tradition in
'aḡamī

Very recent manuscripts (since
the end of 19th century)

Image above:

IES 263: Oromo Islamic poetry

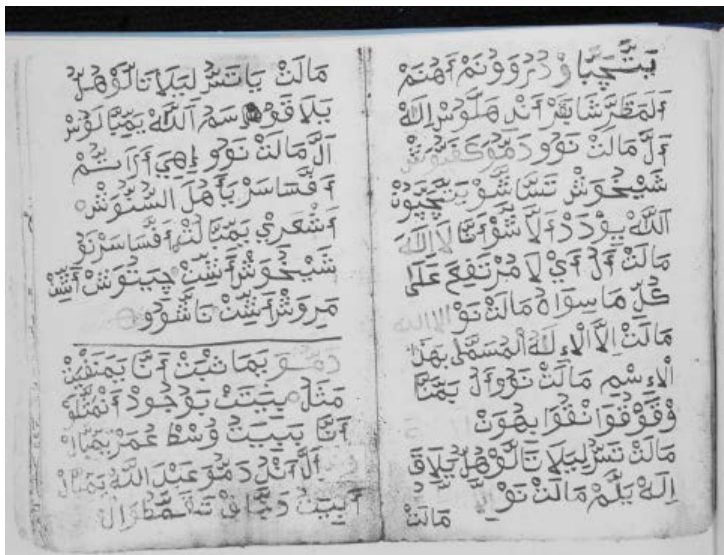


Image below:

IES 4610: Amharic Islamic
poetry

Amharic and Oromo as languages of Islam

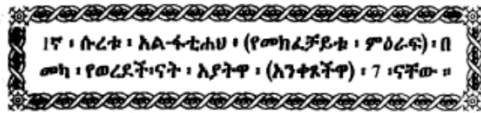
Amharic (and Oromo) '*aḡamī*

- Pietistic literature
- Instruction basics
 - Both written and oral circulation
 - Texts to be recited
 - Some manuscripts are possibly just an aide-mémoire for recitation
 - No structured manuscript tradition
 - No standardized orthography
- “Indigenizing” Islam
 - Texts meant for the average believer
 - Texts full of learned references
 - Simple descriptions of the tenets of religion



Amharic and Oromo as languages of Islam

ፆዕራፍ ፡ ፡ ፡ ስልፋ-ፋፊህ ፡ ፡ ክፍለ ፡ ፡ ፡



- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. በስላህ ፡ ስም ፡ እጅግ ፡ በጣም ፡ ርገሩ ፡ በጣም ፡ አዛኝ ፡ በሽንገው ። | 5. አንተን ፡ ብቻ ፡ እንግግላለን ፤ አንተንም ፡ ብቻ ፡ ርዳታን ፡ እንላምናለን ። |
| 2. ፆሰጋና ፡ ስላህ ፡ ይገባው ፡ የዓለማት ፡ ጌታ ፡ ለሽንገው ፤ | 6. ቀጥተኛውን ፡ መንገድ ፡ ምራን ። |
| 3. እጅግ ፡ በጣም ፡ ርገሩ ፡ በጣም ፡ አዛኝ ። | 7. የነዚያን ፡ በነርሱ ፡ ላይ ፡ በጎ ፡ የዋልክላቸውን ፡ በነሱ ፡ ላይ ፡ ያልተቆጣሀባቸውንና ፡ ያልተሳሳቱትንም ፡ ሰዎች ፡ መንገድ ፡ (ምራን ፤ በሉ) ። |
| 4. የፍርድ ፡ ቀን ፡ ባለቤት ፡ ለሽንገው ። | |

Growing Islamic printing production

Not only in Arabic script: more Islamic literature in fidäl (or in Latin script for Oromo)



Maqaa Rabbiitiniin Jalqaba, Maqaan isaa Rahmaan kan tahe, maqaan isaa Rahiim kan tahe.

- Rabbiin guddate khan mootummaan waa hundaa isa harka jirtu, Rabbiin waa hundarrattuu dandayaa dha.
- Rabbiin khan du'aa jiruu uume, isin laaluudhaaf, isinirraa eenyuu dalagaa gaarii dalagaa, Rabbiin injifataa dha, Rabbiin araaramaa dha nama toowbateef.
- Rabbiin samii torba wal-gubbaa godhee uume, waan Rahmaan uume kheeysatti wal-dhabbiifi eeybii hin agartu, samii Rabbiin uume irra deddeebi'ii mee laali baqaqaa wahi agartaa?

بِشْرِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
تَبْرَكَ الَّذِي يَدْعُ الْمَلَكُ وَهُوَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ
الَّذِي خَلَقَ الْمَوْتَ وَالْحَيَاةَ لِيَبْلُوَكُمْ أَيُّكُمْ أَحْسَنُ عَمَلًا وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْعَلِيمُ
الَّذِي خَلَقَ سَبْعَ سَمَاوَاتٍ طِبَاقًا مَّا تَرَى فِي خَلْقِ الرَّحْمَنِ مِن تَفَوتٍ فَأَرْجِعِ الْبَصَرَ هَل تَرَى مِن فُتُورٍ



Amharic and Oromo as languages of Islam

Amharic and Oromo as “ Islamic Languages”

- Huge production of Islamic audios and videos
- Spoken language of Muslims and Christians
- Difference between Islamic and Christian Amharic/Oromo

- Amharic lingua franca of the Muslims in Central Ethiopia
- Oromo increasingly exposed to Islamization
- Harari basic component of the local Harari identity



Somali manuscript tradition

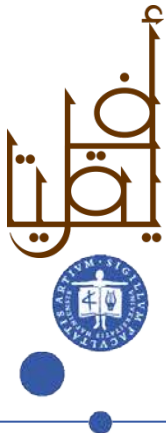
Dispersed written text production in '*aḡamī*

- Texts in different dialects
- Wide oral circulation
- Chimbalazi in Brava

No full-fledged manuscript tradition

- Manuscript texts in Somali difficult to understand nowadays
- No standardized orthography
- Possibly only support for by heart learning

Latin script used in modern and contemporary literary tradition



Languages and literatures of the Muslims of the Horn of Africa: tentative conclusions

Local Islamic literary traditions in the Horn

- Only complementary to Arabic in content
- Strongly influenced by Arabic language and sources
- '*Ağamī* script only rarely read nowadays
- Transferring basic religious instruction to the average believers

Basic circulation of knowledge through recitation, not reading

Partial exception: Harar (Old Harari tradition)



Languages and literatures of the Muslims of the Horn of Africa: tentative conclusions

Formation of Islamic communication languages

- Contemporary phenomenon

Spread of Islamic media

- Production of booklets for the believers in Oromo, Amharic, Somali, Tigrinya
- Translations from Arabic
- Video, audio, CDs

Birth of an Islamic variant of the common Islamic/Christian language





Faculty of Humanities



Languages and literatures of the Muslims in the Horn of Africa. Some first reflections

Alessandro Gori

IslHornAfr (EU 7th Framework Programme, ERC Advanced Grant 322849)

Dept of Cross-Cultural and Regional Studies

University of Copenhagen

Karen Blixens Vej 4

2300 Copenhagen S

Email frd322@hum.ku.dk

www.islhornafr.eu

Copenhagen, 7 November 2014
Dias 23

