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ANDREAS WETTER, Berlin

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by Alessandro Bausi

in cooperation with

Bairu Tafla, Ulrich Braukämper, Ludwig Gerhardt,
Hilke Meyer-Bahlburg and Siegbert Uhlig

Rhetoric Means of a Didactic Amharic Poem from Wärrä Babbo

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1. Introduction: *Ajäm* in Amharic

The term *ajäm* is the local Amharic form of the Arabic word *‘ağam* (noun) or *‘ağamī*¹ (adj.) which refers to Non-Arabs.² Among Amharic speaking Muslims in Ethiopia it is used to refer to Amharic texts which are written using the Arabic alphabet. In the eastern parts of Wällo, which are predominantly inhabited by Muslims, this kind of writing was and still is used in literature dating back to the middle of the 19th century. *Ajäm* literature also exists in other Ethiopian languages, and I will try to give a short overview of this literature in the Ethiopian context. Examples from an Amharic *ajäm* manuscript from Wällo will serve to illustrate some linguistic and textual characteristics of this type of literature. The content of *ajäm* texts is often explicitly religious. The text of the manuscript described in this paper has a particular didactic purpose. I will therefore devote special attention to the deployment of certain linguistic techniques the author uses to convey his message.

2. *‘Ağamī* literature in the world

Ağamī literature is in fact a widespread phenomenon in many parts of the Muslim world. The Arabic writing system is “after the Roman alphabet, the most used segmental script in the world” (Kaye 1996: 743). The best known use of *ağamī* for writing non-Arabic languages are probably Persian in Iran and Afghanistan and Urdu in Pakistan. Usually the adaptation of the script to represent a Non-Arabic language entailed some form of manipulation of the original script. This also applies to Ethiopian languages written in the Arabic script.

3. *‘Ağamī* literature in other African countries

When we talk about the use of the Arabic script for the non-Arabic written language this implies the existence of a body of literature written in that script. This so-called *‘ağamī* literature still exists for a number of African

¹ A comment on the use of the different forms of the term *‘ağamī* and *ajäm*. I will use the latter referring to literature in Ethiopian languages and the first in all other cases.

² PANKHURST (1994) provides an overview of the use of the term *ajäm* in historical Ethiopian sources.

languages. The best known examples of this kind of literature are probably Hausa in northern Nigeria and southern Niger (Hiskett 1975; Boyd – Mack 1997; Piłaszewicz 2000) and Swahili on the coastal regions of Kenya and Tanzania (Knappert 1967; 1971; 1999; Rollins 1983). Compared with other cases in Africa these two literatures have been studied comparatively well. But there existed similar traditions of writing African languages in the Arabic script in many other regions of the continent. In some cases this tradition is still active, and the Arabic based script is used in daily life (Ngom 2010). Some African languages which have been and, in some cases, are still written with the Arabic script, such as Afrikaans in South Africa (Stell 2007), Fulfulde in Guinea and Nigeria (Robinson 1982; Boyd – Mack 1997), Manding in Guinea and Mali (Vydrin 1998), Malagasy in Madagascar (Munthe 1977; Versteegh 2001), Wolof in Senegal (Camara 1997; Ngom 2010). A comprehensive treatment of this subject is given in Mumin (2009).

4. *Ajäm* in Ethiopian languages – a short overview

Ethiopia, or the Horn of Africa, is one of the regions in Africa with the oldest presence of Islam. The first attestation of a Muslim state in Ethiopia goes back to the late 9th century (Braukämper 2002: 19). After a long and turbulent history the cultural and social composition of a number of regions in present day Ethiopia are heavily influenced by Islam. It is therefore not a surprise that traditions of writing indigenous Ethiopian languages with the Arabic script, i.e. *ajäm*-literature, exist in Ethiopia like in other regions of Africa with a similar socio-cultural composition. At the present state of research the extent of the literary production in these traditions can only be estimated. With probably the exception of Harari this field is still under-researched in Ethiopia. At the moment there is information about *ajäm* texts written in the Ethiopian languages °Afar, Alaaba, Amharic, Argobba, Harari, Oromo, Silte and Tigrinya. The existence of *ajäm* literature in the languages Alaaba, °Afar and Tigrinya is based on personal communication. I was not able to see a single page,³ so much more cannot be said at the present moment. The situation in the other languages deserves some further comments.

4.1. Harari

The comparably best known and studied *ajäm* literature in Ethiopia is the literature in so-called Old Harari. Works on literature in Old harari exceeds

³ Orin Gensler told me in the winter of 2011 that a student at the Addis Ababa University did his thesis on Alaaba *ajäm*. Some °Afar friends of mine told me that °Afar manuscripts in Arabic script exist in Aussa, and a Tigrean friend in Berlin told me about texts from a Tigrean scholar called Şehəna Şeh °Umär.

that on all other Ethiopian languages. The first investigations of Harari *ajām* appeared in the 1930s (Cerulli 1936; Cohen 1931). The bulk of research, however, was done in the later part of the 20th century by Drewes (1976; 1983), Wagner (1975; 1988; 1997) and in the new millennium by Banti (2005). But even here the only publication which contains the description of complete manuscripts is the monograph of Wagner (1983). For example Banti (2005) assesses the situation as following:

“The eight Harari texts that have been mentioned so far are just a portion of the °ajamī literature in this language. A huge amount of zikri hymns has still to be properly identified and published.” (Banti 2005: 81)

There are several reasons for the fact that Harari *ajām* literature has received so much scientific attention. One is surely the fact that the city Harar was one of the most important centres of Islamic scholarship in the region which led to a high literary production. The socio-economic context of a big urban centre may have also been a contributing factor. But one of the most important reasons for the prominence of Harari *ajām* literature in Ethiopian studies is, in my view, the easy accessibility of the city and consequently of cultural artifacts, such as *ajām* manuscripts for visitors from the outside world. This becomes even more evident when this situation is compared to that of the Amharic *ajām* literature which was produced in a rural area of a region which has for a long time not regarded as a centre of a Muslim scholarship.

4.2. Amharic

It was Drewes (1976) who wrote first about Amharic *ajām* literature⁴ when he described some peculiarities of this kind of texts. Ironically he had collected these texts during field work in the Silte area, not in Wällo. His last publication “Amharic as a language of Islam” (Drewes 2007) is presently the most detailed work on Amharic *ajām* literature. In this article he describes some linguistic and philological properties of several texts. But a full publication of these manuscripts still has to be done. Pankhurst (1994) also writes about the tradition of writing Amharic with the Arabic script. While he discusses quite extensively the content of some texts that, at least partially,⁵ seem to have been written in *ajām*, he does not give any information about specific texts nor the script.

I was able to collect, i.e. scan, a number of manuscripts in southern Wällo and in Addis Abäba between the years 2002 and 2006 totaling approximate-

⁴ CERULLI (1926) describes excerpts from some Muslim poems written in Amharic, but does not indicate whether those poems were originally written in the Arabic script.

⁵ Since Pankhurst refers also to a M.A. thesis by ASSEFA MAMMO (1987), which deals with oral performances of *manzūma* recitations (cf. WETTER 2007b), it is not always clear what of the material cited is in fact based on written *ajām* and what is based on audio recordings.

ly 1000 pages. Nothing of this material has yet been published, though some of these texts could have been subjects of M.A. or Ph.D. theses at Addis Ababa University.

4.3. Oromo

The information about *ajäm* literature in Oromo is quite sparse, although it is likely that a considerable corpus of texts exists.⁶ There are at least two regions where Oromo *ajäm* texts were produced: one is eastern Ethiopia, i.e. the vast area comprising Arsi, Hararge and Bale, all of which are predominantly inhabited by Muslim Oromo,⁷ and the other is Wällo. I have personally seen some manuscripts that were written in eastern Ethiopia during a conference at Addis Ababa University in 2004.⁸ Some manuscripts are also said to be found in the library of the Vatican, but I was not able to obtain any concrete information about those manuscripts.

The Oromo *ajäm* production in Wällo consists of at least one large manuscript that was written in the early 20th century. I had the opportunity to make a scanned copy of it which has 348 pages. This text was also the subject of a M.A. thesis at the Department of Linguistics at Addis Ababa University (Mohammed Hakim Ahmed 2007). Although the thesis contains a description of form and content it is not a full philological publication. At present it is not clear if this long text is the only Oromo *ajäm* text produced in Wällo.

Hayward and Mohammed Hassen (1981: 555) mention in an article about an indigenous Oromo writing system that “Muslim Oromo scholars, particularly in the provinces of Wällo, Bale and Harär, have for a long time made use of the Arabic script for writing both religious and secular works in their own language” but they do not provide any additional information about individual Oromo *ajäm* manuscripts. The same is true for the remarks by Mohammed Hassen (1996; 2008) about written Oromo in Wällo. He cites Hussein Ahmed (1985) apparently without having seen a single Oromo *ajäm* manuscript himself.⁹ He even repeats the oft-cited doubts about the flexibility of the Arabic script for writing languages like Oromo:

⁶ Unfortunately the article on Oromo literature in the Encyclopaedia Aethiopica contains almost no information about the subject (SMIDT 2010: 69).

⁷ KEMAL ABDULWEHAB (2008) lists a number of authors from that region (there are no page numbers in the document which can be downloaded at <http://etd.aau.edu.et/dspace/handle/123456789/1362>.)

⁸ The start of a M.A. Program in Philology at the Addis Ababa University was marked in October 2004 with a symposium in the Soddäst Kilo Campus.

⁹ HUSSEIN AHMED 1985 is a doctoral dissertation which was later published as HUSSEIN AHMED 2001. There is no indication of any manuscript in Oromo *ajäm* in this work.

“Second, it is very difficult to read Afaan Oromoo written in the Arabic script. This is because the Arabic script consists of consonants only and is, therefore, ill-fitted for writing Afaan Oromoo, which has six basic vowel qualities. The importance of vowels in Afaan Oromoo and their absence from the Arabic script explains both the limited scope for the expansion of written literature in Afaan Oromoo in the nineteenth century and the reason for the impracticality of adopting Arabic script for alphabetizing Afaan Oromoo.” (Mohammed Hassen 1996: 251)

It is needless to say that his assumptions are well rebutted by the voluminous Oromo manuscript mentioned above.

Another piece of information is provided by O’Fahey (2003), according to whom the Arabic script for writing Oromo was apparently “in use in Oromo refugee camps in Somalia in the late 1980s” (Id. 2003: 37). Oromo *ajäm* texts were presumably also written in south-western Ethiopia where Jimma is another centre of Islam (Mohammed Hassen 1990: 159).

4.4. Silṭe

In an article Wagner (1983a) discusses some lines of an *ajäm* manuscript written in Silṭe which were collected by Schlobies in the 1920s in Ethiopia. This manuscript collection comprises several exercise books. Wagner reproduced and described only eleven lines of text in Silṭe, i.e. the bulk of these texts still awaits a thorough description and publication (see also Id. 1997).

4.5. Argobba

During my field research on the Argobba language in south-eastern Wällo, I came across two *ajäm* manuscripts written in that language. Both are very short, i.e. one comprises three and a half pages, and the second one is only a photocopied fragment of two pages which is said to belong to a manuscript of more than 100 pages. The second one seems to represent an older variety of the language and was presumably written by the local saint Abba Assiyya in the early 19th century (cf. Hussein Ahmed 2001: 176). Both manuscripts have not been published yet.

5. The role of Islamic scholarship in Wällo

Islam was most likely introduced in the eastern parts of Wällo prior to the Gagn wars in the 16th century from Yifat, a centre of Muslim statehood during the Middle Ages (*ibid.*: 60). Important for the development of an indigenous literature in Wällo was the Islamic revival and the spread of Sufism in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. An outcome of this development was the establishment of Sufi centres and shrines that served as centres of teaching (Id. 1988b: 96; 2001: 73 ff.).

The foundation of numerous centres of Islamic scholarship created the intellectual context in which the writing of Amharic in Arabic script could be developed. In a hagiographical account the 19th century scholar Faqih Muḥammad ibn Sayf al-Ḥaqq *ash-Shaykh* Jaʿfar Bukko ibn Şiddīq Bukko explains how Amharic can be written in Arabic script.

“The most interesting subsection, and perhaps one of the original contributions of the hagiographer, is his discussion of the problem of transliterating from Arabic to Amharic and vice-versa. He proposes and explains his own system in some detail and remarks on the absence in Amharic of sounds equivalent to those represented by the Arabic letters [...] He also reminds us that Arabic lacks the sounds represented by the Amharic letters like čä, çä, ñä and gä. For čä, he proposes to add a fourth dot to the three dots in the Arabic letter shin, and calls the new letter ‘shīn of the horse’ (*shīn al-khayl*) because čä in Amharic is also used to spur on a horse. He does the same for the others: gä is represented by a kāf with three dots over it and it is called *kāf al-ajam*.” (Id. 1988a: 187)

Over the last 150–200 years there were numerous Muslim scholars in Wällo who worked in and also founded a number of important Sufi centres. Among the most important was Jamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad who introduced the Qādiriyya order at Anna in Rayya and who had a lasting influence through the establishment of a number of further centres in Wällo. The best known of these centres are Dana in Yäggu, founded by his student Şayḥ Aḥmad Ādam, also known as Danī l-Awwal (Id. 2001: 88), and Čali, founded by Sayyid Ibrāhīm Yasin, also known as She Čali (*ibid.*: 137; Abbink 2008) in Wärrä Babbo.

The way the teaching was and still is realized in those centres is partly described by Hussein Ahmed (1988b). Abbink (2008) gives an impressive description of the centre in Čali and another Qādiriyya centre (Ṭəru Sina near Kämise).

The socio-cultural setting of these centres differs to that of Harär in such that they were located in a rural environment. Despite the rural setting their teaching enjoyed a high esteem in other regions of Ethiopia. Muslims from regions such as the Gurage area, Jimma or Bale used to go to one of the famous centres in Wällo to receive an Islamic teaching. In fact this continued until just some decades ago. (cf. Hussein Ahmed 2001: 74; አብዱልላሁ አብዱላሁ [Abdulfättah Abdällah] 1998 A.M.)

6. Amharic *Ajäm*: script and language

In the following sections I will look at Amharic *ajäm* literature from three perspectives: the graphical aspect, i.e. the actual script and writing, the lin-

guistic aspect, and the literary content. While I treat the first section more generally, I use examples from a specific manuscript to illustrate the second and third subjects.

6.1. Adaptation of the Arabic alphabet to Amharic

As mentioned above a lot of languages are written with the Arabic alphabet. When languages which did not exist in written form before are written with a writing system that was originally developed for another language, the graphemes of that writing systems have to be mapped on to the sound system of the new language. The Arabic alphabet is basically a consonantal system, i.e. it only represents the consonants of the language. Additionally it has three graphemes which are used to represent the three long vowels of Classical Arabic \bar{a} , \bar{i} and \bar{u} . With regard to the consonants, the Arabic alphabet is a system which can be adapted quite well to other languages by adding additional diacritic points to basic signs, i.e. a method which is inherent to the Arabic alphabet.

A comparison of the consonant inventories of Classical Arabic and Amharic shows that both languages share a number of consonants. In Amharic *ajäm* those shared consonants are consequently represented with the same signs as in Arabic. Consonants in Amharic that do not exist in Arabic thus are represented by signs of the Arabic alphabet, which have been modified using an inherent characteristic of that writing system. Most graphemes of the Arabic alphabet are based on a basic sign that is modified by some points above or below that basic sign. So for example the graphemes for *b*, *t*, *ṭ*, *n* and *y/i* are all based on one basic sign. The consonants in Amharic which do not have equivalents in Arabic are *č*, *č̣*, *g*, *ñ* and *ž*. These five consonants are written in Amharic *ajäm* with modified Arabic graphemes. Ejective consonants are a typical feature of many languages in the Horn of Africa, but do not exist in Classical Arabic. Besides the ejective consonant *č̣* listed above, the Amharic dialect of Wällo has another two *ṭ* and *q* and these are represented in *ajäm* with the graphemes of the equivalent (or cognate) Arabic consonants *t* and *q*.¹⁰ Returning to those Amharic consonants represented with modified Arabic signs, a quick and first overview of texts written by different authors reveals that the solutions to represent those consonants differ slightly. But the method of finding a suitable sign is always the same, i.e. signs of consonants that sound similar are used. So in order to represent *g*, often the sign for *k* is modified, and either a modified sign for *š* or *ğ* is used to represent *č̣*. In the

¹⁰ In this case the Semitic-Orientalistic tradition of transliteration prevents an unambiguous representation. While *ṭ* and *q* represent in the IPA notation ejective *t'* and *k'* in Amharic, they stand for a pharyngalized *t^h* and an uvular *q* in Arabic.

manuscript from which the examples in this article are taken, the following signs were used by the author: ش for č, ظ for ċ, گ for g and ñ is represented with the combination of ن and ي, i.e. ني. The consonant ž does not appear in the manuscript discussed here.

The variation in representing non-Arabic consonants in Amharic *ajäm* can be easily explained by the fact that there was no central institution which organized and supervised the adaption of the Arabic alphabet to Amharic. This was done by individual scholars who lived and worked in different places in the region. There was without doubt some kind of network between these scholars. This is also indicated by the fact that a lot of scholars and, especially, their students travelled a lot between the individual centres of learning. This might also have had some influence on the development and distribution of Amharic *ajäm*. But the extent and character of these contacts still remain to be investigated.

A complete overview of the signs used in the manuscript is shown in Table 1.

<i>b</i> ب	<i>ñ</i> نى	<i>ğ</i> ج	<i>s</i> س	<i>g</i> گ	<i>y</i> ي
<i>f</i> ف	<i>d</i> د	<i>š</i> ش	<i>š</i> ش	<i>k</i> ك	<i>w</i> و
<i>m</i> م	<i>t</i> ت	<i>č</i> ظ	<i>r</i> ر	<i>q</i> ق	
<i>n</i> ن	<i>ṭ</i> ط	<i>z</i> ز	<i>l</i> ل	<i>h</i> ه	

While the representation of consonants did not pose a real problem for the authors of *ajäm* texts, the difference between the vowel inventories of Arabic and Amharic was a bigger challenge. Arabic distinguishes between three long and three short vowels, the latter of which are represented by diacritics. Amharic distinguishes between seven vowel qualities and in the area of vowel representation, Amharic *ajäm* texts exhibit a considerable variation and ambiguity. The vowel *ä* is usually represented with *fatha*, i.e. a small line above the sign, e.g. ب̄ for *bä*. The vowel *a* is indicated with an *ʿalif* ʾ, e.g. با for *ba*. The representation of the vowel *e* is usually a combination of *kasra*, i.e. a small line under the preceding consonantal sign followed by ي, e.g. بِي for *be*. The vowel *u* is represented either only with a *damma*, i.e. the sign ʾ above the consonantal sign or by a combination of *damma* and the sign و, e.g. ب̄ or بُو for *bu*. In some cases a final *u* is written just like in Arabic plural verb forms, i.e. وا. The vowel *o* is in most cases written with a *damma* on the preceding consonant followed by و, e.g. بُو for *bo*. The vowel *i* is either shown with a *kasra* or a combination of *kasra* under the preceding consonant followed by ا, e.g. بِ or بِي for *bi*. Finally the representation of the vowel *ə* is the most complicated because it is rendered with *fatha* as well as with *kasra*, so *bə* can either be written ب̄ or بِ, which adds ambiguity to the text.

6.2. The language of Amharic *Ajäm* texts

The language used in the Amharic *ajäm* texts is a regional variety of Amharic, i.e. the “dialect of Wällo”. Unfortunately the dialects of Amharic remain to be investigated in a complete and thorough way. The knowledge we have about regional varieties is very selective and sparse. There is, for example, no information about isoglosses and dialect groups. We do not know which of the varieties spoken in the different parts of the Amharic speaking area have closer ties than others. Therefore it is difficult to speak about “the dialect of Wällo”. With regard to the variety used in the *ajäm* texts, it is only possible to note that it differs in several aspects from standard Amharic and displays some similarities with the variety described in Habte Mariam Marcos (1973: 124–129), such as the preposition *tä-* instead of *kä-*, the negative form of the copula *adälläm* instead of *aydälläm* and others, described below.

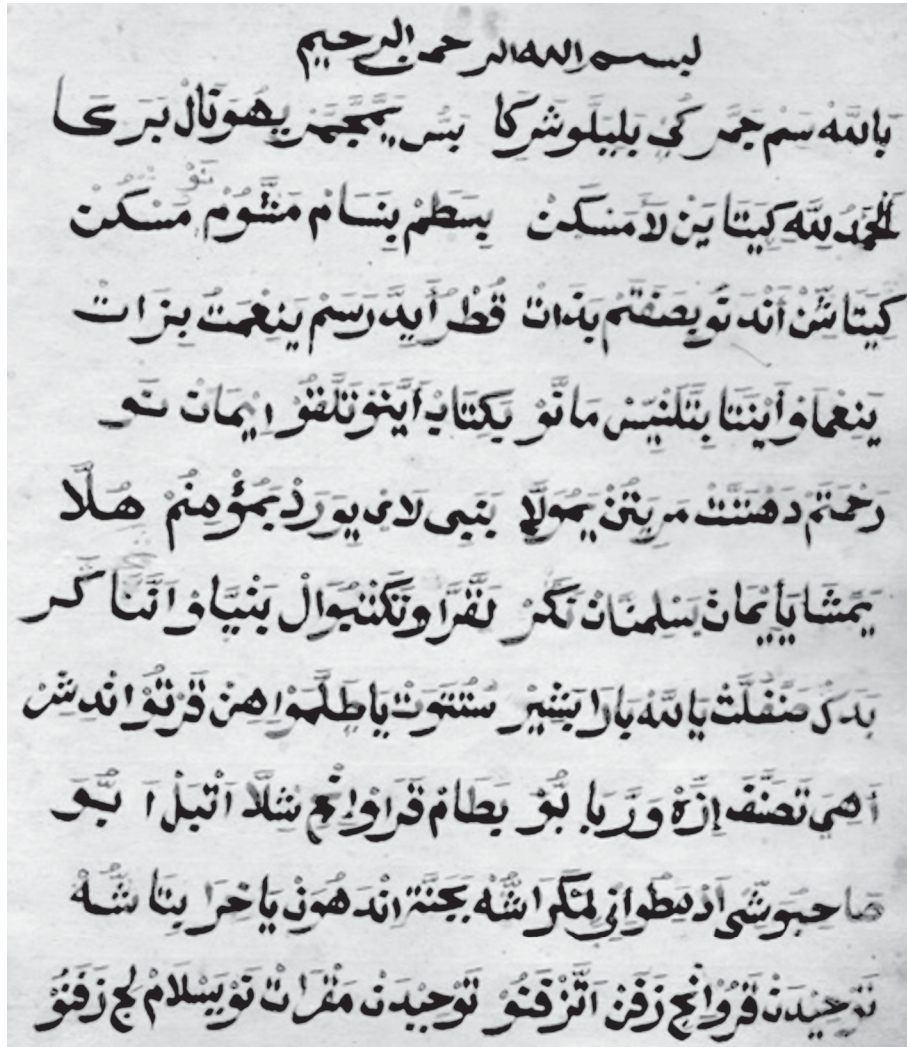
Besides these morphological features that are clearly properties of the regional variety, there are also a lot of lexical peculiarities typical for that specific form of language, namely the high frequency of Arabic loanwords. An interesting point in this regard is whether the Arabic loanwords used in these texts are also part of the spoken language. One could conclude that the high number of Arabic loanwords must be part of a special register used only by Muslim clerics and scholars. But the fact that many of these texts address the unlearned laymen can be evidence that many of the Arabic loanwords are also used by the general population of eastern Wällo.

7. An Amharic manuscript from eastern Wällo

In order to present some peculiarities of Amharic *ajäm* literature I will take some examples from a short manuscript of 28 pages, which was the first Amharic *ajäm* texts I was able to collect. The manuscript is in the possession of the *sheikh* of the Argobba village T’ollaha in Essoye-Gula (near Kemise) in south-eastern Wällo.¹¹

Scanning the manuscript was the best solution for a number of reasons: first, since it is private property it was unthinkable to take and bring it to a research library, such as the Institute of Ethiopian Studies. Second, in order to safeguard at least the content and make it accessible for the scientific investigation a digital form would be sufficient. Therefore I used a portable scanner from Canon (Scan LiDE) to make the scans. In April 2002 I

¹¹ I saw the manuscript the first time during my field research on the Argobba language in January 2002. I asked the *sheikh* if I could take it to Kemise in order to make a photocopy, but he refused. Later my language consultant who is from that village could lend the manuscript and brought it to Kemise where I was able to scan it.



First page of the *Tawhīd* written by *Bašīr ʿUmar* from Dällämäle

scanned each page with a resolution of 150 ppi in RGB 32 bit and saved it as an uncompressed TIF file. It would have been possible to scan it in a higher resolution but at the time when I made the scans I decided to scan *only* in 150 ppi because of the technical limitations, such as scan speed and hard disk space, in a fieldwork context.

7.1. Description of the manuscript

The manuscript comprises 28 pages of an exercise booklet. It is not clear if this version was written by the author himself or if it is a copy made by someone else at a later date. I assume that the latter is the case since there are some corrections on some pages. Every page has between 11 and 13 lines of a clean vocalized script. In some lines the vocalization and some diacritic points seem to have been added at a later time and in another colour. On two pages the copyist wrote the last line in a vertical position to the left of the other lines, apparently because of insufficient space.

The text is in rhyme. One line consists of two verses sharing an end rhyme. On the first ten pages two verses are written in one line. On the 11th page only the first three lines comprise two verses. Beginning with the 4th line to the end of the manuscript only one verse is written per line.

7.2. Origin of the manuscript

The author of the text is *Bašir* °*Umar* from Dällämäle, a location in the eastern lowland of Wärrä Babbo. There is not much additional information about him except that he originally came from Wärrä Himano. My informants also told me that the centre he founded is still active.

In the text the author mentions his name in two verses. On the first page he presents himself as the slave of God (1).

- (1) بَدَأَ صَنَفَّتْ يَا لَلَّهِ بَارَا بَشِيرُ
*bädäg[g] sonnäfällät*¹² *yallah bara bäsir*
 “He composed it well, the slave of God Bašir” (1,8)¹³

And on the last page he adds the name of his father in an Arabic fashion using the word *ibn* “son” between his own and his father’s name.

- (2) يَهِينَنَّ صَنَفَّ بَشِيرُ ابْنُ عُمَرُ
*yəhennən sonnäfä bäsir °ibnu °umär*¹⁴
 “Bashir son of °Umar composed this” (28,2)

¹² For the realization of *ä* as *o* after Arabic *š* see below.

¹³ The numbers refer to page and line in the manuscript.

¹⁴ In the transliteration of the examples I follow the system of the *ZDMG* with the exception of the vowels which respect the Amharic vowel system, i.e. Arabic consonants that do not exist in Amharic such as emphatic *ḍ*, *ḍ* and *š* as well as pharyngal ° and *ḥ* are nevertheless written. By doing this I am trying to acknowledge the fact that some readers, depending on their proficiency in Arabic, may actually pronounce some of these consonants correctly, and some not.

The reader is also informed about the origin of the composition. In one verse the author names the region Wärrä Babbo as the place where he wrote the text.

- (3) أَهِيَ تَصَنَّفَ إِزَّهُ وَرَبَّابُو
*ʾəhe täsonnäfä ʾəzzih*¹⁵ *wärrä babbo*
“this was composed here in Wärrä Babbo” (1,9)

7.3. The state of description and analysis

After the manuscript was scanned I read it with my language consultant who was familiar with the text since his youth. So the first approximate transliteration is in fact the reading of my language consultant. There are some gaps between this reading and the actual written forms. But this concerns in most cases, the representation of vowels which is, in any case, not consistent. Therefore the transliterated version has a preliminary character and has to be complemented by a precise and “correct” transliteration. Nevertheless the reading of the consultant should not be viewed as “incorrect” because it is based on oral transmission which goes hand in hand with the use of the text in the local community.

At the present state of description only those examples used in this article were translated and received some preliminary comments. The whole text still needs a complete and detailed description. The reading of the local scholar has to be checked and corrected, the text has to be translated and commented upon.

7.4. Summary of its content

The text is referred to as “Tawḥīd from Dällämäle” by local scholars. While the Arabic term *tawḥīd* has a religious meaning “doctrine of Oneness”, the text is in fact a kind of Islamic catechism and comprises the basic concepts of the Islamic faith. A similar genre exists in the *ʿaḡāmī* literature of other African languages such as in Hausa and serves the same purpose, i.e. to introduce the laymen to the necessary tenets of the religion (cf. Hiskett 1975: 24, Boyd – Mack 1997: 22ff.). I will look into this aspect at a different point in the article.

The content of the text is made up of the description of the five pillars of Islam, the explanation of the six articles of Iman, the names and roles of the angels and the names of the most important Prophets. The whole text is full of admonitions and warnings and graphic descriptions of the punishments for the sinner.

¹⁵ The writing of ʾ in words which begin with a vowel is very inconsistent in the manuscript. I therefore decided to write it in the transliteration also in those cases where it is not written in the *ajām* text.

8. Linguistic features of the manuscript

Since we are dealing only with a written text, not much can be said about special phonetic or phonological features of the language used in it. The Arabic loanwords are written in the Arabic orthography, i.e. they contain signs which represent consonants that do not exist in Amharic. There are some conventions regarding the pronunciations of some more frequent Arabic consonants in the variety of Muslim Amharic speakers in eastern Wällo. For instance, Arabic uvular *q* is pronounced in Amharic as ejective *q* and Arabic pharyngalized (emphatic) *t* is realized as ejective Amharic *t*. The Arabic pharyngalized (emphatic) fricative *ṣ* is realized as labialized *s^w* in Amharic when followed by the vowel *a*, as in *s^wabib* “friend”. If the vowel *ä* follows there is no labialization, but the vowel is sometimes realized as *o* like in *sonnäfä* “he composed”. The actual pronunciation of other consonants such as the pharyngal fricatives *ʕ* and *ħ*, the uvular *g* or the interdentals *z*, *d* and *z* depends on the proficiency in Classical Arabic of the respective reader. Some pronounce these consonants as in Arabic, others who have only a superficial competence in Arabic, use the articulatory closest Amharic consonants, i.e. *ʔ* for *ʕ*, *h* for *ħ*, *g* for *g* and *s* or *z* for the interdentals. Only the velar fricative *h* is pronounced as in Arabic by almost all Muslim Amharic speakers irrespective of their knowledge of Arabic. Arabic loanwords like *häyṛ* “good” or *ahira* “the hereafter” can regularly be heard in daily speech.

8.1. Peculiarities of the regional variety

The language of the text reflects the local variety of Amharic. When people talk about dialects of Amharic, they generally list the regional varieties (the dialects) of the language according to the historic provinces where Amharic is the dominant language, i.e. Gondär, Wällo, Goğgam and Šäwa (Mänz). But in fact, the regional varieties have not really been studied. There are only a few articles which are based on a survey done in the 1960s by Ethiopian linguists (Habte Mariam Marcos 1973). This work contains a lot of valuable information on the regional variation of Amharic, but it cannot replace full and exhaustive research of the whole Amharic speaking area, which still remains to be done. Therefore, instead of claiming that the peculiar features found in the text of this manuscript represent the “dialect of Wällo” as a whole, I prefer to talk only about the local variety of Wärrä Babbo in eastern Wällo.

The lexicon is obviously one of the linguistic subsystems where differences between regional varieties are most visible. Since the text of the manuscript contains particularly religious topics the variety of lexical items is somewhat limited, i.e. more or less restricted to concepts referring to education, morality and spirituality. Lexical items peculiar to this variety with a

more general meaning are rather few. The following three words belong to this type of items.

The word *abbo* (4) is used as a friendly form of address,¹⁶ and it can frequently be heard in daily live conversations in eastern Wällo.¹⁷

- (4) بَطَامَ قَرَاوْ اِنْجِ شَلَا اَتْبِلْ اَبُو
bätam qəraw ənǧi čalla atbäl[äw] ʾabbo
 “read it very well and don’t be careless, my friend” (1,9)

Other words typical for that region, although they are also known in other regions of the Amharic speaking area, are the verbs *kägǧälä* “to want” (5) and *dolä* “put in” (6) (instead of *fällägä* and *asgäbba*).

- (5) مَوَطَاتِنْ سِگَجَلْ اِجْجِ زَمَنْ نَدُو
mawṭatən sikǧǧäl ʾəǧǧäg zämän näddo
 “when he wants to come out having burned for very long time” (2,5)

- (6) بَكْفِرْ يَدُولَالْ اِهَيْنَّنْ مَطْرُطَرْ
bäkufrä yədolal ʾəhennən mäṭärtär
 “doubting this puts (you) into faithlessness” (2,10)

There are some structural features significant to this variety. One is the occurrence of the ejective dental *t* in positions where the standard variety of Amharic has *s*,¹⁸ like in the word *ṭom/ṭomä* “fast/to fast” (7) (cf. Habte Mariam Marcos 1973: 125).

- (7) أَرَاتِّيَاوْ دَمُو رَمَضَانَ مَطُومَ نُو
ʾarattäññaw dämmo rämäd wan¹⁹ mäṭom näw
 “and the fourth is to fasten during Ramadan” (4,6)

Another, also a feature that can be found in many regional varieties of Amharic, is the prepositional prefix *tä-* occurring in places where the standard variety has *kä-* (cf. *ibid.*: 126). In (8) it is connected to the plural form of the near deictic pronoun *ənnih* “these” and expresses an ablative meaning. In (9) it

¹⁶ This word should not be confused with the word *abbo* which is used among Christian Amharic speakers to refer to St. Gäbrä Mäñfäs Qəddus (cf. KANE 1990: 1190). Though there might be a relationship with *abo* as described for the region of Harär (*ibid.*).

¹⁷ I only refer to the use of spoken forms from eastern Wällo because my personal experiences are limited to that region.

¹⁸ Which is in fact the case in many non-standard varieties of Amharic.

¹⁹ The labialization of *d* in this word is triggered by the Amharic pronunciation of the Arabic emphatic *d*.

marks a local relation and is prefixed to the noun *gon* “side”. There are many more examples of this form in the text.

- (8) رُسُولُوشُ تَنْتَهُ سُوَسْتِ مَتُو تَاسِرَ اسُوَسْتِ
rusuločču tännih sost mäto tasrasost
 “from these (are) 313 messengers” (9,10)

- (9) يَمَطِيقُ كِزِي تَكْنُو يَنْسَالُ
yämmätäyyäq gize tägonu²⁰ yännässall
 “at the time of asking (the soul) will stand up at his side” (13,11)

The singular demonstrative pronoun for near deixis has, in two of three cases, the form *əhe* instead of *yəhe*, which could also be a regional feature.

- (10) أَهِي تَصَنَّفَ إِزُهُ وَرَبَّابُو
əhe täsonnäfä əzzih wärrä babbo
 “this was composed here in Wärrä Babbo” (1,9)

Another local feature is the form of the negative copula. It lacks the diphthong of the standard form, i.e. *adälläm* “he is not” instead of *aydälläm* in Standard Amharic.

- (11) إِنْدَ سَوِ أَدَلَّمُ أُسْمَا بَاسِطُ نَوِ
əndä säw ədälläm əssum[m]a basiṭ näw
 “he is not like (ordinary) man, (as for him) he is generous” (21,1)

- (12) وَنَدَمُ سَيِّتِ أَدَلُّو تَنُورُ تَخَلَّفُو
wändəm set ədällu tänur täḥälläqu
 “they²¹ are neither man nor woman, they were created from light” (14,5)

In one instance the author uses a form which is said to be typical for the variety of Yäğḡu. According to one language consultant the prefix *ha-* is the negation marker of the imperfective.²² The standard form is *al-*. This form appears only once and it seems that it is restricted to 2nd pers. forms.

²⁰ The rendering *gonu* is based on the reading of the local scholar. It does not fully correspond with the written form تَكْنُو.

²¹ “They” refer to the angels.

²² Siraj Mohammed, personal communication, Kämise 2002.

- (13) بِتْلُو مَالَتْ مَنُو هَاتَّقَرُوا / الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ سَاتَلُمِ أَنْقَرُوا
*bəttəlu malät mən näw hattəqäru*²³ / *alhamdulillahī sattəlum ʾatqäru*
 “when you say ‘what it is’ don’t you read. Don’t read without saying
 ‘alhamdulillah’” (2,1)

The Amharic variety of eastern Wällo also differs from the standard variety with regard to the forms of the 3rd pers. honorific.²⁴ The respective form of the copula is *näwot* (Habte Mariam Marcos 1973: 127, Getahun Amare 1983: 40).

- (14) نَبِيَّ أَدَمَ نَوْتُ مَجْمَرِيَانْتُو / يَنْبِيَّ نَبِيَّ نَوْتُ مَطَّرَشَانْتُو
näbi ʾadäm näwot mäğämmäriyaččäw / yəñña näbi näwot mäččärräšaččäw
 “Prophet Adam is the first of them, our prophet is the last of them” (9,9)

The differences between the two varieties in the system of pro-forms include pronouns too: the forms for the 2nd and 3rd pers. honorific as well as for 3rd pers. plural pronouns are *antu*, *ərswo* and *əssaččäw*. The bound possessive pronoun and the object agreement marker of the 3rd pers. honorific likewise correspond to that difference, i.e. they both have the form *-wot*. Example (15) is an illustration of the use of *əssaččäw*.

- (15) وَنَجَلِيَّامَ يَلَّ نَسَاشْتُو أَنْدَكُوا
wänğälä[ññ]am yällä tässaččäw ʾandənk^{wa}
 “There is not even one criminal among them” (15,4)

8.2. Incorporation of Arabic loanwords: verbs

The text presently under discussion and *ajäm* texts in general are characterized by a high proportion of Arabic loanwords. Most of these words belong to semantic areas which are in connection with the Islamic faith and concepts related to it, such as literacy, moral values and live after death. With this regard a lot of the loanwords which appear in this text express meanings for which there exist “native” Amharic words.

From the point of view of grammar the loanwords behave in terms of morphology and syntax just like “normal” Amharic words. Verbs, for instance, are adjusted to the template system of the language. Although it may sometimes not be absolutely clear if the source of loan verbs are verbs or nouns. The often used verb *zäyyärä* which means “to visit, pay homage” (cf. Drewes 2007: 13) is derived from the Arabic noun *ziyāra* “visit” and not

²³ Note the extra *alif*. These kind of irregularities do appear in some places and seem to be mistakes by the copyist.

²⁴ This was already mentioned by COHEN (1939: 146) and DREWES (2007: 4).

from the corresponding verb *zāra* “to visit”. Below in (16) is a short list of loan verbs.

- (16) a. *kättäbä* “to write”
 b. *sonnäfä* “to compose/write”
 c. *wäggäbä* “to be an obligation”
 d. *qärra* “to read”
 e. *hälläqä* “to create”
 f. (⁶)*allämä* “to teach”

Some loan verbs are in fact derivations of primary loanwords, i.e. derivation works according to the derivational patterns of Amharic. In (17) a. and (17) b. the marker for the medio-passive *tä-* is used while in (17) c. and (17) d. the causative marker *as-* is used for the derivation.

- (17) a. *täkättäbä* “to be written”
 b. *täsonnäfä* “to be composed/written”
 c. *askättäbä* “to let s.o. write”
 d. *aswäggäbä* “to make it an obligation”

Some examples from the text illustrate the use of these loan verbs. The verse in (18) contains the verbs *qärra* “to read” and *täkättäbä* “to be written,” the latter in the perfect (converb plus auxiliary).

- (18) لَقَرَّأَوْ تَكْتَبُوا لِنِيَّأَوْ أَنْكَأِجِر
läqärraw təkätb^wall bännäw ʾannägagär
 “For the one who studied, it has been written in our language” (1,7)

In (19) the noun *askättabi* “the one who has s.t. written” is an agent noun which is derived from the verb *askättäbä* “to have s.t. written”.

- (19) سَرَانُ أَسْكَتَّأَبِي بَقِيرِ رُومَانُ نَوْه
səran ʾaskättabi bäqäbər roman näw
 “The one who has (it) written in the grave is Roman” (13,3)

In (20) the infinitive *mäqrat* of the verb *qärra* “to read” is used.

- (20) إِهَيْنُ كِتَابُ مَقْرَاتُ أَنْبَلْتُ إِنْب
əhen kitab mäqrat attäbälut ənbi²⁵
 “Don’t refuse (say no) to read this book” (2,11)

²⁵ The writing of *ənbi* instead of *əmbi* for “no” seems to be an overcorrection.

In (21) the verb *sonnäfä* “to compose” is used (see also example (1) above).

- (21) بَدَائِكَ صَنَّفَأْتِ يَا اللَّهُ بَارَا بِشِيرٍ
bädägg sonnäfällät yallah bara bäšir
 “He composed it well, the slave of God Bashir” (1,8)

In (22) the form *yaswäggäbä* is the relativized form of the verb *aswäggäbä* “to make it an obligation” which itself is a derivation of the verb *wäggäbä* “to be an obligation”.

- (22) اللَّهُ يَا سَوْجَبُو أَمْسُنُنْ وَقْتِ نَوِّ
allah yaswäggäbäw amməstun wäqt näw
 “It is five times, what God made an obligation” (4,5)

The form *yärzäqän* in (23) is the jussive form of the verb *räzzäqä* “to provide means for living” and is part of an invocation. In fact, that verse contains three Arabic loanwords, *näbi* “prophet” and *šäfa’a* “intercession” are the other two.

- (23) يَنْبِنِ شَفَاعَا كَيْتَأَشْنُ بِرَزَقِنْ
yänäbin šäfa’a getaččən yärzäqän
 “May our Lord provide us with the intercession of the Prophet” (19,10)

The form *si^calläməh* in (24) is the 3rd pers. masculine imperfective form of the verb *allämä* “to teach” combined with the marker of temporal adverbial sentences *s-*, i.e. forming a subordinate clause. Interestingly, the author does not use the local form of the clause marker which is *t-* instead of *s-* (cf. Habte Mariam Marcos 1973: 126).

- (24) هُونَى بَلْهَ سَمَا عَالِمِ سِعْلَمَه
hunäññ bäläh səma alim si^calläməh
 “[...?]²⁶ listen when a learned teaches you” (13,9)

8.3. Incorporation of Arabic loanwords: nouns

Just like the verbs, the nominal Arabic loanwords refer mostly to specific religious concepts. Some nouns appear with comparably high frequency in the text. These are nouns which reflect the dominant traits of the content, i.e. the correct behaviour as revealed in the Holy Books, and the tradition of the Prophet, explanations of good and bad and the consequences of man’s deeds in life after death, i.e. in the hereafter. The nouns with the highest

²⁶ The exact meaning of the form *hunäññ* is still not clear.

number of appearances are *ʾiman* “believe” (16), *näbi* “prophet” (16), *wağib* “obligation” (15) and *ʿadab* “punishment” (14), which is clearly explicable with the main message of the text. Other nouns which appear comparably often in the text are *ʾisləmännä* “Islam” (11), *s^wahib* “friend”²⁷ (11), *ʾahira* “hereafter” (10), *kitab* “book” (10), *ḥäyr* “good” (8), *mustahil* “impossible, absurd” (7), *ğännät* “paradise” (6), *ğaʾiz* “permitted, admissible” (6), *mäʿna* “meaning” (6). Although these nouns apparently have religious connotation, some of them also appear quite often in daily conversation.

Arabic based loan nouns are, like verbs, more or less seamlessly incorporated into the Amharic morphology. They are combined with any possible kind of bound morphemes, like the plural marker *-očč*, the prepositional prefixes *bä-*, *lä-* and *tä-*, the case markers *-n* and *ya-* as well as possessive suffixes and the article.

With regard to plural marking there is a certain inconsistency. Some nouns are written in the Arabic singular form with Amharic plural marker, but some have the Amharic plural marker *-očč* attached to an Arabic plural form, i.e they are in fact a combination of Arabic and Amharic plural marking. So in (25) the Arabic singular noun *näbi* “prophet” is combined with the Amharic plural marker *-očč* rendering “prophets”.²⁸ But in (26) the Arabic loanword is the plural form of *näbi*, i.e *anbiya*, which is complemented with the plural suffix *-očč* of Amharic. The loan word *käyfiyya-w* “sort, type” carries the article *-u* (here realized as *-w* because of the final vowel).

(25) بَنِيَّشْ مَامَنْ كَفَيَّوْ سُوْسْتْ نَوْ
bänäbiyočč²⁹ mamän käyfiyyaw sost näw
 “The sort of belief in the Prophets is three” (7,11)

(26) أَرَاتِّيَّوْ دَمُوْ بَانِيَّوْشْ مَامَنْ
ʾarattännaw dämmo banbiwočču mamän
 “And the fourth is believing in the Prophets” (3,8)

²⁷ The high number of occurrences of this word can be explained by the author’s wish to frequently address the reader directly.

²⁸ In both examples the nouns are combined with the preposition *bä-*.

²⁹ Note that the copyist apparently made a mistake and forgot the fourth point in order to write č. Here and in examples (26) and (27) he wrote ش instead of ش.

Other examples of the combined type are *mäla'iko-čč-u*³⁰ in (27) and *°ashab-očč* (plural of *sahib*) in (28).

- (27) يَاَإِلَٰهَ مَلَائِكُوتِ قُطِرَ اشْوُ نُو بَزُ
*yallah mäla'ikočč qutraččäw*³¹ *näw bəzu*
 “The number of the angels of God is many” (14,2)

- (28) أَصْحَابُوتِ مَائِتِ نُو سِبَلُ سِبَطُ
°ashabočč mayät näw sibälu siṭätu
 “Seeing the Companions (of the Prophet) when they eat and drink” (9,5)

The combination of Arabic loan nouns and other bound morphemes is illustrated by the following examples.

The combination of genitive marker *yä-* (and article *-u*) and the noun *nīmä(t)* “grace” is shown in (29) and *°adab-n* “punishment” (here with the accusative marker *-n*) in (30):

- (29) يِنْعَمَتْ بَزَاتُ
yäni°mätu bəzat
 “the abundance of grace” (1,4)

- (30) يَعْدَابُنِ إِسَاتُ
yä°adabən °əsat
 “the fire of the punishment” (2,9)

The combination of the noun *kitab* “book” in (31) and *näbi* “prophet” in (32) with the preposition *bä-* is shown below:

- (31) بَكِتَابُ أَيَّنُو تَلْفُو إِيمَانُ نُو
bäkitab °ayyänäw tälləqu °iman näw
 “In the book we have seen the great faith.” (1,5)

- (32) بَنَبِي لَائِي يورَدُ
bänäbi lay yuräd
 “May it descend on the Prophet” (1,6)

³⁰ The Arabic singular form is *mal'ak*.

³¹ In this example the author used the Arabic sign ش instead of the modified sign ش for č.

The combination of the preposition *lä-* and the noun in *ğännät* “paradise” is given in (33):

- (33) أَكْلُنْ لَجَنَّتْ أُكْلُنْم لَسَات
*°ukkulun*³² *läğännät* *°ukkulunəm lāsāt*
 “half for paradise, half for the fire” (27,4)

And the combination of the nouns *näbi* in (34) as well as *ḥawd(-u)* “the basin” in (35) with the preposition *tä-* is shown below:

- (34) تَنْبِي حَوْضُ أَلْ يَمَكَّلَاكَلُو
tänäbi ḥawd *°allu yämmikälakkəlu*
 “There are some who prohibit the basin of the Prophet” (19,2)

- (35) نَبْنِ يَمَكَّتَلْ تَحَوْضُ يَطَطَال
*näbin yämmikkättäl*³³ *täḥawdənu yəṭṭäl*
 “those who follow the Prophet drink from its basin” (19,4)

Finally some examples of Arabic loan nouns marked as a direct object with the suffixed accusative marker *-n* in (36) and (37):

- (36) تَوْحِيدَنْ قَرُو
təwḥidən qəru
 “read the *tawḥīd*” (1,11)

- (37) يَخَالِقَنْ عَدَابُ يَلْوَالِ قَمَسَوَا
yəḥaliqən *°adab yəläwall qəməsäw*
 “He tells him: ‘Taste from the punishment of the creator’” (2,6)

Arabic phrases

Drewes (2007) describes some Amharic *ajäm* texts that contain complete Arabic phrases which are part of larger syntactic constructions (2007: 13). In the *Tawḥīd* of Dällämäle there are only a few phrases and they are not used as described by Drewes, i.e. in (38) and (39) they function more like a sort of indirect speech.

³² Here the standard form would be *əkkulun*. It is quite possible that the vowel *u* of the stem has an assimilating effect on the epenthetic vowel *ə*.

³³ The gemination of the *k* in *يَمَكَّتَلْ* seems to be a mistake, because otherwise the form would be read as passive, which does not make sense.

- (38) الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ سَأْتَلُمُ أَنْقَرُوا
alhamdulillahi sattalum atqäru
“Don’t read without saying ‘Alhamdullilah’” (2,1)
- (39) لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ بِمَا لَتَهُ مَعْنَى
la’illa ’illallah bämälätəh mä’na
“The meaning of your saying la-Ilah Illallah” (8,10)

9. The didactic purpose of the poem and its linguistic codification

The motive of the author Bašir ʿUmar is the teaching of the basic Islamic tenets to his illiterate co-religionists. The *tawhīd* is therefore first and foremost a didactic text. This type of text seems to be quite widespread in Eastern Wällo because there are other texts which belong to the same genre. I was able to collect (i.e. scan) a number of similar texts, which were written by the famous Muslim militant scholar *Sheikh* T’alha Jaʿfar (Hussein Ahmed 1989; 2001: 177ff.).

This type of text also exists in other African regions with literary tradition of ʿaḡamī literature. Hiskett (1975) presents a concise explanation of the purpose and the context of didactic literature in Hausa.

“The types of verse described in this chapter, theological and legal verse, have a different purpose: to instruct and to assist in memorizing. They, too, have their moments of colour and animation but they contain esoteric and technical subject-matter, the significance and purpose of which is clear only to Muslims.” (Hiskett 1975: 64)

He also stresses the importance of the correct observance of religious rules and ritual for the believer. Muslim reformers, who were active in a similar manner in 19th-century Nigeria as they were in contemporary Ethiopia, saw these kinds of text as a useful medium to educate the illiterate co-religionists.

“It is therefore important for Muslims to be properly informed about these matters and for Muslim reformers it is a duty to secure conformity. One method of attempting this is through didactic verse. Through such verse people are brought to realize their obligations and knowledge of the Sunna is disseminated, while learning it by heart is a convenient way for the individual to acquire an aide-memoire, a mnemonic reference that will keep him on the straight path and protect him from forgetfulness.” (*ibid.*: 64–65)

The example of the interrogation of the dead in the grave Hiskett gives a vivid illustration of the specific role of the *tawhīd* genre.

“Islam teaches that, on the first night in the grave, the deceased is visited by the two terrifying angels Munkar and Nakir, who question him about his belief in God and the Prophet. If his answers are satisfactory, he is left in peace in the grave until the Day of Resurrection: if not, then Munkar and Nakir beat him with cudgels of iron and he suffers immediate punishment in the grave as a prelude to future torments in Hell Fire. To a conservative and largely illiterate Muslim population, that has as yet hardly begun to question the certainties of Islam, such a prospect is real and terrifying. Versifications on *tauhīdī*, that affirm the Oneness of Allah, His attributes and qualities, and describe Muhammad’s unique prophetic role, provide an insurance against the ordeal of the Interrogation in the Grave.” (*ibid.*: 65)

In order to be understood by the peasant population, this kind of religious didactic text had to be composed in the spoken local language. This objective seems to be one of the central motives behind the development of religious literature in local African languages. In the case of Eastern Wällo that language was Amharic. Consequently the author explains straightforwardly (40) that he wrote the text in “our language”.

(40) لَقَرَّأَوْ تَكْتَبُوا لِبْنِيَّوْ أَنْكَاكِرْ
läqärraw tākätb^wall bännāaw ’annägagär
 “For the one who studied, it has been written in our language” (1,7)

In order to address and convince the reader of the importance of his message, the author uses different rhetoric techniques. The most dominant one is the use of imperative forms. They are employed to form advice and demands. These demands and advice have equivalent individual and collective addressees, i.e. exactly half of the 30 verses containing imperative forms are in singular and half in plural forms.

Another means of addressing the reader is the frequent use of the word *s^wahibe* “my friend”. Using this expression allows the author to talk directly to his target group and enhances the familiarity between author and reader.

In the following examples the addressees are an individual (41) and a collective (42). In both verses he uses the expression “let me tell you” as an additional means of coercion.

(41) صَاحِبِي لَنْكِرَةَ لِأَخِرَاهُ بَسَلْ
s^wahibe ləngärəh lä’ahir bəsäl
 “My friend let me tell you prepare yourself for the hereafter” (5,5)

- (42) صَاحِبِي أَذْمَطُوا أَنِّي لِمَكْرَأَشَّةٍ
s^wahibočče ʾadmətu ʾəne ləmākəraččub
 “My friends listen, (and) let me tell you” (1,10)

A reoccurring motive is the demand to stay away from the wrong path and stop forbidden activities. In (43) the author urges the reader to desist from unlawful acts and offers an alternative by demanding to do good.

- (43) وَنَجَلْنَا تَوْنًا خَيْرَ سِرًا سَرُو
wänğäl täwunna häyr səra səru
 “Stop (doing) crime, do good work/deeds” (2,8)

Further lexical techniques which help to enforce the urgency of the message are lexical means such as the adverb *bätam* “very” in the two following examples, or the expressions *bä-niyyah* “with intent” in (45) which is in fact an Arabic loanword.

- (44) صَاحِبِي قَرَأْتُو أَطْبَقَهُ بِنِيَّهِ
s^wahibe qəraččəw atbəqəh bəniyyah
 “My friend read them steadfastly with intent” (6,4)

- (45) أَدَسَّنْتُ نُو بَطَامَ سَمَانِيَّيْ أَمَّا
ʾaddisənnātu nəw bätam səmaññəmma
 “it is his being new, listen to me very sincerely” (6,7)

Another vivid expression which aims at raising the interest of the reader is the phrase *əndä baləngära af* “as/like the mouth of a friend” in (46). The reader should appreciate the guidance and warnings of the verses just as the advice of a good friend.

- (46) نَكْرُنْ أَدْمَطُوا أُنْدَ بِالْأَنْجَرَا أَف
nägärn ʾaddamtu əndä baləngära ʾaf
 “hear the matter as (it would come from) the mouth of a friend” (24,7)

The author does not content himself with advising merely the reader/s. In using the imperative form of the Arabic loanword *ʿalläm* “to teach” he requests the reader to instruct others in (47).

- (47) إِنَّا نَمُّ يَارُنَا لِيَلَانَمُ عَلَّمُو
ənanntəm yazunna lelanəm ʿalləmu
 “And you, take it and teach it to another (person)” (28,9)

From 30 verses that contain imperative forms, eleven of them are negative forms. By using imperative forms the author tries to warn the reader to abstain from the forbidden and the condemned such as in (48) where he compares a bad habit, i.e. singing of songs to a preferable act like the reading and studying of the *tawḥīd* text.

- (48) تَوْحِيدُنْ قَرُوْ اِنْجْ زَفْنْ اَتْرَفْنُوْ / تَوْحِيدُنْ مَقْرَاتْ نُوْ يَسْلَامْ لِيْجْ زَفْنُوْ
tāwḥidən qəru ŋi zäfän attəzfänu / tāwḥidən mäqrat näw yäslam läğ zäfänu
 “Study the *tawḥīd* and don’t sing songs; studying the *tawḥīd* is the song of
 a Muslim” (1,11)

Negative verbs often appear in the advice not to forget the teachings contained in the *tawḥīd* text (49).

- (49) يَا اِيْمَانْ اَلْقْ دَمُوْ اِسْلَمًا اَسَاْ / اِسُّسْ اَمْسَتْ نُوْ هُلْنَمْ اَتْرَسَاْ
yä’iman ʾalläqä dämmo ʾəsləmənassa / ʾəssus ʾamməst näw hullunəm ʾattərsa
 “That of the faith is completed, what about Islam?; and this is five, don’t
 forget anything!” (4,2)

10. Outlook

With the exception of *ajäm* literature in Harari, most texts written in Amharic and in other languages which have been collected so far still await a methodical and thorough philological documentation and linguistic analysis. The situation of research on Ethiopian *ajäm* literature has improved a little bit since the teaching of philology began at the Addis Ababa University in 2004. Since then postgraduate students have begun to study local Islamic literature in Arabic and Ethiopian languages and a number of M.A. theses have been dedicated to this topic. Nevertheless, the study of Ethiopian *ajäm* literature has just hardly begun.

One of the advantages that the research on *ajäm* literature in Ethiopia represents is the fact that many texts are still “in use”, i.e. they are read and sometime even learned by heart by members of the Muslim population. This opens the opportunity to study not only the text from a philological perspective but to incorporate the wider socio-cultural context of it. By this, I mean the cooperation with local scholars who can contribute immensely to the understanding and the analysis of these texts and their use and role in society.³⁴ Many *ajäm* texts contain local and historical references which can only be understood and described when local scholars are involved in the

³⁴ BOBBOYI (2008: 131) stresses the importance to involve local specialists and scholars in the research and conservation of *ajäm* literature in West Africa.

study. A study of *ajām* texts could be designed as a combination of philological, linguistic, ethnographic and historic methods. I would like to propose a twofold approach for this kind of research. One is the comparative view which relates the various literary genres of *ajām* literature in Ethiopia to similar traditions in other Muslim societies in Africa. The other is a holistic or interdisciplinary approach which combines linguistic-philological methods with the historical and ethnographical research.

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Summary

This article describes aspects of an Amharic manuscript from Wärrä Babbo written in *aḡām*, i.e. in the Arabic script. Since this kind of literature is quite widespread in the eastern parts of Wällo and in Yifat, the article begins with an introductory overview of *aḡām* literature in Ethiopia and the special position of eastern Wällo as centre of Islamic scholarship and its role for the development of religiously inspired literacy. The philological and linguistic aspects of this type of Amharic literature are exemplified with a *tawḥīd* poem from eastern Wällo. Besides a detailed treatment of peculiar linguistic feature of the language used in the poem the analysis of the linguistics means that are used by the author to convey his intentions, i.e. the teaching of the basic Islamic tenets to his illiterate co-religionists, form the central content of the article.