

# AJAMI TRADITIONS IN THE HORN OF AFRICA AND THE CONCEPT OF ISOGRAPH

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(Copenhagen, 11 April 2018)

LANGUAGES:

- Harari (Ethiosemitic);
- Amharic (Ethiosemitic);
- Argobba (Ethiosemitic);
- Tigrinya (Ethiosemitic);
- Selt'i (Ethiosemitic).
  
- Somali (East Cushitic);
- Oromo (East Cushitic);
- Afar (East Cushitic);
- Saho (East Cushitic);
- Alaaba (East Cushitic).



HARARI (since the 16th century, now also used in some locally printed books - digraphia with the official *fidäl*-based orthography of Harari):

Cohen (1931), Cerulli (1936), Wagner (1983a), Banti (2005, 2010).

AMHARIC (since when? especially in Wollo):

Drewes (2007), Gori (2007), Wetter (2009, 2012).

ARGOBBA (since when?):

mentioned in Wetter (2012: 177 f.).

TIGRINYA (at least since the 2nd half of the 19th century)

mentioned in Wetter (2012: 177), Abdulkadir (2016).

SELṬ'I (since when?):

Wagner (1983b).

SOMALI (since the 2nd half of the 19th century? published data from the southern and the north-western areas):

Moreno (1955), Cerulli (1964), Banti (field data), Cabdiraxmaan (2016)

OROMO (since the 2nd half of the 19th century?; known examples from the Wollo and the Harar areas):

Mohamed Hakim (2012)

°AFAR (since the 1st half of the 19th century? NB Kabir Ḥanda died in 1828 according to Morin 1997: 55):

Morin (1997).

SAHO (since when? known example from Irhaafale in the central area):

Banti & Vergari (2014).

ALAABA (since when?):

mentioned in Wetter (2012: 177).

Folio 1v of ms. IES 256, one of the oldest witnesses of the Harari *Kitāb al-farāyiḍ*. It is the only ms. that still preserves the original division of the *KF* into three parts. According to Gori (2014) from the 19th century, yet personally I believe it to be earlier.

- The first part of the *KF* consists in a series of numerical sayings based upon 2, 3, 4, 5 or 10 and dealing with life and wisdom.
- The second part is a sort of catechism that explains through questions and answers several doctrinal tenets, and details the duties (*farāyiḍ*) of pious believers. Numerical sayings are very few in this part, and occur only at its end.
- The whole third part consists in another sequence of numerical sayings on the duties related to religion, prayer, fasting, spiritual knowledge, ritual ablutions, etc.



A numerical saying based on 4 from the first part of the *KF* (f. 2r of ms. IES 256).



*Har<sup>c</sup>atuḥ zi-har<sup>c</sup>atin ināy:*  
*dawā ḡammi<sup>c</sup> ināy do bil<sup>c</sup>at aqlilot,*  
*adab ḡammi<sup>c</sup> ināy do kalām aqlilot,*  
*ibādat ḡammi<sup>c</sup> ināy do dilḥi aqlilot,*  
*īmān ḡammi<sup>c</sup> ināy do ṣabri liḥādot.*

‘And four are the mother of four:  
the mother of all medicine is eating little,  
the mother of all good manners is speaking little,  
the mother of all worship is sinning little,  
the mother of all faith is bearing patience’

In Banti (2005) I analysed 17 features in the Ajami orthography of four Old Harari literary texts:

- a. the *Kitāb al-farāyiḍ*,
- b. the “Song of the 4 Caliphs” (= Text B in Wagner 1983a), by shaykh ʿAbdalmālik b. ʿĀbid,
- c. the *Masnoy*, and
- d. the *Muṣṭafā* (= Text A in Wagner 1983a), by Hāšim b. ʿAbdalʿazīz b. Amīr Hāšim (1123-79 H./1711-65 C.E.),

They are:

- i. 4 features that regard how non-Arabic sounds such as *č*, *č'*, *ñ*, and *g* are represented,
- ii. 13 strictly orthographic features such as what is written together as a single word and what not, how final *-u* and *-o* are represented, &c.

## Features of type (i.):

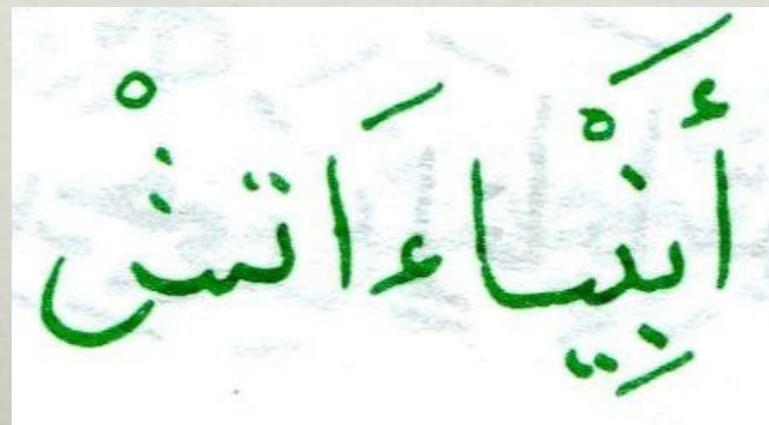
1. ط represents both Har. *t'* and palatal *č'* in the oldest texts. In the *Muṣṭafā* a new special symbol seems to appear for Har. *č'*, and is used systematically in later texts:



2. ن occurs in the older texts both for *n* and where present-day Har. has palatal *ň*. Texts from the late 19th century also have ي for palatal *ň*. Contemporary Har. uses a new sign:



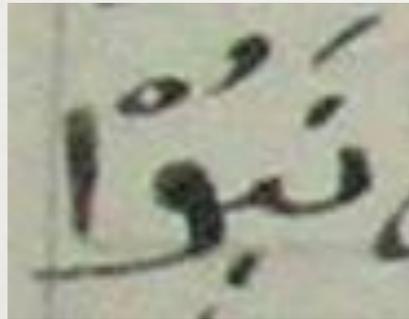
3. Har. *g* and palatal *j* are both represented by ج in the older texts, but some mss. of the *KF* and of the *Masnoy* also have several instances of ك for velar *g*. The letter چ starts to appear for velar *g* later, and is now used by some writers both for *g* and *j*, side by side with ج.
4. Har. *t* and palatal *č* are generally represented by ت in the oldest texts, even though a couple of words are already written with ش in the *KF*. The *Muṣṭafā* generally has ش for *č*. Yet one Harari hymn in the *Mawlud* published in 2001 spells *anbiyā' āč* 'prophets' with a digraph:



Some features of type (ii.):

1. The genitive/relative particle, always pronounced as *z-* in Mod. Har., is spelt either as <z-> or, etymologically, as <ḏ-> from the *KF* till contemporary written Har.
2. The suffixal elements (i.) *-nat* that forms abstract nouns like *magdab-nat* “being an influential person”, (ii.) the possessives *-iy* “my”, *-ḥād* “your (2 sg.m.)”, *-zo* “his”, etc., (iii.) the verbal clitics containing the old prepositions *l-* and *b-* like *-bo* “against him”, *-lo* “for him”, and their variants, (iv.) the postpositions *-be* “in, against, by”, *-de* “to, towards”, *-le* “to, for”, *-kut* “like”, and (v.) the conjunctions *-wā* “and” *-ma* “and” are not infrequently written as separate words both in the older texts and in present-day Har.

3. Har. words that end in *-u*, or *-o* are either spelt simply with final *ḍamma* or frequently with *alif otiosum* in the older texts, e.g.:



*nabō* ‘oh Prophet!’

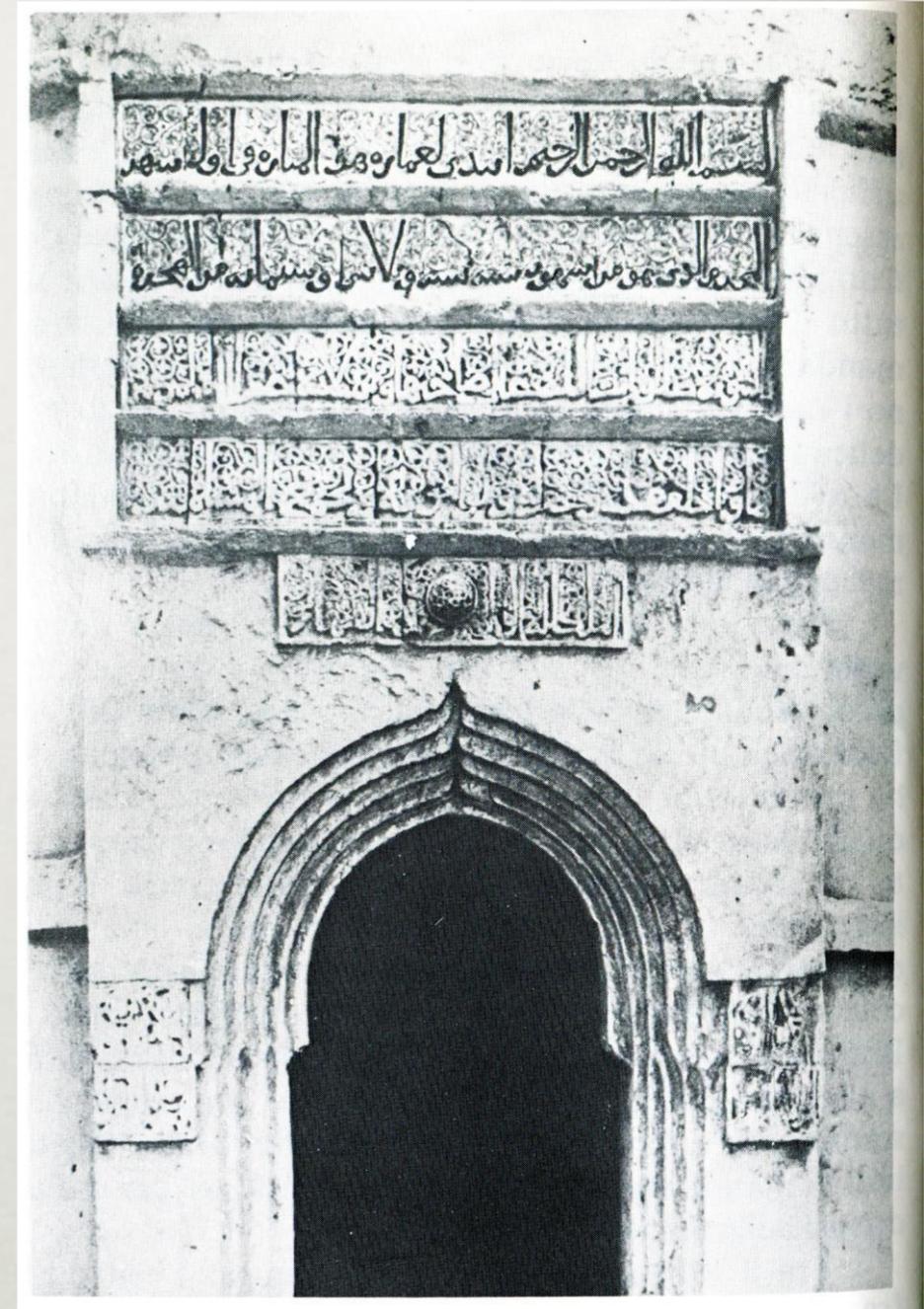
In contemporary written Har. one finds double *waw* in similar contexts, e.g., in the 2006 Mawlud:

نَبِيُّو مُحَمَّدُو دَوَّانِي،

*nabyō Muḥammadō dawwāni*

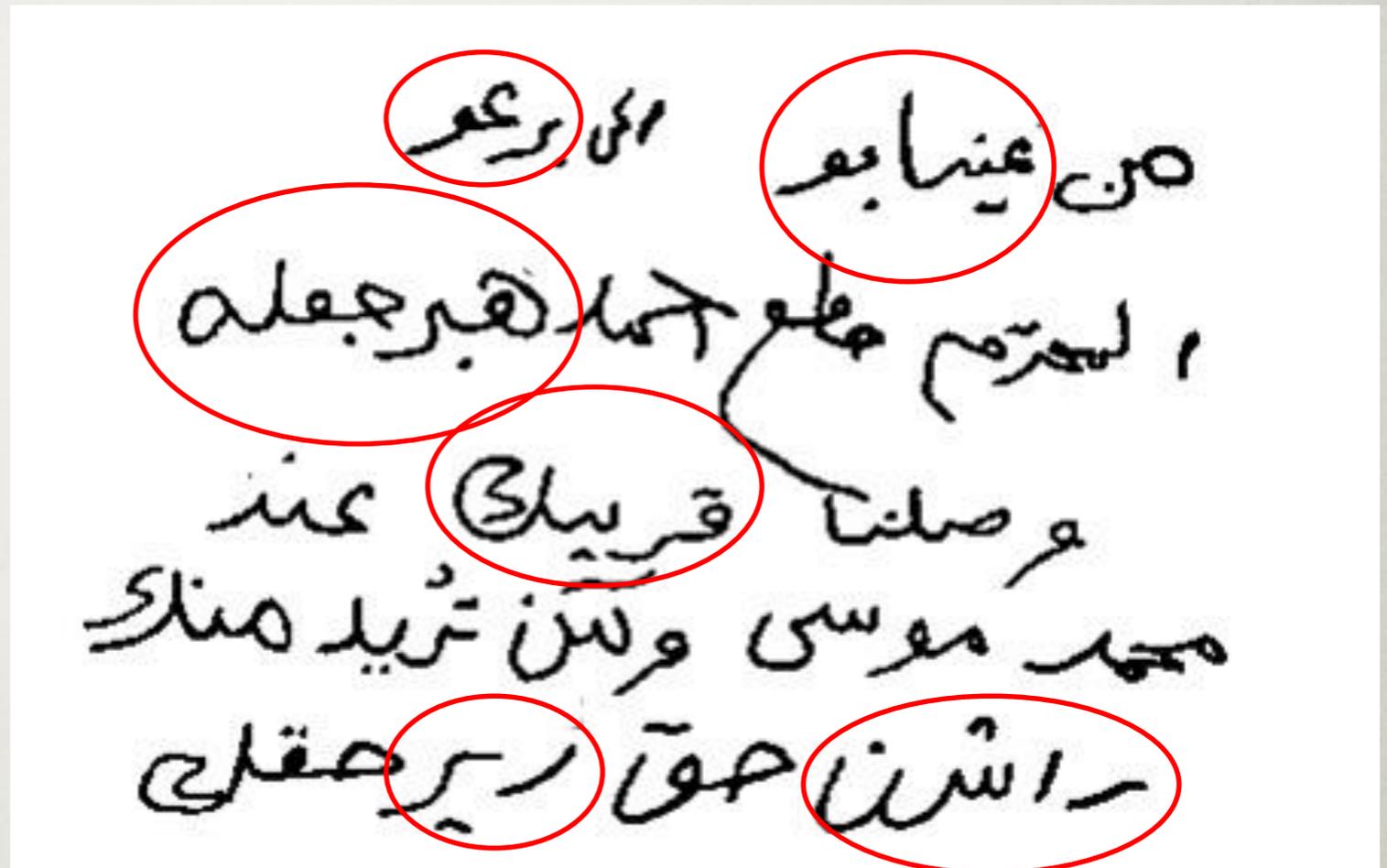
‘Oh Prophet Mohammed, heal me!’

Arabic has been used for centuries for writing in the countries where the Somalis lived, both for writing on stone, on wood (e.g., for teaching the Qur'aan), and on other writing materials.



The inscription above the door of the old minaret of the Al-Jaamic mosque in Xamarweyne. It bears the date 1 *muharram* 636 H. (= 14 August 1238).

Frequently scribes mixed Arabic and Somali in their letters.



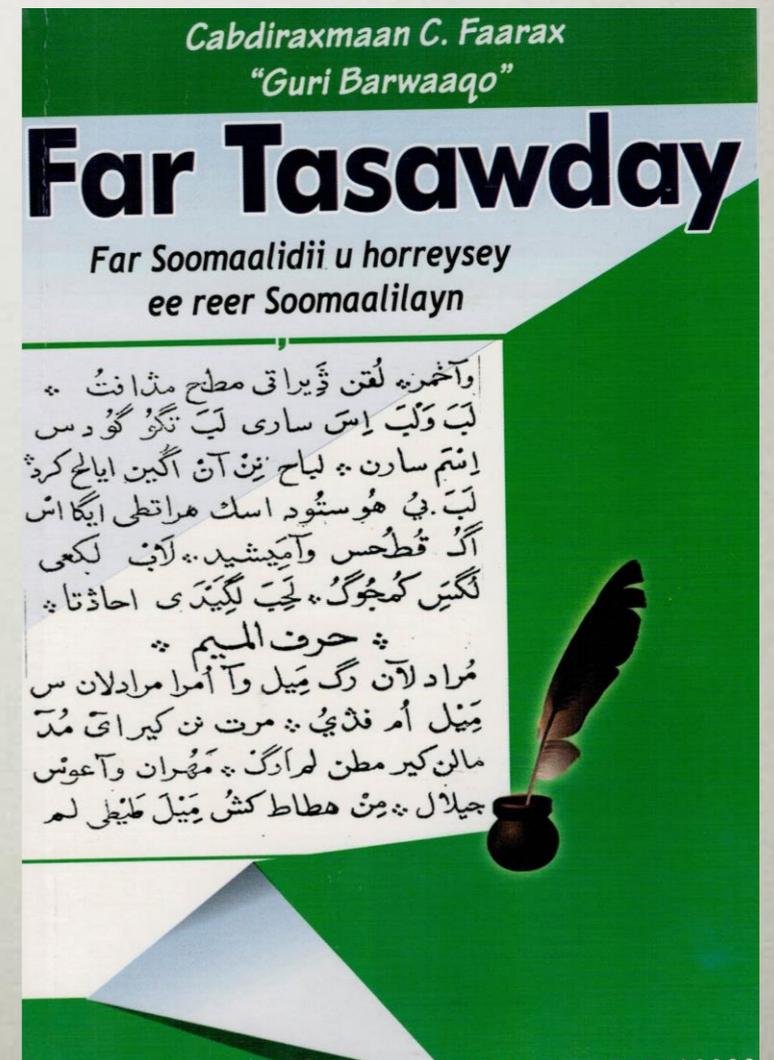
The beginning of a letter in broken colloquial Arabic mixed with Somali (published by Lewis 1958: 138):

*Min **°Aynabo** ilâ **Bur°o**. Al-muḥarram Jāma° Aḥmad **Habar Je°lo**  
 waṣalanā **farrīnka** °inda Muḥammad Mūsā. Walākin turīdu minka  
**rāšin** ḥaqq **rēr** ḥaqqak ...*

According to a tradition reported by Cerulli (1964) and Cabdiraxmaan (2016), Ibraahiim Cabdalla Mayal of the Makaahiil clan tried to adapt the Arabic alphabet for writing Somali in the second half of the 19th century, in what would later become British Somaliland. His pupil Maxamed Cabdi Makaahiil published a booklet with some letters and proverbs with this system in 1934. Cabdiraxmaan (2016) found it and published a study on it.

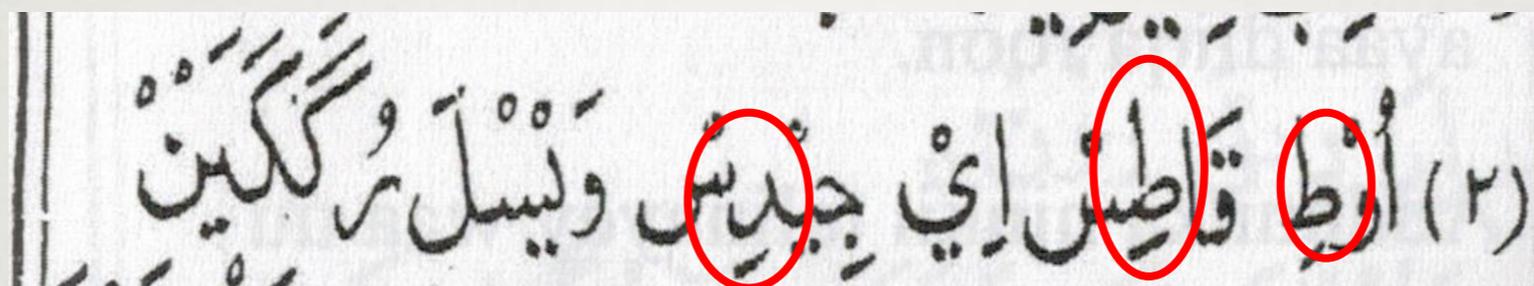


The 1st page of Maxamed Cabdi Makaahiil's booklet



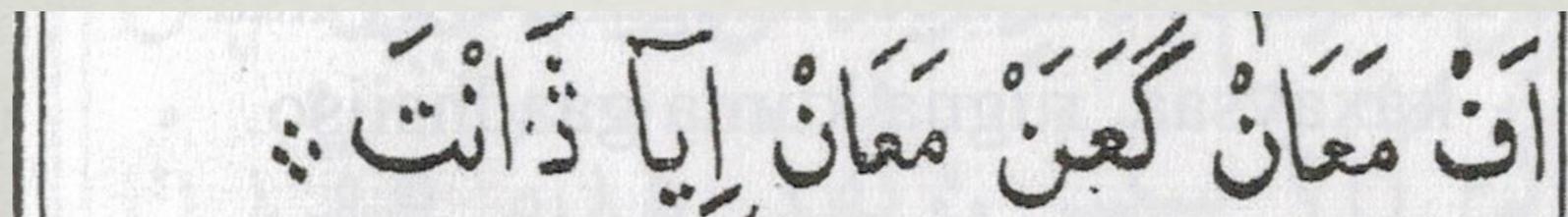
The cover of Cabridaxmaan (2016)

Two proverbs from Maxamed Cabi Makaahiil's booklet:



Oodi qaadis ii jiidis waysla rugageyn

'Carrying a thorny bush or dragging it you are always bringing it to your home' (p. 21)



Af macaan gacan macaan iyaa dhaanta

'A helpful hand is better than a helpful mouth' (p. 23)

At the end of the 19th century, the well-known Sheekh Awees Maxamed from Brava (d. in 1909, according to Cerulli, 1964: 117) composed several religious poems both in Arabic and in different dialects from southern Somalia.

Main sources on *Sheekh Awees*:

- Cerulli, *Somalia*, vol I: 187 f., vol III: 117-38.
- Moreno, *Il somalo della Somalia*: 364-67.
- Said S. Samatar, “Sheikh Uways Muhammad of Baraawe, 1847-1909. Mystic and reformer in East Africa”.
- ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. ʿUmar al-Qādirī, *Jalāʾ al-ʿaynayn*, and *Jawhar al-nafīs* (2 books about his *manāqib*).

- Cerulli (*Somalia*, vol. III: 117 f., 127 f.) mentions:
  - 1) a “*canzone*” (‘song’) by *Sh. A.* called *Axad Sheeki* on the devastations caused by the *Siyid’s* movement (with text, translation and notes);
  - 2) one “*preghiera*” (‘prayer’) in Hawiye dialect, that begins by *Yaa nebi salaam caleeka* (with text, translation and notes);
  - 3) three “*preghiere*” in Rahanween dialect (i.e., in Maay), and one in Daarood dialect (in the same ms. as 2. above, acquired by him in 1923 in Mogadishu);
- Moreno (*Il somalo della Somalia*) provides the text and translation of one of the poems (“*la celebre qaṣīda*”, ‘the well-known q.’) in Maay, that begins by *Laa ilaaha, ilaah kaleto maba yaalo* (from a Bravanese ms. owned by an <Adde Mugno>, “Vice capo distretto di Mogadiscio”).

- In 1984 (?) in Buulo Mareerto (near Marka), together with the late Giorgio Cardona and prof. Cabdalla Cumar Mansuur I visited *Sheekh* Abuukar Maxamed Yare, a nephew of *Sh. A.*, who was then the General *Naa'ib* of the Qaadiiriyya. He headed a *jameeco* and showed us several mss. with poems by *Sh. A.*  
It was possible to take pictures of several of these poems, and to have them read by him.
- No information whether *Sheekh* Abuukar is still alive, nor about the mss. But Buulo Mareerto has already been under Shabaab rule for several years, and the mss. may have been destroyed by the Shabaab's anti-Sufi fury.



Known poems by *sh. Awees* and their witnesses:

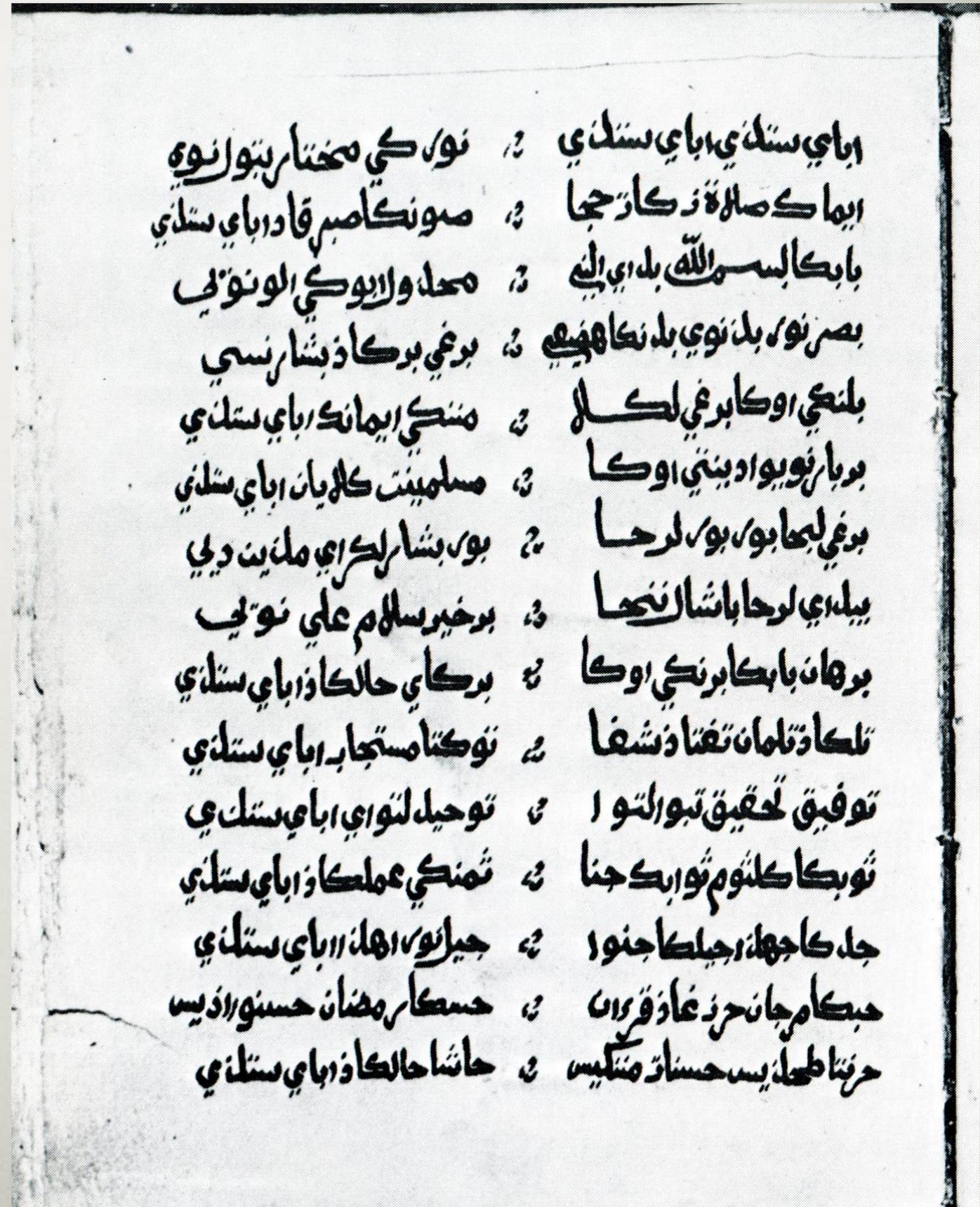
- 1) “*Axad Sheeki*”: Cerulli, ms. A;
- 2) “*Yaa Nebi salaam caleeka*”: Cerulli, ms. C, composed in the Benadir;
- 3) “*Laa ilaaha, ilaah kaleto maba yaalo*”: Moreno, ms. D, composed in Biyooley;
- 4) “*Salaad badanow*”: mss. A, C, composed in northern Somalia;
- 5) “*Mawlla qeerka ma jiro*”: mss. A, B, C, D, composed in the Benadir;
- 6) “*Sallaa Alla calaa Axmaddaa*”: mss. A, C, composed in the Benadir, in the interriverine area;
- 7) “*Abbaay sittidey*”; ms. A, a second ms. from Sandra Vianello, composed in Beled el-Amiin;
- 8) “*Abaay Nabiyow*”: ms. C, composed in Lower Shabeelle.

The first folio of manuscript A that was in Buulo Mareerto in 1984, with the beginning of *Abbaay Sittidey* by Sheekh Awees.

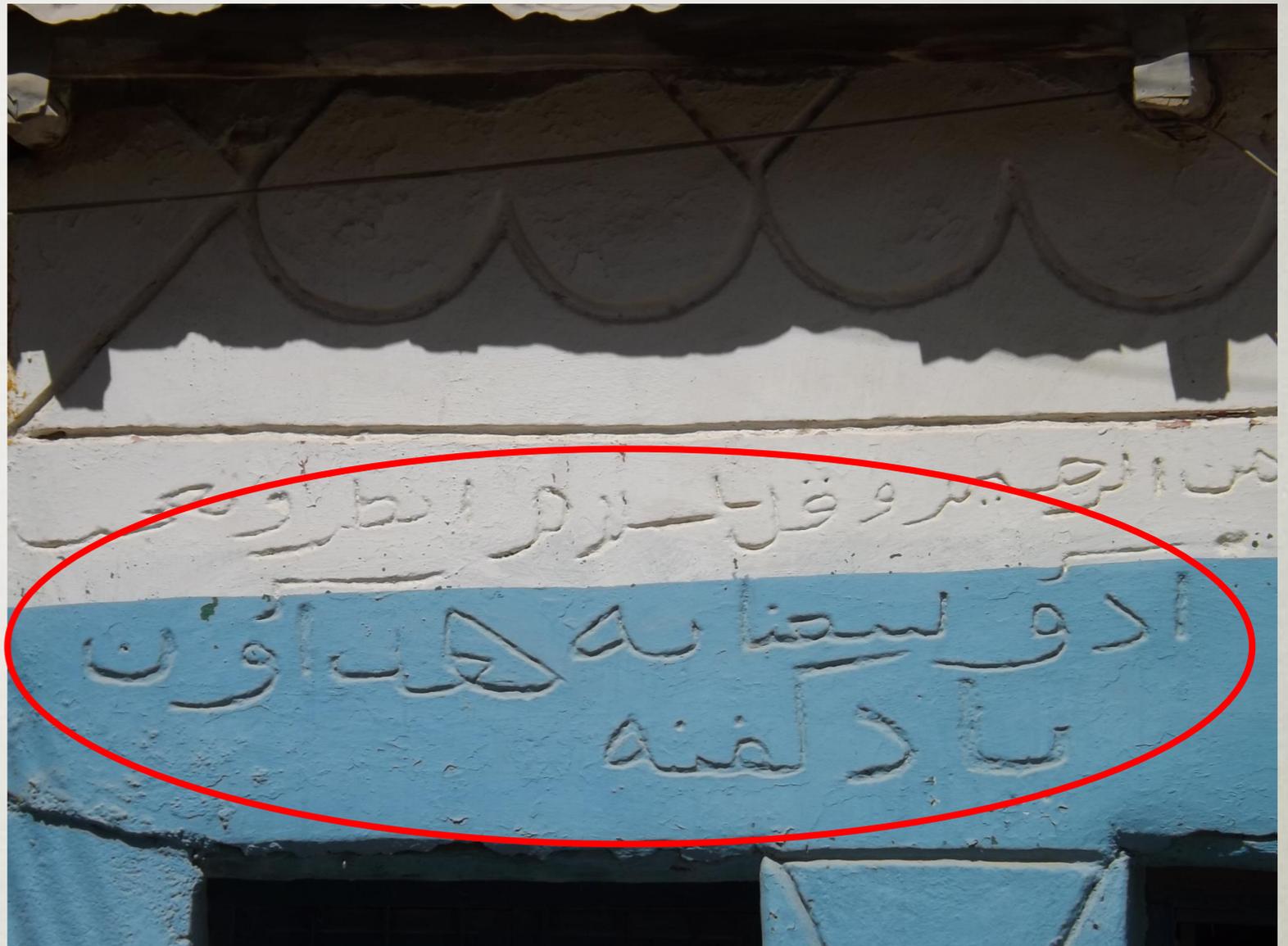
The first two lines are:

*Abbay Sittidey Abbay Sittidey,  
nuurkii Mukhtaar batuula  
Nawii  
limaanka salaata zakaata xajaa,  
soonkaa sabarkaada Abbay  
Sittidey*

‘My Dear Lady, my Dear Lady,  
light of the Chosen one, virgin  
of the Prophet,  
Faith, prayer, zakat, xajj, fasting  
are your patience, my Dear  
Lady!’



A Somali Ajami notice  
on the first shop for  
selling women's  
goods that was set up  
in Ceerigaabo  
(Somaliland) in the  
50s



.....  
*Adoo soconaaya ha-daawan  
yaad kufine*

.....  
'While you are walking, don't stare,  
because you may stumble'

The Somali Ajami spelling conventions of Maxamed Cabdi Makaahiil, Ceerigaabo and *Sh. Awees* differed from each other:

	M. C. Makaahiil	Cerigaabo	Sh. Awees
<i>g</i>	گ		غ ~ ك
<i>ḡ</i>	ڨ		ط
<i>d</i>	د ~ ط	د	د

Oromo Ajami will be discussed in more detail tomorrow.

Suffice it to point out here that there are considerable differences through time, and between Oromo Ajami texts from Wollo and those from Harar.

## Sources for Saho Ajami

(i.) Arabic texts with Saho names and words, e.g.:

- Ibrāhīm al-Muḥtār (1909-1969), former mufti of Eritrea, wrote among other things:
  - *al-Fatāwā al-Minifirāwiyya fī muhimāt aḥkām al-maḍāhib*, unpublished ms.,
  - *al-Hādiya ilā mā fī al-luġa al-Sīhāwiyya min al-alfāẓ al-<sup>c</sup>arabiyya*, unpublished ms.,
  - *al-Hāwi li-aḥbār al-ša<sup>c</sup>b al-Sīhāwī*, unpublished ms.
- Muḥammad <sup>c</sup>Uṭmān Abū Bakr (b. 1945):
  - *Ta'rīḥ Iritriyā al-mu<sup>c</sup>āṣir arḍan wa ša<sup>c</sup>ban*, Cairo 1994.

ii.) Religious *nazme* hymns written in Ajami:

- for instance, *shekh* Soliiman Ismaaciil Maxammad from Irhaafalo (center-southern of the Saho-speaking area, met by myself and Vergari in 2010).

iii.) Songs by contemporary Saho singers written in Ajami (vs. other Saho singers who write their texts in adapted *fidäl* or Roman characters:

- for instance, Cumar Hadbar (born in the southern Saho-speaking area; data collected in London in 2014).

## Saho words in Arabic texts (I)

فَعَسُو



فَالأَوَّلُ جَدُّ لِبَنِيهِمْ قَبَائِلُ **فَعَسُو**

رَسْمُو



وَالثَّانِي جَدُّ لِبَنِيهِمْ قَبَائِلُ **رَسْمُو**

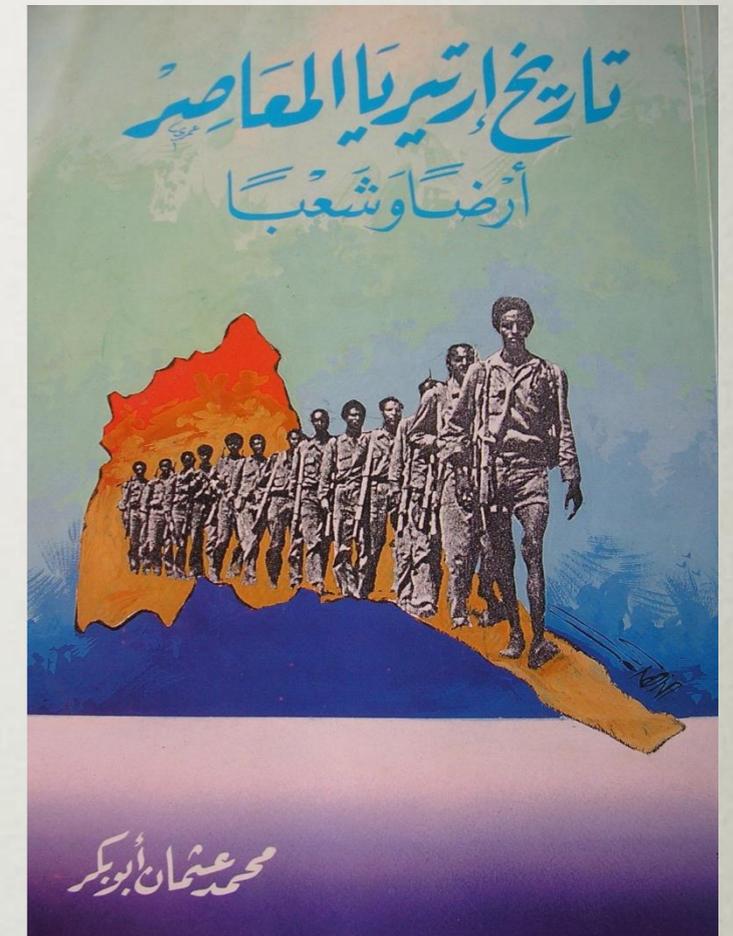
The names of the Saho clans of the *Gacaso* and *Dhasamo* from the Minifire (from p. 2 of an unpublished typed ms. by Ibrāhīm al-Muḥtār, maybe the first draft of his *al-Fatāwā al-Minifirāwiyya*).

## Saho words in Arabic texts (II)

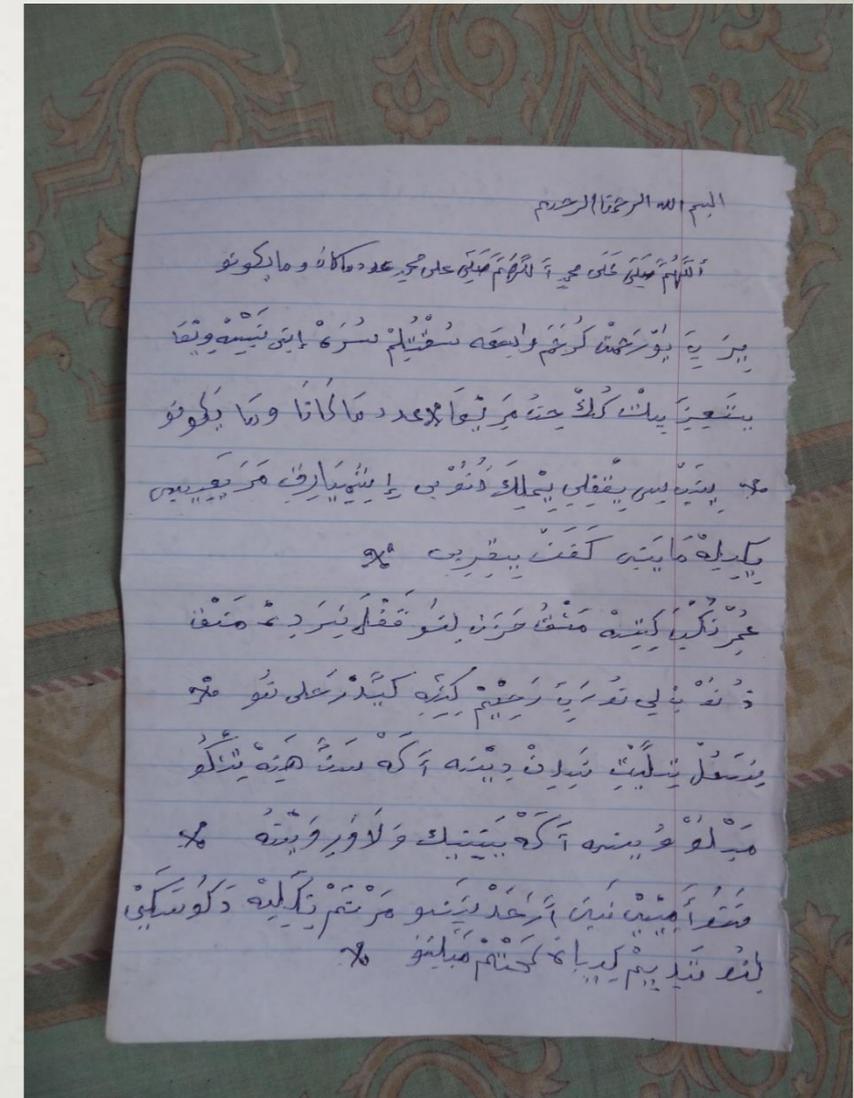
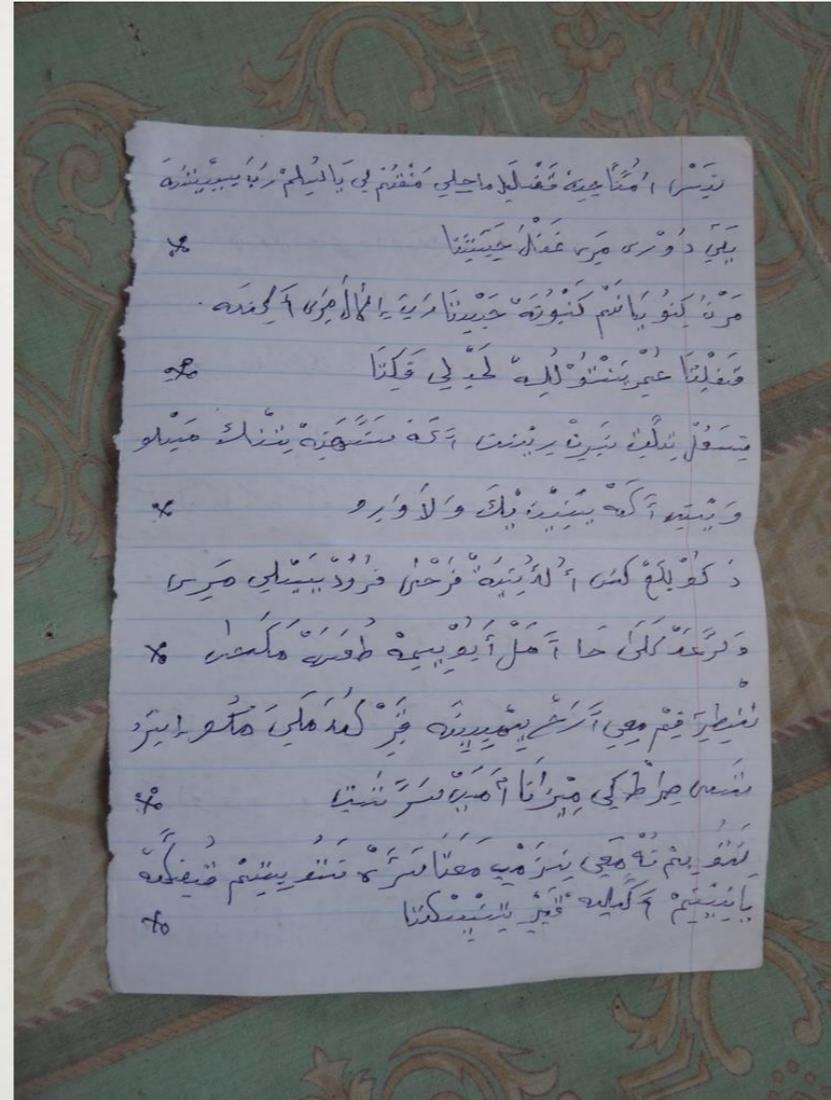
## التقسيم الإداري للمنفرى :

ينقسم المنفرى إلى ثلاثة فروع رئيسية :

- ١ - رسمو .
- ٢ - قعسو .
- ٣ - فقيه حرك ( سليتو ) .



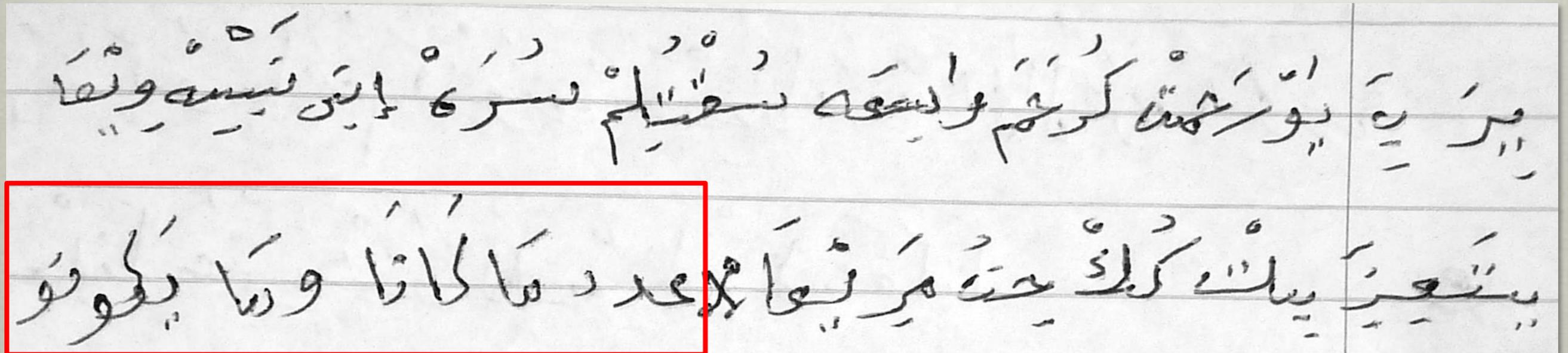
The same names *Dhasamo* and *Gacaso* spelt exactly in the same manner by Muḥammad 'Uṭmān in his *Ta'rīḥ Iritriyā* (1994).



Sheekh Soliiman Ismaacil Maxammad interviewed in Irhaafalo (Eritrea), 27-28 January 2010.

His *nazme* hymn, *Yi Rabbi yol raxmat* 'My Lord, be merciful to me!' Recording of a chanted version of this *nazme* from a 1979 cassette.

The 1st stanza: Saho Ajami + Arabic refrain



Yi Rabbi yol raxmat, Ku raxma waasica  
 Sugto lem sorhah[a], inni nabseh weeca  
 Yi tacizzibe ged, Kok xino marhiica  
 ‘My Lord, be merciful to me, Your mercy is huge,  
 Since I don’t know what awaits me, I cry for my destiny,  
 If You punish me, I cannot stand up against You’

*‘Addada mā kānā [sic!] wa-mā yakūnū [sic!]*



Cumar Axmad Cabdalla “Hadbar”  
 Interviewed in London, April 2014  
 Text of his song *Yi mara* ‘My people’,  
 from his new album *S & A*

Yimara.

3X6 عمر له بر = شايبة

1 = عرني حه يشكي با دا مالول  
 او عهيري اقنكي فطرا  
 هتو لك لوا دينا برا  
 ديسر يوه كليتم ايبرا

No 1

و طلم

2 = مكينو عيدا هيسه مرا  
 نعييا ويتي اي با مرا  
 ديف هنييه ديعر مرا  
 بيريشيف لليم كى برا

و طلم

3 = نروي دادكي افهرا  
 حه بارو بدي كنفرا  
 ليهتيف منه انرا  
 اتو فرق سه مرا

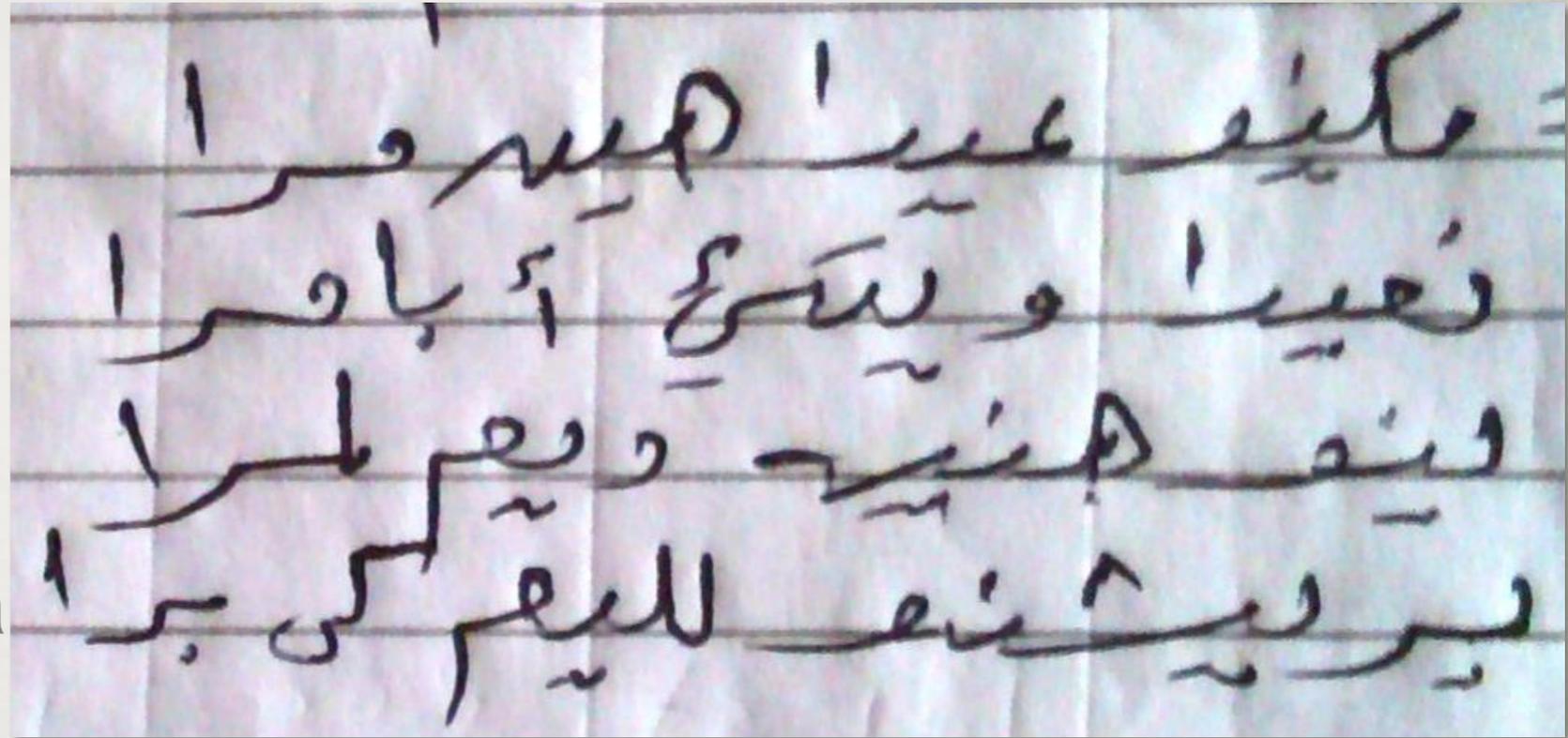
و طلم

دويه يرك حنه انقرا

Maser	KIT	DRUM	DRUM	Temp
DXXE	46	329	407	116

## The second stanza

Makino cayda hin mara  
 Ni cayda wayte aba mara  
 Lino hanih dhic le mara  
 Barhishno lellec kee bara



‘We are not people who lack (our) traditions,  
 (Yet) our traditions lost who fulfills them.  
 Even if we have capable people,  
 We should distinguish between day and night’.

An **isogloss** is the geographic boundary of a certain linguistic feature, such as the pronunciation of a certain sound, the use of a particular word for a certain meaning, or the occurrence of some morphological or syntactic feature.

Major dialects are typically demarcated by groups or bundles of isoglosses, rather than by single isoglosses. Analysis of isoglosses provides important cues for past histories of contacts and/or isolation of language communities.

Similar to an isogloss, an **isograph** is a term that has been used for some years for a feature of a script that distinguishes it from related script series, e.g., the forms of some letters of the Iron Age Old Hebrew script that differ from their counterparts in Old Aramaic and Phoenician.

More broadly, just as any clearly identifiable linguistic feature can be used as an isogloss, any clearly identifiable feature in a writing system can form an isograph:

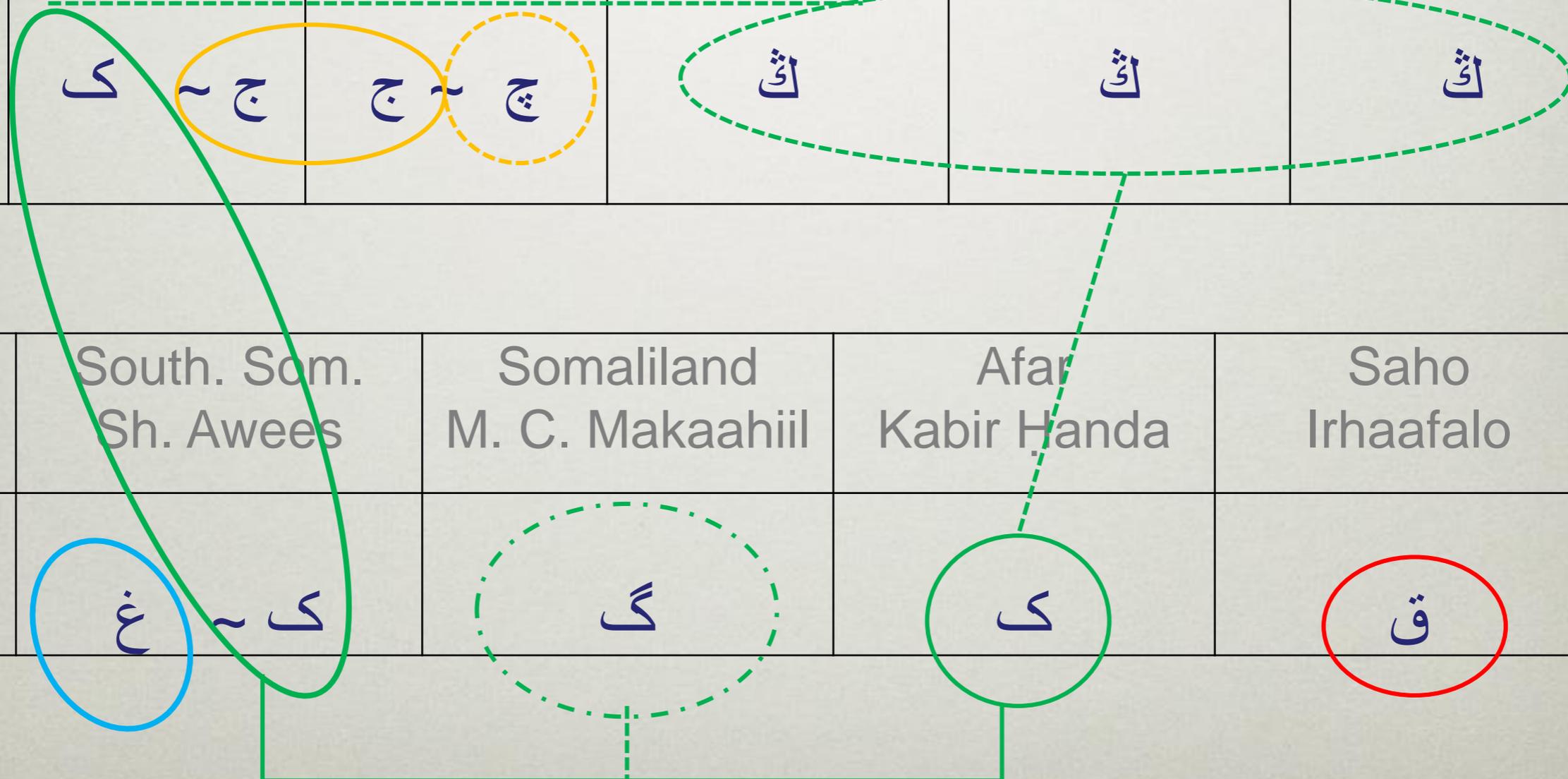
- the shape of a specific letter or character;
- the use of a certain calligraphic style vs. another one, e.g., of the *barnāwī* and the *maghribī* styles in W. Africa;
- the use of a specific character for representing a sound or a word;
- a strictly orthographic feature such as one of those seen above for Harari Ajami; &c.

	Old Harari	Cont. Harari	East. Oromo	Wollo Oromo	Wollo Amharic
č					
č'			<p>??</p>		
ñ					

### The representation of *g*

	Old Harari	Contemp. Harari	East. Oromo	Wollo Oromo	Wollo Amharic
<i>g</i>					

	South. Som. Sh. Awees	Somaliland M. C. Makaahiil	Afar Kabir Handa	Saho Irhaafalo
<i>g</i>				



	<i>d</i>
Saho	
<sup>c</sup> Afar (Kabir Handa)	
Eastern Oromo	
Wollo Oromo	
N. Somali (M.C. Makaahiil)	
S. Somali ( <i>sh.</i> Awees)	
Modern Harari	
Old Harari	

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