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Article

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The Study of Arabic Grammar in Ethiopia:  
The Case of two Contemporary Muslim Learned Men

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The presence of Arabic in Ethiopia is ancient, and the language is deeply rooted in the written culture of the country. It is a well-known fact that Christian church books have been translated from Arabic into Gǝzǝzf for centuries to enrich the bulk of Ethiopian literature. Arabic *marginalia* and notes can be found in Gǝzǝzf manuscripts; and Arabic documents are kept in ecclesiastical libraries, in monasteries and churches.

Quite naturally, it is primarily in Ethiopian Muslim communities that the Arabic language spread, producing an impressive body of literature which still waits to be discovered and fully appreciated in its cultural and historical importance.

The highly revered position of Arabic across the Islamic world is well known. The last divine revelation to the humankind kept in the *Koran* is in that language. Every Muslim has to approach the sacred text in its original idiom and even the most ignorant faithful must learn at least some Arabic to be able to duly perform their five daily mandatory prayers. Its religious value made Arabic not only the language of Islamic theology and jurisprudence, but also of science and medicine. Arabic came to be the main expressive tool of a universal civilization, and learned men everywhere in the Islamic world use it and spread it through their written works. The use of this sacred language strengthened the feeling of belonging to a common *umma* (community) and the cohesion among Muslims coming from different continents.

The study and the analysis of Arabic grammar by the Islamic intelligentsia was thus a pillar in the education of every learned man in the Muslim world. Ethiopian Muslims have been no exception to this common situation.

Arabic grammar and syntax (*nahw*), with its branches of *ṣarf* (morphology), *ʿarūd* (prosody), *maʿāni* (allegories), *bayān* (eloquence), *bādī* (science of metaphors) and *balāğga* (rhetoric), play a crucial role in the curricula of

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1 A slightly abridged version of this paper was presented at the 16th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies in Trondheim (Norway) on July 3rd 2007.

2 Dipartimento di Linguistica – Università degli Studi di Firenze.
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traditional Islamic high schools in every Muslim community of the country, including Wollo, Harer’s kabirgär, and the Gurge areas.

Famous textbooks of Arabic grammar are known and studied in all the educational institutions of Ethiopia.

Local Ethiopian scholars became experts in teaching Arabic grammar to pupils. The mid-19th century shaykh Kammalaw of Wollo was a highly esteemed master of Arabic grammar and syntax, and such famous learned holy men as hagg Bu-sha sayyid al-ba’ of Gata in Qallu (d. 1863) or hagg Gawhar b. Haydar of Sonke (d. 1935) trained their students also in Arabic.

The most widely spread book of Arabic grammar in Ethiopia is the Muqaddima al-‘Ağurrumiyya by the famous Moroccan scholar of Berber origin Abu ‘Abdallah Muhammad b Dawud al-‘Sanhaq b. Aghurrum (d. in Fas 1323), which is widely used everywhere in the Islamic world. The Fatrabb al-bariyya ‘ala al-durra al-bahiyya nazm al-‘Ağurrumiyya by Ibrâhim al-Bâquri (d. 1861), a renown gloss on the ‘Ağurrumiyya10, is also traditionally diffused in Ethiopia.

Other books that Ethiopian Muslims use to learn Classical Arabic include the Mulhat ar-râb by al-‘Harîrî (d. 1054)11, the Alfiyya and the Lamiyyat al-as’al or the Kitâb al-miftah fi‘alîmiyyat al-as’al both by Ibn Mâlik (d.1273)14, the Marâb al-arwâb by Ahmad b. ‘Alt b. Mas’ud (beginning of the 14th century)15, the Mu‘gnee al-labîb ‘an kutub al-a’ariyib by ‘Abdallah b. Hišâm

6 DREWES (1976 passim).
7 It would be very interesting to compare the handbooks circulating in Ethiopia with those used in other Islamic countries, especially in Yemen, the Sudan, and Egypt. For some information on the Iranian Islamic syllabus and textbooks see Seyyed Hossein Nasr (2006:161–76; especially about sarf and nahwu 162–4); for Mauritania, see Fortier 2003.
10 GAL II: 238; GAL S II: 335; the Fatrabb al-bariyya is actually a gloss on the Durra al-bahiyya fi‘alîmiyyat al-‘Ağurrumiyya by Sîhab al-Dîn Yahyâ al-‘Imrîtî (floruit 1581), which is an excerpt from the Aghurrumiyya with commentary (GAL II: 238; GAL S II: 335).
11 It is very common to find in Addis Ababa copies of this book printed in Singapore by the famous Sulaymân al-Mara‘î printing press in 1346/1927–8. Also other books of this Asian publishing house are usually available in the Ethiopian Islamic book market (e.g., an edition of the Tanbih al-anâm).
12 HUSSEIN AHMED (1988:100).
13 GAL I: 276–8; GAL S 486–9.
15 GAL II: 21; GAL S II: 14.
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(d. 1360)\textsuperscript{16} and the \textit{Muğib al-nida‘} \textit{alà qaṣr al-nadâ} by 'Alî b. Aḥmad al-Fakhrī al-Makkī al-Ṣāfī al-Naḥwî (d. 1564)\textsuperscript{17}.

There are numerous Ethiopian Arabic manuscripts transmitting famous Arabic grammatical texts. To mention a few examples, in the collection of Arabic manuscripts at the IES in Addis Ababa we find the famous \textit{Ṣarb al-masālik li-alfiyyat Ibn Mālik} by Abu Muḥammad 'Abdallāh b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Aqīl (d. 1367)\textsuperscript{18} and the \textit{Ṣarb al-tuḥfa al-wardiyâ al-manẓuma fi ‘ilm al-arabiyya} by Zayn al-Dīn ‘Umar b. al-Wardī (d. 1349)\textsuperscript{19}; in the Biblioteca Civica of Pavia a copy of the \textit{Muḥtasar lam‘a fi al-naḥw} by Ibn al-Ḡinnī (d. 1002) is kept\textsuperscript{20}. Also in the library of Hararian amīr Muḥammad b. `Alī b. 'Abd al-Ṣakur (1272–92/1856–75), manuscripts of Arabic grammar were represented\textsuperscript{21}.

More recently, books on Arabic grammar originally published in Egypt were brought to Ethiopia and reprinted in Addis Ababa by local Islamic publishing houses. This fact illustrates the exceptional interest of Ethiopian Muslims in the study of this language.

In 1419/1998–99 the \textit{Nağāsh} printing press in Addis Ababa published an impressive collection of Arabic grammatical texts under the title \textit{Mağmu‘at al-ṣarf}, containing five different works on Arabic morphology and syntax (see appendix 5 for details)\textsuperscript{22}.

Subsequently, the same editor issued four well-known Arabic works expounding on subjects contained in the \textit{ Ağurrumiiyya} and in some of its commentaries. They are highly elaborate \textit{ḥāfiya} (gloss) and \textit{ṣarb} (commentary) texts (see appendix 5 for the complete list of these books).

In 2002 \textit{Nağāş} also printed a contemporary commentary to the \textit{ Ağurrumiiyya}, conceived as a sort of schoolbook for beginners, the \textit{Tuḥfa al-saniyya bi-ṣarb al-muqaddima al- ağurrumiiyya} by Muḥammad Muḥyī al-Dīn 'Abd al-Ḥamīd\textsuperscript{23}.

\textsuperscript{16} GAL II: 23–25; GAL S II: 16–20.
\textsuperscript{17} GAL II: 23, 381; GAL S II: 16–7, 512. The work is a commentary on the other handbook by Ibn Hišām the \textit{Qaṣr al- nadas wa-ball al-sada‘}.
\textsuperscript{18} Manuscript Harar n. 23: JOMIER (1967: 288); GAL I: 299; GAL S I: 523.
\textsuperscript{19} Manuscript Harar 23: see JOMIER (1967: 288); GAL II: 140–1; GAL S II: 174–5.
\textsuperscript{20} Ms. 12, ff. 9–12: see TRAINI (1973: 858).
\textsuperscript{21} DREWES (1983: 75, 77).
\textsuperscript{22} The \textit{Nağāsh} edition reproduces that of the \textit{Maṭba‘at Muṣṭafâ al-Bābî al-Ḥalabî} printed in Cairo 1340/1921–2.
\textsuperscript{23} The book was completed by the author in Ramaḍān 1353/1934–5. The pedagogical aim of the text is evident from the series of simple questions at the end of each chapter, meant to facilitate the reader’s revision of the studied subjects.
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Commentaries to textbooks of Arabic grammar were also authored by Ethiopian Muslim learned men. Some of them remain unpublished, while others have been printed in Ethiopia or abroad: e.g., ṣaqīb Zubayr of Yāğgu wrote a commentary to the Āğurrumiyya; ṣayh Ibrāhīm ʿAbd al-Razzāq of Yāğgu commented the Alfiyya of Ibn Mālik, and Muḥammad Amūn of Dawway wrote a commentary to the Āğurrumiyya titled al-Maqāṣid al-waṣfiyya fi ṣarḥ al-āğurrumiyya.24

Ethiopian Muslim scholars have uninterruptedly attended to the study of Arabic grammar. Last year (1427h), in Adaamaa/Nazret, Maktabat Badr printing press published the Namīr al-sāfī bi-ṣarḥ sawāhid al-kāfi fi ʾilmay al-ʿarūd wa-al-qawāfī, a booklet by Muḥammad b. Ḥāmī al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Ṣamād al-Burānī, a young living Ethiopian learned man.25 It is a commentary on the sawāhid (lości probantes; probative verses) on which the rules of the famous handbook on prosody and rhyme al-Kāfi fi ʾilmay al-ʿarūd wa-al-qawāfī26 are based.

The two contemporary learned men who I chose as a case study for this paper—ṣayh ʿAbd al-Bāṣīt b. Muḥammad b. Ḥasan al-Mināṣ and ṣayḥ Muḥammad Amūn b. Abdallāh al-Ityūbī al-Harārī al-Muḥammadī—are the most convincing proof of this continuous traditional interest. An analysis of their biographies and works will hopefully contribute to shed light on some aspects of the traditional Islamic learning in contemporary Ethiopia. It will also give us a more precise idea of the corpus of doctrine Muslim teachers focus their attention in the field of Arabic grammar and other related subjects on. I believe it can also help enhance our prosopographical knowledge of Muslim learned men which is still very limited and vague.

The main source for the biography of ṣayḥ ʿAbd al-Bāṣīt b. Muḥammad b. Ḥasan al-Mināṣ is the biographical note (targāma) by Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. ʿAḍām b. Musā al-Ityūbī (sic!) al-Wallawī contained in his commentary on the ʿayḥ’s principal work on Arabic grammar, Madani al-ḥabīb minman yuwalī muğnī al-labīb, recently published in Addis Ababa.28

24 Published in Cairo according to HUSSEIN (1988: 101 and 105 note 50).
26 Al-Kāfi fi ʾilmay al-ʿarūd wa-al-qawāfī is a much renowned work by Ḥādī b. Ḥābīb al-Qināʿī (d. 1454); GAL II: 27; GAL S II: 22.
27 I have already briefly presented this scholar in GORI (2005: 89–92) using a very short Amharic article which appeared in the Islamic Ethiopian magazine Bilāl (1, 10, 1985 E.C., 21–22).
28 The commentary is titled Fath al-qarīb al-muɡīb fi ṣarḥ kitāb madani al-ḥabīb. It is a two-volume set published in 2003 in Addis Ababa by Maktabat Muṣʿab b. ʿUmāyir in
In this *tarāğama*, ʿAbd al-Bāṣīt is honoured by many praising terms, some of which are directly referred to his exceptional knowledge of Arabic grammar. He is termed *al-nabwī al-luğawī, sulṭān qawā'id luqāt al-ʿarab, ḥalīl zamānīb*29, and *Sibawayh awānīb*30.

According to his own words, *sāḥib* ʿAbd al-Bāṣīt was born in the village of Minās (Borana – Wollo), four years before the battle of Sāgāle (1328H/1908). He first received the basic education in his village from his father: in particular, he was introduced into *fiqh* (Jurisprudence) according to the *sāḥīfī* school of Law. As customary in traditional Islamic education, he then left his native Minās to look for famous teachers in the different branches of Muslim learning.

*Ṣaḥīb* ʿAbd al-Bāṣīt thus went to Yaṣulā and studied Law under the guidance of ʿAlī Daqār: in particular, he was taught the *Ṣawwāt al-zubdāb*, the *alsīya* on *sāḥīfī fiqh* by Ibn Raslān (d. 1440)31. He continued his legal studies in Bulbul with *ṣaḥīb* ʿAbd al-Salām al-Bulbulī al-Sarrī, but he then turned to what was to become his main field of specialization: Arabic grammar. He travelled to Darrā (northern Shoa) where he started deepening his knowledge of Arabic with *ṣaḥīb* al-sāḥīfī al-ḥāḡāḥ Ḥāmād b. ʿUmar al-Sankārī (*nazīl* Darrā), father of the famous *ṣaḥīb* Muḥammad Wale32. He stayed there for 15 years, learning all the branches of the grammatical science: *nabw*, *ṣarīf*, *balāḡa*, *ʿarūḍ* and *qāfīya*. He was also taught *manṭiq* (logic) and apparently some general elements of the *fiqh* according to the *hānafī* school, as *ṣaḥīb* Ḥāmād was *hānafī*. *Ṣaḥīb* ʿAbd al-Bāṣīt obtained the *iḏāḥā* (permission to teach) from *ṣaḥīb* Ḥāmād in all the subjects he studied with him, and returned to Minās.

In his native town he started teaching Arabic, an activity he pursued until his death. After 45 years in Minās he moved to Addis Ababa where he taught for 15 more years. During his 60-years-long career, he had an enormous number of students: their list in the *tarāğama* contains the names of almost all the most famous representatives of contemporary Ethiopian Muslim intelligentsia, including Muḥammad Wale, *ṣaḥīb* Saʿīd b. Yusuf b. Maḥṣūr, *ṣaḥīb* Ḥāmād b. Ibrāhīm *iḥām* of the *gāmī* of Arāb Ganda in Dessie, *ṣaḥīb* Saʿīd Ḥasan Šīfāʾ al-Salutī, and many others.


29 ʿḤallī of his times*: the reference is to ʿḤallī b. Ḥāmād (d. 791 or 786 or 776) the most famous grammarian of Arabic: R. Sellheim, “ʿḤallī b. Ḥāmād, al”, in: *EI*, IV, 1962–64.
30 “Sibawayh of his times”: Sibawayh (d. ca. 796) disciple of ʿḤallī, one of the great ancient theoreticians of Arabic grammar: M.G. Carter, “Sibawayhī” in: *EI*, IX, 962–64.
31 ʿSiḥāb al-Dīn Āḥmad b. Raslān al-Ramlī is the author of the *sawwāt al-zubdāb* handbook of Law according to the *sāḥīfī* school in ca. 1000 raḡāz verses, based on the Kitāb al-zubdāb by al-Bārizī (GAL: II: 96; GAL S II: 113).
32 Some biographical information about *ṣaḥīb* al-ḥāḡāḥ Āḥmad b. ʿUmar can be found in Muḥammad Wale 1425/2004: 85–93.
At a certain point, šayḥ ʿAbd al-Bāṣīṭ also had the opportunity to go to Gaddo to study ḫadīṣ with ḥāfīz Kābir Ṭāḥim b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Dawwawī: under his guidance he studied parts of the kutūb al-sīṭa and the Ḥāmiṣ al-ṣaḡīr by al-Suyūṭī (d. 1505)\(^3\).

The šayḥ died in 1413/1992–3. In his long life he produced many written works, especially poetry in raḡaz verse, most of which are still unpublished (see appendix I for a list).

Among them, one may find a nazm (versification) of the famous Muqaddima al-ḥadramiyya on the ṣaḥīḥ fiqh, the most common Law handbook in Ethiopia ṣāḥīḥ school; an urğūza on ʿaqīda called al-Durr al-faḥīd fi ʿaqīdat al-tawbīd; and another urğūza criticizing qāt and its use. He wrote also in Amharic: the source mentions a text on virtues of prayer.

In the field of Arabic grammar he wrote a nazm of the famous Marāb al-arwāḥ; the Urğūzaṭ al-taṣrīf, an urğūza muzdawiqa in 817 verses on verbal conjugation and derivation\(^4\); and his masterpiece, Madanī al-habīb mīm-mīm yuwwalī muğni al-labīb\(^3\). On this work he wrote also a commentary under the title Kitāb minhāǧ al-usūl ilā bayān al-furuʿ bi-al-usūl which was completed in 1401/1980–81. Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. ʿĀdīm b. Musā, son of one of the students of šayḥ ʿAbd al-Bāṣīṭ, composed a huge commentary on Madanī al-habīb, the above mentioned Fatḥ al-qarīb al-muğīb.

The Madanī al-habīb is formally an urğūza muzdawiqa made up of 2,276 verses. It is inspired by the famous Muğni al-labīb, and is in fact an abridged poetic version of the latter. Like Ibn Ḥiṣām’s treatise, it is organized into eight chapters: 1) al-muṭadāt; 2) al-ḏum;l; 3) mā yuṣbih al-ḏumla (al-ṣa[r]; garr wa-maḡrur); 4) al-muṭadāt wa-al-ḥabar, al-ḥāl and al-ʿaṭf; 5) al-ḥadīṯ; 6) correction of common errors of the grammarians; 7) kayṣīyyat al-ʿrāb; 8) general remarks on sentence construction.

Madanī al-habīb thus covers all the main topics of Arabic grammar and deals with them in detail. As the text is conceived as a nazm (poetic version) of another matn book (in prose), every subject is treated directly, and in a simple and clear style. Of course, like many of these traditional grammatical handbooks in verse, Madanī al-habīb suffers from its very condensed structure and from its tendency to use a very concise way to present the grammatical rules: each rule is actually contained within a single verse written in

\(^{33}\) GAL II: 147; GAL S II: 183.

\(^{34}\) This work was commented upon by Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. Ādīm. The commentary was published under the title Fatḥ al-ḥarīm al-latīf ṣa[r] urğūzaṭ al-taṣrīf in 2005 in Addis Ababa by Maktubat Muṣʿab b. ʿUmayr in co-operation with Muʾassasat al-kutūb al-taṣqafīyya of Beirut.

\(^{35}\) Published in Addis Ababa in 2003 by Maktubat Muṣʿab b. ʿUmayr in co-operation with Muʾassasat al-kutūb al-taṣqafīyya of Beirut.
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a compendious style full of references to the Holy Book and of partial quotations of its passages, so that it is often very difficult to understand the grammatical content implied in the poetical text.

However, this is the common traditional way of exposition followed by grammarians to collect and explain grammar and syntax rules: the use of verse is also the standard, as it is believed to make it easier for the students to memorize the text.

Sayh ʿAbd al-Bāšīṭ with his Madanī al-habīb exactly reproduces the structure and the content of his model, and in doing this he contributes to preservation of what one may term the ancient tradition of teaching Arabic grammar in Ethiopia.

The biography of the second sayh, Muḥammad Amīn b. ʿAbdallāh al-Ityūbī al-Haraqī al-Muḥāmmadi, can be elicited from the short tārīgama contained in the preface to his al-Bākura al-ḡinīyya min qīṭāf ʿrāb al-ḡurrumīyya.

Sayh Muhammad Amīn b. ʿAbdallāh b. Yusuf was born in 1348/1929–30 in the village of Buwayta. He is given also the nisba al-haraqī (mintaqatan; his region) and Karrt (nābiyatan; his area). As usual, he had his basic education in his native village and its surroundings until he was 14. He then started the traditional long tour of the main Muslim educational centres studying with several different teachers in the various subjects of traditional Islamic education.

First he attended the courses of sayh Abu Muḥammad Musa b. Ahmad al-Adayyilt, Sibawayh zamāni, where he studied all the branches of Arabic grammar (al-funan al-ʿarabiyya), nabw, sarf, balāqa, ṣarud, as well as some logical-philosophical subjects, including mantiq, maqulat and waṭāʾ. He also studied some tafsīr (Koranic commentary) with this same teacher.

36 Published in 2003 in Addis Ababa by Maktabat Muṣab b. ʿUmayr al-islāmiyya. The tārīgama is on pp. alif-ḡim.

37 It is worth noting that this sayh was given the same eulogizing epithet as sayh ʿAbd al-Bāšīṭ.

38 It is interesting to note that in this case the teacher of Arabic grammar is also the teacher of logic and philosophy: the formal and theoretical aspects common to both subjects are apparently the reason for their being taught together and by the same person. Also manuscripts sometimes contain grammatical alongside logical treatises: see Drewes (1983: 77) for a manuscript including Ibn Malik’s Alfiyya followed by al-Aḥḍar’s Sullam on logic. For a survey of the relationships between grammar and logic in Islam see MAHDI 2007.
Muḥammad Amīn continued his education studying ʿtasīr and more ʿarūd with ʿayy Ḥibrīn b. Yāsīn al-Maqṣūṭ (called ʿal-ṣayḥ al-bāwi ʾmufassir zamānīḥ). In the second subject, he learned from ʿayy Ḥibrīn the ḥaṣiyat al-Damānḫurī al-kubra ʿalā maṭn al-kāfī39, the commentary by al-Anṣārī on the Manṣūmat al-ḥazraṯiyyya40, and the commentary by al-Šabbān on his Manṣūmat al-ʿarūd41. He also continued his education in logic and rhetoric.

He subsequently passed to the faṣīḥ ʿayy Yusuf b. ʿUṯmān al-Warqī with whom he studied Law according to the faṣīḥ school on the commentary of Ǧālāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī on the Minhāǧ42, the Fath al-Wadhāḥ by al-Anṣārī43, and ʿMaǧnūʿ al-muḥtaḏ by al-Ḥāṯīb44. He continued his juridical education under the guidance of ʿayy Ḥibrīn al-Muqṭī with whom he studied the Fath al-Gawād ʿalā al-ʾIrād by ʿĪbān Ḥaḍar al-Ḥaytamī45. His next teacher was ʿayy al-ḥāḍīṯ Aḥmad Ḥibrīn al-Karrī, with whom he studied ḥadīṯ on the Ṣabīḥān and iṣṭīḥāṭ46. He eventually completed his cursus studiorum with ʿayy ʿAbdallāḥ Nur al-Qāṣī with whom he learned

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39 The gloss by Muḥammad al-Damānḫurī (d. 1871) on the already mentioned text of al-Kāfī fi ʾilmay al-ʿarūd wa-al-qawāṣfī by Ḥanāfī: GAL II: 27; GAL S II: 22.
40 Zakariyyāʾ b. Muhammad b. al-Anṣārī (d. 1511 or 1520) is the author of a commentary on the Rāmīṣa al-ṣāfiya fi ʾilm al-ʿarūd wa-al-qawāṣfī, the famous work on prosody by Muḥammad al-Ḥaṣraṯī, also called al-Qaṣīḍa al-Ḥaṣraṯiyyya: GAL I: 100, 312; GAL S I: 545.
41 ʿAbū al-ʿIrāf Muhammad b. ʿAlī al-ṣabīḥ (d. 1792) is the author of a much appreciated manṣūma on prosody called al-Ṣāfiya al-kāfiya fi ʾilm al-ʿarūd, on which he wrote also a commentary: GAL II: 288; GAL S I: 399–400.
42 Ǧālāl al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Maḥallī (d. 1459) wrote one of the many commentaries on the Minhāǧ al-talībīn by al-Nawawī (d. 1278), which is by far the most famous and most widely spread handbook of faṣīḥ fiqh in the entire Horn of Africa: GAL I: 395; GAL II: 114; GAL S I: 681.
43 Fath al-wadhāḥ is the title of the commentary that Zakariyyāʾ b. Muḥammad b. al-Anṣārī (s. note 40) wrote on the Minhāǧ al-talībīn: GAL I: 395; GAL S I: 681.
44 Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Ṣirbīnī al-Ḥaẓīb (d. 1569) is the author of the Muğnī al-muḥtaḏ, a commentary on the Minhāǧ al-talībīn: GAL I: 395; GAL II: 320; GAL S I: 681; GAL S II: 441.
45 Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Ibn Ḥaḍar al-Ḥaytamī (or al-ḥaytamī: d. 1563) is the author of the Fath al-gawād fi šarḥ al-Irād, which is a commentary on the famous Law handbook of the faṣīḥ school called Irād al-gawā bi masālik al-bāwi by Ismāʿīl b. Aḥī Bakr al-Muqīrī al-Yamanī (d. 1433). The latter is, in turn, an abridged version of the Ḥāwī al-saḡīr fi al-fatāwa by al-Qazwīnī (d. 1266; GAL I: 394; GAL II: 190; GAL II: 387–389; GAL S I: 679; GAL S II: 527–529).
46 The text also hints to the fact that he studied with some anonymous ʿayy-s the four ʿSunan and the Muʿawwataʾ by Mālik b. Anas: this is particularly interesting as the mālikī school of Law is scarcely present in Ethiopia.
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At the end of his educational travels, he managed to collect a great number of iṣgaza in all fields of Islamic learning.

Ŝayb Muhammad Amīn left Ethiopia in 1398/1977–78 to Saudi Arabia where he still lives. He teaches in the Dār al-hadż al-hayriyya in Aqyäd. He is also a “night teacher” in the Masgid al-harâm in Mecca.

His works are many and they cover every field of Islamic learning (see appendix 2 for their list). Most of them are still unpublished. Here I consider in some detail only his grammatical production.

In the field of nabha, he expounded various aspects of the Āğurrumiyya in three commentaries:


As the titles of his books show, Ŝayb Muhammad Amîn is essentially guided by a didactic spirit. At least two of his works are expressly addressed to youngsters. This pedagogical aim leads him to write very plain and clear prose commentaries to the most widely spread handbooks of Arabic grammar. In doing this, he apparently follows a modern approach to the subjects he is dealing with: the style he uses and the way he explains the sometimes very

47 The great Islamic theologian Mas’ûd b. ‘Uμr al-Taftazâní (d. 1389 or 1390; GAL II: 215; GAL S II: 301–304) authored two commentaries (a longer one – Šarh muṣawâd – and a shorter one – Šarh muḥtasâr) on the Taḥâṣn al-miṣâb by al-Ḥâṣib al-Qâzîwînî (d. 1338; GAL II: 22; GAL S II: 15–16), which is a commentary of the third book (dealing with ‘ilm al-ma‘ānî wa-al-bayân) of the Miṣâb al-‘ālîm by Yûsuf al-Sakkâkî (d. 1229; GAL I: 294–296; GAL S I: 515–519).

48 Al-Badr al-talîs fi ṣall ġamî‘ al-ġawamî‘ by the mentioned Ġalâl al-Dîn al-Mâhâlî is a much appreciated commentary on the ṣâfî’s fiqh handbook Ġamî‘ al-ġawamî‘ by Taq al-Dîn al-Subkî (d. 1370; GAL II: 89–90; GAL II: 114; GAL S II: 105–107; GAL S II: 140).


50 Published in Addis Ababa together with the abovementioned al-Bâkûra al-ġiniyya.
confusing aspects of the traditional Arabic grammatical theories are very simple and far from rhetorical concerns. The use of prose is also very peculiar and somehow modern as it breaks with the traditional \textit{nazm} composition: this is the path also followed by other contemporary authors, as the above mentioned Muḥammad b. Ḥāfīz al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-#abād al-Burānī.

One may argue whether \textit{sayh} Muḥammad Amīn has been influenced by modern educational methods which started spreading in Ethiopia like elsewhere in the Islamic world. The fact that he rewrote his two published commentaries while he was in Mecca$^{51}$ may suggest that a modernizing influence was exerted on his approach to the grammatical subjects, since in Saudi Arabia contemporary pedagogical methods are very often applied to and intermingled with traditional educational syllabi and curricula.

Generally speaking, it is difficult to foresee today the evolution of traditional Islamic education in Ethiopia (and in the Horn as a whole) in the next few years, especially in the field of Arabic grammar. It is evident that the model of modern organized and standardized school and high school educational systems will be more and more influential on traditional Muslim centres of learning. The growth of institutionalized colleges (like the Awelia [al-Awwaliyya] College in Addis Ababa) seems to be a consequence of this kind of influence.

One may only hope that this modernizing tendency will not completely rule out the rich and amazing variety of the traditional corpus of handbooks, commentaries and glosses with their sometimes complicated but always fascinating style and structure, but, on the contrary, will help to keep this heritage alive and productive, so that it may continue to nourish the minds and spirits of students and learned men.

\textbf{Bibliography and bibliographical abbreviations}


$^{51}$This is clearly stated on page tā‘ of the tarğama in the Bâkîra al-ğaniyya and on page 139 of the Taḥník al-astfâl.
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Appendix

Appendix 1: List of the works by ʿAbd al-Bāṣīt b. Muḥammad b. Ḥasan al-Minātī as mentioned in his tarqama

al-Durr al-farid fi ‘aqidat al-tawḥīd;
Kitāb minhāg al-usul ʿala bayān al-furūʿ bi-al-usul;
Madāni al-halib mimman yuwālī mughni al-labīb;
Naẓm lubb al-usul fi ṣann al-usul;
Naẓm marāb al-arwaḥ;
Naẓm al-muqaddima al-hadramiyya;
Naẓm nābbat al-fikr;
Urğuzat fi ḍamm al-qāʿit;
Urğuzat al-taṣrif.

Appendix 2: List of the works by ʿAbd Muḥammad Amtīn as mentioned in his tarqama

In grammar and syntax:
al-Bākura al-ġantīyya min qīṣāf ʿrāb al-ḡurrumīyya;
al-Ṣuṭuḥat al-qayyimīyya fi ʿīlāl wa-dawābīt al-ḡurrumīyya;
al-Ḥarīda al-bayhīyya fi ṣābīl amṭīlat al-ḡurrumīyya;
Ḥašṣīya ʿalā kaṣf al-naqāb ʿalā mulḥat al-ṣrāb;
Ḡawāhir al-taʿālimat ʿalā ʿrāb al-taqrīzāt liʿUṭmān Ṣaṭār;

In fiqh:
Ḥašṣīya ʿalā fath al-ḡawād li-Ibn Ḥašār;

In ʿilm al-hadīṣ:
Ḥidāyat al-taqālib al-muʿdim ʿalā ḍibāḥat al-muṣlim (sic!);
al-Nāḥr al-ḡarī ʿalā tārāṣīm wa-muṣkilat al-buḥārī.

In muṣṭalab:
al-Bākura al-ḥadiṣīyya ʿalā maṭn al-bayyānīyya.52

In ṣafar:
Miḵšāf al-zalmaa “alā ṣawāḥībat al-asmā (mawṣuma fi asmā Allāh al-ḥusnā);
ʿUmdat al-ṣafar wa-al-muʾribīn ʿalā kitāb ṭabb al-ʿalamīn.

In ʿilm al-riḡāl:
Ḥulāsat al-qawāl al-muṣṭim fī taraṣīm riḡāl al-muṣlim (sic!).

Appendix 3: List of the handbooks used in traditional Islamic education according to our two sources

Ṣafwat al-zubad (= Ṣihāb al-Dīn Ahmad b. Râslân al-Râmiṭī, Ṣafwat al-zubad, 1000 rağaz verses based on the Kitāb al-zubad by al-Bârizī);

Published in 2005 in Addis Ababa by Maṭṭabat Muʿā ṣ b. ʿUmāyr in cooperation with Muʿassasat al-ḵutub al-taqāṣīyya of Beirut.

52 Aethiopica 11 (2008)
Appendix 4: List of some of the main handbooks of Arabic grammar traditionally used in Islamic learning centres

Alfiyya and Lāmiyyat al-af'al [or Kūṭāb al-misfāh fī āniyyat al-af'āl] by Ibn Malik (d. 1273);
Marāb al-arwāh by Ahmad b. 'Alt b. Mas'ūd (beginning of 14th century);
Maṣūb al-nidār 'ālā qaṭr al-nadda' by 'Alī al-Din 'Alt b. Aḥmad al-Fākihi al-Makki al-Sāfīr al-Nāhi (d. 1564);
Muqni al-lāhib an kuṭub al-qāri' by 'Abdallāh b. Ḥišām (d. 1360);
Muḥtasār al-imāma fī al-nabwī by Ibn al-Ġinni (d. 1002);
Muḥtab al-ṭārīb by al-Ḥarīrī (d. 1054);
al-Muqaddima al-Āğurrūmiyya Abu Abdallāh Muḥammad b Dāwūd al-Šanḥāgī b. Āğurrūm (d. 1323);
Ṣarḥ al-masālik li-Alfiyyat Ibn Malik by Abu Muḥammad 'Abdallāh b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Aqīl;
Ṣarḥ al-taḥsyf al-uṣāriyya al-manṣūma fī 'ilm al-ṣarḥ fī ṣubḥ yān al-Dīn ‘Umar b. al-Wardī (d. 1349);
Hāsiyyat al-Damānhūrī al-kaḥra 'ālā matn al-kaḥfī (= Muḥammad al-Damānhūrī [d. 1871], gloss on the al-ṣāḥīf al-tūlah al-sūrād wa-al-qawfī by al-'Qinā‘ī);
Ṣarḥ al-Anṣārī 'ālā Manṣūmat al-ḥāraqiyya (= Zakariyyā‘ b. Muḥammad b. al-Anṣārī [d. 1511 or 1520], commentary on the al-Rāmiib ašrāfīyya fī 'ilm al-ṣarḥ wa-al-qāfiyya al-Qāṣīḍa al-ḥazraqfīyya by Muḥammad al-qāzīrī);
Ṣarḥ al-Ṣabāḥīn 'ālā Manṣūmat al-ṣarḥī (=Abū al-'Irāf Muḥammad b. Ṭālīb al-Ṣabbāh [d. 1792], manṣūmat al-ṣāḥīf al-kāfīyya fī 'ilm al-ṣarḥī);
Ṣarḥ al-Ṭawāafīh al-ḥanīyya 'ālā muṣannafūt al-Āğurrūmīyya by 'Abdallāh b. Aḥmad al-Fākihi (d. 1564);
Ṣarḥ al-taḥṣīl al-Taftāzānī (d. 1389 or 1390), sarḥ muṣawwāl and sarḥ muḥtasār on Talḥīs al-misfāh by al-ḥaṭṭīb al-Qazwīnī (d. 1338).

Appendix 5: List of the handbooks of Arabic grammar currently available on book market in Ethiopia

Faṭḥ raḥb al-baṭiriyya 'ālā al-duwra al-babīyya nāzīm al-āṣūrūniyya by Ibrāhim al-Baṣīrī (d. 1861), gloss on the al-Durrā al-babīyya fī nāzīm al-āṣūrūniyya by Šīhāb al-Dīn Yahyā al-'Ismīrī, d. 1568);
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Mağmu’at al-sarf, including 1) al-Šāfīyya by Ibn-al-Ḥāqib (d. 1249)53; 2) Masāh al-awwāb by Ahmad b. ‘Ali b. Mas’ud (floruit beginning of 14th century) 54; 3) Kitāb al-Iṣṭi (Kitāb ṣārīf al-Zanqāni or al-Iṣṣi or Mahādi al-tasrif) by ‘Izz al-Dīn Abu al-Fadā’il ‘Abd al-Wahhab b. ‘Abūl-Hārām al-Zanqānt (floruit 1257)55; 4) Maqṣūd fi al-tasrif, anonymous but attributed to Abu Ḥanifa56; and 5) the anonymous series of verbal paradigms on the basis of the verb nasara called Amṭila muṣḥalifā.

Šarḥ al-sayyid Ahmad Zaynī Darān’ al-matn al-ġāṣṣrūmiyya, Addīs Abāba: Nağāšt, šafar 1421/2000, commentary on the ġāṣṣrūmiyya by Ahmad Zaynī Darān’ sāfī muṣṭi of Mecca (d. 1886)57;


Summary

The article deals with the study of two contemporary Muslim Ethiopian scholars (ṣayḥ ‘Abd al-Bāṣīt b. Muḥammad b. Ḥasan al-Minnāt and ṣayḥ Muḥammad Aṭṭin b. ‘Abdallāh al-Ḥiyūb al-Ḥarārī al-Maḥammadī) to the study of Arabic grammar. The position of this subject in the curricula of traditional Islamic education in Ethiopia is shortly described from both a diachronic and a synchronic perspective. The biography of the two learned men is analyzed with a special emphasis on the different phases of their training and on the literary outcomes of their activity. Finally, the main handbooks used in the Islamic educational centres in Ethiopia are listed to give the reader a clear idea of the frame in which the aspiring ṣayḥ-s and their masters study and teach.

54 GAL I: 21; GAL S II: 14.
55 See GAL I: 283; GAL S I: 497–8.
56 GAL S II: 657.
58 GAL I: 380, GAL S II: 512. The original edition was printed in Cairo at Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabi printing press in 1343/1924–25.
59 GAL I: 238, GAL S II: 334.