

# [A History of the Hadiyya in Southern Ethiopia](#)

Translated from German by Geraldine Krause

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Aethiopistische Forschungen  
Band 77

# Aethiopistische Forschungen

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## Preface

There are very few existing studies that deal with the history of illiterate ethnic groups or peoples in Africa<sup>1</sup> setting down their origins and development up to the present. Some of these studies do not go beyond a descriptive succession of historical and ethnographical materials, but they are nevertheless highly valuable as sources. Others additionally give comprehensive insights into the cultural history of the respective groups.

Whereas treatises on political groups (for both the pre-colonial epoch and that of modern state formation following the colonial demarcation of boundaries), as well as those on geographical regions – often restricted to certain time frames – gained increasing significance in academic literature, it is the monographic accounts of the history of ethnic groups which have not become a specialised field of study for cultural anthropologists and historians respectively. Regarding the first-mentioned academic scholars there was, due to the discipline's given focus of attention on a synchronic perspective, often a lack of interest in this type of study as well as the adequate methodological know-how. The latter, researchers who primarily orientated themselves towards relying on written records, lacked the willingness to augment the sketchy body of materials through field studies, and thereby did not open themselves up to new source areas. The specific conditions as to how studies exist thematically and contextually for illiterate peoples take for granted both historically-compiled subtle source analysis as well as field research. It is difficult to meet the requirements for both domains and undoubtedly parts of this work may appear deficient in accordance with assessment criteria of cultural anthropology or history respectively. The fact that the study deals largely with a historical documentation in a *terra incognita* certainly increases the methodological difficulties.

Considering the scope of a world history like that of Arnold J. TOYNBEE (1951/61, II: 365), Ethiopia existed only as the literate Christian Empire of the north, surrounded by a world of "African Barbarism" and thus hardly able to preserve its singular identity. Southern Ethiopia, inhabited by illiterate non-Christian peoples, was part of that "barbaric" world which did not reach the level of an "advanced civilization" characterized, for example, by the possession of a script. That such a perception meant a factually and morally serious discrimination for the greater part of the world obviously has found too little attention in the field of occidental historiography to the present-day. What has been written about Africa mainly concerns studies on colonial history where historians can revert to a fund of written records, so that their research is not fundamentally different from historical scholarship con-

1 Such works have come out, just to mention some prominent examples, on the Yoruba (JOHNSON 1921), Sudan-Arabs (MACMICHAEL 1922[1967]), Zulu (BRYANT 1929), Bambara (TAUXIER 1942), Beja (PAUL 1954), Bemba (ROBERTS 1973) and Kuba (VANSINA 1977).

cerned with European territories. The limitation of source materials in this particular context means that research is mainly focussing on the history of European expansion in “overseas” territories in which particularly Africans are more or less reduced to the role of objects in the contact between two antagonistic cultural worlds. Up to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the indigenous inhabitants of this continent south of the Sahara hardly appear as creative subjects in the process of their own history in which the European part was reduced to taking an interest as foreign observers and chroniclers.

The focus of this work is the analysis and interpretation of the oral traditions in which the Hadiyya preserved their people’s past. For the more recent periods of history, particularly from the time of the Italian occupation (1936), there are undoubtedly more written records to be discovered which promise important additions to the fragmentary state of the research presented here.

There seem to be no principal differences in the historiographic methodology regarding literate and illiterate societies. The interrelations of an individualised and a generalised approach necessarily apply to both of them and have to be continuously revised.<sup>2</sup> The individualised or ideographic method derives its criteria from the subject itself, such as a local chronicle, the descriptive account of a traveller, or an oral tradition. The respective sources of information are in each case interpreted for their singularity with all the available background data in terms of the prevailing ideas of the respective time as well as personal concurrent circumstances. The hermeneutic approach, which tries to elaborate the criteria of interpretation by means of a “feedback effect” between a respective subject and its perception, has obviously not yet been advanced enough with regard to illiterate cultures. It can, however, principally be applied in a way which is usual with Europe-oriented historical research. Terms like “holy war” (of the Muslims in the Horn of Africa in the 16<sup>th</sup> century) or the *gäbbar* system, are examples of “individual totalities” which should not be left in their hermeneutic circle but must rather be comprehended as elements naturally involving a larger historical context.

Admittedly, this study must be partly bound to an individualistic perspective due to the situation of the source materials (chronicles of individual rulers; informants with above-average knowledge). But it nevertheless endeavours to embark on a type of typology where groups of people such as ethnic units replace individual personalities as active and incentive entities. This will be returned to once again later (see chap. 2.2).

It goes without saying that the history of the Hadiyya cannot be separately analysed from the Northeast African cultural, historical and ethnic framework as a whole. This implies the use of certain generalised terms like “Pan-Ethiopic” for

2 Since the first edition of the book on Hadiyya history new stimulating methodological research has been carried out by authors such as MILLER (1980), HENIGE (1982), VANSINA (1985), JONES (1990), just to mention some of the most prominent scholars.

cultural and social phenomena which exist in more or less similar patterns all over the area.<sup>3</sup>

As for ethno-sociological termini, a comprehensive discussion about their definitions will not be aimed at here just as little as an analysis of their contents. This is reserved for a study on the culture of the Hadiyya.<sup>4</sup> For an understanding of the historical conditions, it is however necessary to summarize some of the important facts. The Hadiyya, who are the subject of this study, are not a homogeneous people but are rather sub-divided into a number of ethnic groups partly with different languages and cultural affiliations. They were initially all inhabitants of a political entity, a kind of state, which in the four centuries following its break-down became remarkably diverse. The Libidoo (Maräqo), Leemo, Sooro, Shaashoogo and Baadawwaachcho remained a language entity and preserved an identity of oneness, the Hadiyya proper; whereas the Qabeena, Allaaba, parts of the East-Gurage as well as descendants of an old Hadiyya stratum living with the Oromo and Sidaama, developed separate ethnic identities.

All of the groups mentioned, which can now be defined as ethnic unities, are composed of patrilineal clans named after prominent forbears. These clans, as local and exogamous entities, are sub-divided into lineages settling together in districts or sub-districts.<sup>5</sup> In the course of turbulent periods of migration from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards, numerous processes of fusion and fission occurred. Several ethnic segments split up from moving groups thereafter frequently experiencing a separate historical development. Others were amalgamated into the body of neighbouring groups of superior power. Thus, processes of assimilation and proliferation steadily changed the ethnic situation in southern Ethiopia. The Hadiyya, who were to a large extent either split up or pushed westwards through new thrusts of people, are a marked example for how eventful the history of the African people was and is.

Those authors concerned with the history of Ethiopia before the 17<sup>th</sup> century located the settlements of the Hadiyya at that time at the upper Gibe (Omo)<sup>6</sup> where bearers of the name still live today. This localisation implies – not least because a gap of historical research existed in this area – the hypothesis of static ethnic-territorial conditions over a period of several hundred years. Our investigations refute the hitherto assumed continuity of these living areas and render an increasingly com-

3 Pan-Ethiopian traits were clearly defined and elaborated by LEVINE (1974:64, *passim*) in the context of “Greater Ethiopia” as a culture area. Cf. also GASCON (1995, Chapt. Introduction, *passim*) for stimulating ideas in this field.

4 A monograph entitled “Fandaanano: the traditional socio-religious system of the Hadiyya in southern Ethiopia” is being prepared (BRAUKÄMPER n.d.). This refers to the Hadiyya proper, i. e., the Leemo, Sooro, Weexo-giira, Shaashoogo, Baadawwaachcho and Libidoo.

5 Here the concepts of clan and lineage are basically those of Raymond FIRTH (1971:53) in British Social Anthropology. The patterns of social structure of the Hadiyya largely correspond to those of the neighbouring Gurage which were analysed by William SHACK (1969:69 ff., 143 ff.)

6 Cf., for example, PANKHURST 1961a: 109; TRIMMINGHAM 1965: 64; HUNTINGFORD 1965: 2; HUNTINGFORD 1969, map 4; TADDESSE TAMRAT 1972: 133.

plete picture of ethnic dynamics which can be depicted cartographically as far as possible.

I carried out the field study in Ethiopia during two stays there over a period of two and a half years altogether; from March 1970 to February 1971 and from September 1972 to March 1974. In order to research the history of the Hadiyya proper and the relationship to the tribes of Hadiyya descent, it proved necessary to enlarge the study to a bigger area inhabited by ethnic groups speaking different languages. I worked for approximately one and a half years with the inhabitants of the Kāmbata-Hadiya sub-province, around four months with the Arsi in the same-named province as well as in Šäwa and Bale, one or two months in each case with the Qabeena, Allaaba, East-Gurage, Sidaama and also with the Oromo in the Čärčär area.<sup>7</sup>

A difficult problem is posed by the transcription of indigenous terms in Ethiopian languages. Fortunately, the *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica* provides a voluminous corpus of names of persons, places and cultural phenomena, whose standardization can be employed for the field of “Pan-Ethiopian” terms mainly of Amharic and Gəʿəz background.<sup>8</sup> Many Cushitic- and Omotic-speaking ethnic unities followed the example of the Somali and the Oromo and are developing systems of Latin transcription of their own which are, however, neither fully compatible nor, in a number of cases, conclusively standardized. I therefore had to sometimes rely on dictionaries in the process<sup>9</sup> or on word lists which were checked for me by linguistically experienced speakers of the respective languages. Certain deficiencies in the field of orthography are therefore unavoidable. For the Arabic names and words I took the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (new. ed. 1960ff.) as an authoritative base. As it is common in anthropological literature, names of ethnic groups, clans and cultural terms in African languages are left in the singular, because pluralisation would be confusing in the different languages (e. g. *gaaxana*, pl. *gaaxanno'o* = war leader in Hadiyya; *balabbat*, pl. *balabbatoč* = landowner in Amharic). With regard to titles, sometimes different versions are employed, for example, *gärad* in Semitic and *garaad* in Cushitic languages.

7 During the regime of the *Provisional Military Administrative Council (Därg)* a continuation of field research in Ethiopia was impossible for me. That is why I transferred the area of my studies to the Republic of the Sudan in the 1980s and to north-eastern Nigeria during the first half of the 1990s. Since 1999 I have resumed new field studies in Ethiopia in order to complete my data for a monograph on the traditional culture of the Hadiyya and on issues of the recent past. In the context of these research programs new data of research on Hadiyyaland and neighbouring areas have been provided by Alke Dohrmann, Dirk Bustorf and Cathrin Horstmann.

8 UHLIG et al. (eds.), 2003-2010. The four volumes hitherto published range up to letter X.

9 For example, GUDISAANCHI HADIYYI ZOO'N LOSA'AN DEESKA (1996 Eth. Cal.).

## Preface to the Revised Edition

The original German version of my book on the history of the Hadiyya in southern Ethiopia was published in 1980. Because it was written in German, it was accessible to only a limited circle of readers who were interested in this topic. Over the past decades, I was repeatedly urged by Hadiyya intellectuals to provide a revised English version of the book which, as a next step, could be used as a base for a translation into their local language.

I am fully aware of the problem that the state of research has considerably changed since the German edition of the history of the Hadiyya was published. It goes without saying that in the new publication a thorough revision and a comprehensive view of the studies, which have been accomplished in the meanwhile, have been undertaken as much as possible. A new generation of scholars has arisen and the participation of Ethiopians in the *Sciences of Man*, particularly in cultural anthropology and history, is continuously advancing. Admittedly, the outcomes of works on the regions of concern in central-southern Ethiopia have not been exploited and analysed to the extent as would have been desirable.<sup>10</sup> However, although a number of substantial studies have appeared, the total contribution of works on the Hadiyya and related groups has remained of fairly limited size. I am therefore optimistic that this book may be of some use as a base for further research.

Some alterations have been made and some unfortunate errors have been corrected. I am obliged to the reviewers Reinhard Escher, Karl-Heinz Golzio, Virginia Luling, Roland Oliver, Günther Schlee, Heinrich Scholler, Bairu Tafla and Edward Ullendorff, who have forwarded suggestions for improvements concerning historical details and problems of chronology. I ask the pardon of those authors who were not acknowledged.

Although I eventually refer in the text or in footnotes to some events which have occurred after the publication of the book in 1980, it is by no means my intention to pursue the historical analysis beyond the 1970s to include the far-reaching political changes caused by the revolution of 1974, the consequences of land reforms, civil wars, villagization, resettlement, the collapse of the *Därg* regime and the rise to power of the EPRDM government in 1991. The completion of research up to the present day situation will be the task of a new generation of researchers in cultural anthropology, political studies and modern history.

<sup>10</sup> This refers, for example, to the numerous thoroughly analysed entries in the *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica* (2003-2010) with their enormous amount of information on historical, cultural and biographical subjects.