

ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY
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TIGRINYA *'AJAMĪ* ON NAJĀŠĪ
PHILOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF ŠAYḤ 'UMAR ABRAR'S
MANUSCRIPTS

BY
AMIRA ABDULKADIR

June, 2011

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Abstract

This thesis examines a manuscript in Tigrinya that is written in the Arabic script. A text in a non-Arabic language that is written in the Arabic script is known in Arabic as *‘ajamī*. The *‘ajamī* manuscript the thesis deals with focuses on the 7th-century king of Abyssinia, popularly called Najāšī by Muslims. He was contemporary with the Prophet Muḥammad. The manuscript was written by a Muslim clerical scholar of the Tigray region, Šayḥ ‘Umar Abrar, who lived in the last quarter of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. In addition to a detailed philological analysis of the manuscript on Najāšī, the thesis provides brief descriptions of fourteen other manuscripts of the Šayḥ. It is believed that this thesis constitutes the first scholarly treatment of Tigrinya *‘ajamī*.

Most of the manuscripts of Šayḥ ‘Umar are in Tigrinya *‘ajamī*; some are in Arabic and a few in Amharic *‘ajamī*. Apart from the one on Najāšī, the other manuscripts deal with such topics as inheritance, genealogy, jurisprudence and *Mawlid*.

Based on the manuscripts of Šayḥ ‘Umar, especially on the aspects concerning the emigrant companions of the Prophet who were welcomed by Najāšī, the thesis hopes to contribute to the history of Islam and Muslims in northern Ethiopia.

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Our lovely kids are source of optimism and encouragement to me. I am so grateful to our sons Huzeifa and Uways for sharing the responsibility of taking care of Ukasha and Meryem who were born during my postgraduate studies.

Dedicated

to

my mom,

W/o Zemzem Zeinu

and

my dad,

Hajj Abdulkadir Ibrahim

Tigrinya Consonants	Phonetic Symbols
ሀ	h
ለ	l
ሐ	ħ
መ	m
ረ	r
ሰ	s
ሸ	š
ቀ	k'
ቆ	k' ^w
ቐ	q
በ	b
ተ	t
ቸ	č
ነ	n
ኘ	ñ
አ	ʾ
ከ	k
ከ ^o	k ^w
ኸ	ħ
ኸ ^o	ħ ^w
ወ	w
ዐ	ʿ
ዘ	z
ዠ	ž
የ	y
ደ	d
ጀ	j
ገ	g
ገ ^o	g ^w
ጠ	ʈ
ጠ ^o	č'
ጸ	p'
ፀ	s'
ፈ	f
ፐ	p

Tigrinya Vowels

Vowel phoneme	Phonetic Symbol
አ	ä
ኡ	u
ኢ	i
አ	a
ኤ	e
አ	ə
አ	o

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.1 Background

The second semester of my first year, 2008, in the MA program of the Philology program was the time I started thinking about the topic I should focus on for my thesis. Along with my friends we decided to start with surveying the theses written by our seniors. While scanning through the theses I encountered beautiful contributions regarding Muslim clerics which indeed inspired me. Then I discussed with my friends as to how we should go about our studies. Consequently, there surfaced an idea; we decided to approach our undertakings from regional perspectives, that is, to focus on manuscripts and their producers who belong to the cultures, languages and ethnic groups we belong to. I found the idea quite sensible as my assumption was that almost nothing had been done so far on the contributions of Muslim clerics of the Tigray region. I considered myself fortunate and thought that I would bring a new entry into Ethiopian philology.

I consulted Ato Mohammed Seid, head of the Arabic Unit of AAU, who had successfully defended his thesis on a topic in Arabic philology in 2007. I asked him if he could help me in identifying a manuscript from the Tigray region. To my surprise, he showed me a copy of a manuscript in Tigrinya written in the Arabic script, that is, an *'ajamī* manuscript. He told me that the manuscript had not been studied and that I would be the first to work on it. I expressed my gratitude to him with a sense of relief. After browsing through the document I figured out that the author of the manuscript is one of those Muslim clerics who are popular in the Muslim community of Tigray. Instantly, I decided to go ahead with working on that manuscript. In fact, it so happened that that manuscript became the focus of my thesis.

What is often said or written about the history of Islam in northern Ethiopia is how it was resisted except at the initial stage when Muslim Arabs were welcomed by an Ethiopian king. Of course, although Arab Muslim followers of the Prophet were welcomed in Abyssinia in 615 A.D, spreading Islam in northern Ethiopia was not easy unlike in the southern part of the country. In northern Ethiopia, it was fiercely resisted by the Christian kingdom (Abraham Demoz 1972:1). Thus, many people get surprised when they come across a Muslim, let alone a clerical scholar of

merit, from Tigray, a traditional Christian region. Nevertheless, twenty-one inscriptions found in Tigray show that there existed a Muslim community since the eleventh century (Gori 2007:166). Hence, Islam is a religion that has been in the northern Ethiopian highlands for ages and has a long history of its own (Hussein 1982:2-3, 2001:58).

As mentioned above, although promoting Islam in northern Ethiopia had been difficult, there were individuals who shouldered the responsibility of spreading the faith and cultivating the Islamic culture in their community. One such heroic personality was Šayḥ ‘Umar Abrar or, as he is popularly known by the Muslims of Tigray, Šähna Šayḥ ‘Umar ‘Our teacher Šayḥ ‘Umar’. Apart from upholding the Islamic faith during difficult days, the fact that he left us manuscripts that are of paramount importance for studying the history of Islam in Tigray and generally in Ethiopia, makes him one of those erudite traditional Muslim scholars of Ethiopia.

Most of the manuscripts of Šayḥ ‘Umar Abrar are in his native language Tigrinya written in the Arabic script, that is, in *‘ajamī* – a local language written in the Arabic script. The etymology of the word indicates that it is an Arabic term used by the Arabs to refer to the Persians or Iranians. The Arabs used to call the Persians either *‘ajamī* or *Furs*. The word *‘ajamī* means ‘foreigner’ or ‘non Arab’ (Elias A. Elias n.d:293). Later on the meaning of the word was extended to include the sense of a foreign language written in the Arabic script. Although most of Šayḥ ‘Umar’s manuscripts are in the genre of *‘ajamī* he has also written in Arabic.

Ethiopian Muslim clerics teach about Islam mostly through the indigenous languages written in the *‘ajamī* fashion. Apart from its religious use the *‘ajamī* literature is important as it embodies aspects of Ethiopian history in general and particularly that of Islam in Ethiopia. However, as many indispensable Arabic sources on Ethiopia were not given due consideration, the contributions of the Ethiopian Muslim scholars, especially their *‘ajamī* works, have also remained for long unnoticed (Endris 2007:4). In addition to manuscripts, information on the tombs of local saints which could be a subject of inscriptional philology is also in the category of important but neglected written heritage. In the same way as manuscripts are studied, examination of the tombs of saints and inquiry into the literature and oral traditions about shrines would give clues for the lacunae in the history of Islam in Ethiopia (Hussein 1984:52-53).

Šayḥ ‘Umar’s manuscripts, which are among the contributions of Muslim clerical scholars, are an aspect of the Ethiopian literary tradition. Of the manuscripts of Šayḥ ‘Umar, the focus of the present study is on the one which is concerned with the ancient Ethiopian king, popularly called Najāšī, who was a contemporary of the Prophet Muḥammad. The next section briefly describes what the name Najāšī signifies and the historical events related to the reign of the King.

1.2 Najāšī

The history of Islam in Ethiopia is directly related to the history of Islam in Tigray and its immediate environs. As it is widely known, Islam reached Ethiopia almost immediately after its emergence during the reign of King Aṣḥama ibn Abjar¹ (Ella Ṣaḥam (Sergew 1972:185)) in 615A.D. That Ethiopian king is popularly known as Najāšī. The name is an Arabized version of the Ethiopic word *nāgasi* meaning one who is anointed as a king. The word has gradually become an appellation by which King Aṣḥama is known.

Najāšī’s hospitality to the emigrant followers of the Prophet Muḥammad is a milestone in the relationship between the Ethiopian state and Islam. According to Muslim scholars such as Samia (2001) the king embraced Islam. But, for instance, Trimmingham (1965:46) represents the historical narration as a legend. However, the introduction of Islam into Ethiopia by the followers of the Prophet Muḥammad has not been questioned.

The tomb of Najāšī is found in Tigray, in the town of Nāgaš which is 10 kilometers from the town of Wukro along the Mekelle-Adigrat Road which itself is 55 km east of Mekelle, the capital of the Tigray region. According to Gori (2007), the number of inhabitants of the town of Nāgaš is about 1500 where half of them are Christians and the other half Muslims. In addition to bearing the name of the king, the town is the burial place of some of the followers of the Prophet who came and lived in Ethiopia (at the time Abyssinia) for about sixteen years. It is also the established tradition of the Muslims of Tigray to bury their notables in Nāgaš.

¹ The name of King Najāšī’s father is presented in the literature as ‘Abḥur’ (MS 1) or ‘Abjar’ (Munro-Hay 1991:261) and even as ‘Abḥur Abjar’ (Ahmeddin 2011:57). The confusion between the first two is probably the Arabic letter *jīm* with its dot resulting in ‘Abjar’ or lacking the dot and becoming the letter /ḥ/ and causing ‘Abḥur’. The third confusion ‘Abḥur Abjar’ arises possibly from considering the former as the name of Najāšī’s father and the latter that of his grandfather.

Near the tomb of Najāšī is found a church known as Mariam Kadiḥ. Its name is related to the wife of Najāšī. It is believed that Najāšī once set off with his wife and entourage and they reached the place where the church is now located. His wife asked those who were with her where they were going and they told her that they were going to the land of Islam. She then quitted the journey and went back. When Najāšī asked where his wife had gone, his servants told him that she went back. “Did she betray?” he asked. They said “Yes”. After that event, the place came to be known as Kadiḥ ‘one who betrays’ (Ahmeddin 2011:55-56). According to Gori (2007:1109), the tomb of Najāšī’s wife is in this church which is built facing opposite the tomb of Najāšī. The Christians of the locality swear by saying *Maryamən Nāgāšən yəgbārənna* which means let us be opposite as Mariam (the church) and Nāgāš (his tomb). The phrase is said when one tries to affirm that they are telling the truth.²

The place where Najāšī’s tomb is found served as a place where ordinary Muslims gathered with Muslim clerics for *fatwa*, that is, for religious explanations by the clerics to questions posed by ordinary Muslims. Muslims, mainly from Tigray, used to gather there every year to get answers to their questions. According to *Futuḥ al-Ḥabasha* ‘the conquest of Abyssinia’ (2003: 351) when Imam Aḥmed Ibn Ibrahim (graññ) raided Tigray in the 16th century he passed by the tomb of Najāšī. This indicates that there was a realization of the existence of the tomb since the sixteenth century.

Šayḥ‘Umar Abrar, the subject of this research, contributed a lot towards the reconstruction and recognition of the site of Najāšī’s tomb (source: Šayḥ Aḥmed and Šayḥ Ali). Effort was made to reconstruct the site but governmental recognition was not achieved easily. Yet Muslims value the place with reverence. Annual celebration takes place on the day of *Ashura*³, the day on which Prophet Moses defeated the Pharaoh. It is celebrated on the tenth day of the first month of the Islamic calendar, *Muharram*. Nowadays, people from all over the country and even from the Sudan gather and celebrate in memory of Najāšī (Šayḥ Nurḥusein and Šayḥ Aḥmed). Poems of Šayḥ‘Umar Abrar about Najāšī and about other Muslim saints are recited in the house of the

² The episode about the refusal of Najāšī’s wife to head towards the prophet Muḥammad with her husband implies that Najāšī professed Islam.

³ The celebration in memory of Najāšī was done on this day because it is a day on which many blessings occurred other than the defeat of the Pharaoh.

Šayḥ which he gave away for the purpose. These poems are in the form of *manzūma* style. A *manzūma* is a religious song sung in a group. It is a kind of panegyric or praise.

A national symposium on Najāšī was held in Mekelle, the regional capital of Tigray Region in 1999. The symposium assigned a committee for the establishment of a centre named Aṣḥama al-Najāšī Cultural and Educational Centre. In 2006 a symposium for launching the centre was held at ECA (Economic Commission for Africa). At the symposium the centre was formally established and was promised donations and various kinds of support. The first donation was made to the centre by the Tigray regional government by granting 110,000 square meters of land at Nāgaš town. The centre started operation by setting up an office in Addis Ababa. It has the objective of making the project feasible with the support of both national and international figures interested in preserving heritage and culture (Ismail 2006).

1.3 Objectives of the Study

a. General objectives

The general objective of the thesis is to identify a traditional Muslim clerical scholar in the Tigray region and to reveal his manuscripts. Based on one of the manuscripts of the cleric, the thesis aims to bring to light the history of an Ethiopian king related to the emigrant companions of the Prophet Muḥammad.

b. Specific objectives

- i. to give a brief biography of Šayḥ ‘Umar Abrar, a traditional Muslim clerical scholar in Tigray
- ii. to provide brief philological descriptions of fifteen ‘*ajamī* and Arabic manuscripts of Šayḥ ‘Umar Abrar;
- iii. to give philological analysis of a selected Tigrinya ‘*ajamī* manuscript of Šayḥ ‘Umar Abrar on Najāšī;
- iv. to identify and discuss the linguistic features of the manuscript on Najāšī.

1.4 Methodology

The study involves examining the physical conditions, content and language of the manuscripts. Data are also collected from informants especially for the reconstruction of the biography of Šayḥ 'Umar and for issues concerning the *'ajamī* manuscript on Najāšī.

1.5 Scope and Limitation

The study surveys fifteen manuscripts of Šayḥ 'Umar Abrar which focus on different subjects. Of the fifteen manuscripts, the study provides in-depth analysis to the one which focuses on Najāšī and which is written in Tigrinya *'ajamī*. For all fifteen of the manuscripts brief philological descriptions are provided. Among the manuscripts, the one which focuses on Najāšī is analyzed essentially from the view point of its contents. The analysis is descriptive in approach. Interpretations related to circumstances are not dealt with. However, linguistic features characterizing the manuscript are identified and described.

1.6 Literature Review

Research on *'ajamī* literature in Ethiopia is a recent phenomenon. This does not mean that *'ajamī* is new to Ethiopia. Arabic was in use in several medieval Islamic states of Ethiopia where *'ajamī* was also used. Similarly, as stated in the MA thesis of Kemal (2007:9), *'ajamī* had been in the literary culture of some African countries but was later terminated during the period of colonial era.

According to Alula Pankhurst (1994:258), Enrico Cerulli was the first to discuss Ethiopian Muslim poetry in Amharic. Aseffa Mamo (1988) in his MA thesis analyzes the *'ajamī manḏūma*, poems that are usually sung in the Wollo region. He mentions that the poems are in Amharic but written in the Arabic script.

Pankhurst describes and analyzes Amharic *'ajamī* poems from the viewpoint of content, style, occasion and popularity. He indicates that Islamic poetry in the Ethiopian languages written in the Arabic script is very popular. He also points out that *'ajamī* poems are found mostly in Adere (Harari), Oromo, Amharic as well as in Gurage and are often recited during Ramadan, the holy month of fasting (1994: 259).

As regards the contents of the poems, Pankhurst identified ten kinds based on the researches done by Cerulli, Aseffa Mamo and audio recordings available on the Merkato. Pankhurst also points out that there is no *manzūma* regarding the emigrants who sought refuge in Ethiopia. The reason he gave is that the local Muslim literature is reluctant to acknowledge the Christian king (1994:265). Both assumptions, that the scenario of the emigrants is missing and that the reason is the reluctance in the local literature, are not acceptable. Firstly, there are many poems in which the emigrants and their host are mentioned and glorified. A case in point is the very topic which this research is concerned with and which I will treat later. Secondly, based on written historical and Prophetic tradition, Samia K. (2001:94-97) attests that the Ethiopian king who hosted the emigrants embraced Islam. To that effect, she provides many reasons. Thirdly, the Prophet admired the king and said that he was a fair and honest king even before he became a Muslim (Abdusselam 1989:65).

The preceding scholars are among those who brought to light the importance of '*ajamī*' literature in Ethiopia. But none of them analyzed '*ajamī*' manuscripts from the perspective of textual criticism. The following three M.A theses by indigenous scholars are perhaps pioneering works fully devoted to textual criticism.

Kemal Abdul Wehab's MA thesis (2007) focuses on '*ajamī*' manuscripts in Amharic. In his paper he analyzes nine manuscripts of Šayḥ Ṭalḥa, a Muslim cleric from Wollo who spread the basic principles of Islam to the ordinary Amharic speaking Muslims through the medium of Amharic poetry. Šayḥ Ṭalḥa's poems revolve around the glorification and description of the deeds and characters of Allah and the Prophet. They also focus on prayer through mediation and jihad. The Prophet Muḥammad's biography is the main subject of the Šayḥ's manuscripts. The thesis also addresses the struggle that Šayḥ Ṭalḥa conducted against Yohannes and Menilik, two Christian emperors. He was bitterly against Yohannes for his fierce policy of conversion.

Mohammed Hakim, in his MA thesis (2007), deals with an Oromo '*ajamī*' manuscript of Šayḥ Aḥmed Šayḥ Siraj entitled *Brille Šafa*. The thesis underscores that the Šayḥ was a man born to praise Allah, love the Prophet and sing in honor of him. The Šayḥ is portrayed as a virtuous cleric who influenced people by his piety, poetic ability and dedication. He is also presented as an intelligent Šayḥ who was endowed with a unique ability of the craft of speech and poetry who

emerged in his later life as a prominent author and *mādiḥ* (panegyrist). He was thus compared with leading poets in the global history of Islam like Hassan Ibn Tābit, al-Busayri and al-Waraq. The thesis points out that the manuscript deals with the *sīrah* (biography) of the Prophet and his companions.

Abdella (2009) is another MA thesis on Oromo *‘ajamī* manuscript. According to Abdella, Šayḥ Uṭman Busaysa of Hararge is the author of a manuscript which is entitled *Qaṭro al-Ajurumiyyah*. The thesis is a philological study of an Arabic grammar manuscript in Oromo *‘ajamī*. Abdella (2009) states that the tradition of learning and teaching classical Arabic, mainly grammar and morphology, has been a common practice among the Muslim communities in Ethiopia over the last two centuries. However the basic educational system has involved oral interpretation of Arabic grammar. That drew the attention of Šayḥ Uṭman Boseysa. He observed the problems and difficulties that students faced in learning Arabic grammar and he simplified the *Ajurumiyyah* (a well-known Arabic grammar textbook) by paraphrasing and translating it into the Oromo language. This helped students to achieve the basic knowledge of the Arabic grammar in a short time.

‘Ajamī has also been used to write some east gurage languages. For example, Redwan (2011) presents a poem in Wolene *‘ajamī*.

As mentioned earlier the Arabic script had been used widely in many African countries before the colonial era. Nigeria, Senegal, Mali and Gambia are some of the countries that have recently revived their *‘ajamī* literature. These countries are searching their *‘ajamī* heritage which they believe embodies their history. The countries seem to be engaged in a movement of awakening in order to study their history prior to colonization (Mohammed Seid 2006).

As observed above, *‘ajamī* literature has been used in Ethiopia and in many African countries for some centuries. This literature, which can contribute a great deal to the knowledge about the various African countries, has long been neglected. However, the need for researching the literature is now growing. The present study is one such attempt to reveal the existence and contents of Tigrinya *‘ajamī* manuscripts of a renowned Muslim cleric of the Tigray region. The following chapter presents the biography of that renowned clerical scholar of the Tigray region, Šayḥ ‘Umar Abrar.

CHAPTER TWO

Biography of Šayḥ ‘Umar Abrar

2.1 Family background

Šayḥ ‘Umar was born to his father Abrar Ḥayr Aḥmed and his mother Desta Muḥammad Ḥiyar in Addərgud, a district in Adua, Tigray region. The exact date of his birth could not be identified but it is believed to be in 1878. His family, through his father, claims that they are descendants of the Prophet Muḥammad through the Prophet’s grandson Hassen. Such a claim is common in the biography of many famous Šayḥs in Ethiopia (Endris 2007). Šayḥ ‘Umar’s father and uncles were personalities who are considered as saints venerated in the society. Some of their descendants are also respected and visited.

It is believed that the birth of the future Šayḥ ‘Umar had been foretold by a saint Šayḥ called Ḥalifa. The story goes that Šayḥ ‘Umar’s mother dreamed of eating honey. She was told by this saint that she would give birth to a son who would become knowledgeable but would not stay long in life. The mother died some years after she gave birth to the promised child. The father died earlier. The young ‘Umar became an orphan who was brought up under his uncles’ care (source: Šayḥ Aḥmed, Šayḥ ‘Umar’s son, and Šayḥ Juhar).

It was during the intolerable reign of Emperor Yohannes that the young ‘Umar lost his father who refused to be converted to Christianity. One day officers of Alula Aba Nəgga, the highest official of the Emperor, came and took the father, Šayḥ Abrar, from his house. Two other Muslims were also taken with him. Later, the bodies of the two other individuals were found while that of Šayḥ Abrar was lost. It is believed that since he was a saint God took him away (source: Šayḥ Aḥmed, Šayḥ Kedir and Šayḥ Juhar). This kind of explanation was common in those times in the Muslim society of Tigray. This was the way they explain their steadfastness in their belief. Another case is the death of a saint named Šayḥ Ukasha, Šayḥ Abrar’s brother. The story is told that while the priests were trying to bury the dead body in the Christian graveyard it spontaneously disappeared.

The act of forcing Muslims to become Christians was not practiced by all the common Christians of Tigray. Surprisingly, some of my informants reported that the Christians of Tigray used to

help their Muslim compatriots by testifying that they had become Christians though they knew that they were practicing Muslims. It is also interesting to learn that a Christian friend of Šayḥ Abrar known as Kinfē's father avenged the Šayḥ's death by killing those who revealed the religion of the Šayḥ.

During his childhood 'Umar lived with his uncles serving as a shepherd. He had no chance of getting religious training at that time because of the oppressive nature of the situation. However, as he was approaching adolescence, he found it difficult to accept being ignorant about his religion. Hence, he left for Wollo at the age of fifteen changing his name to Kaḥsay to avoid being tracked. That was in fact, a common practice by religious lads of the time. After fifteen years studying in Wollo he went back home to Tigray (source: Šayḥ Aḥmed and Šayḥ Juhar).

2.2. Religious training

Little is known about Šayḥ 'Umar's religious schooling. In the colophon of one of his Arabic manuscripts the Šayḥ indicates that he copied it and that it belonged to his teacher Muḥammad Hasan al-Madanī. Informants also identify one of his teachers as Šayḥ Muḥammad Nur Bigiddo of Wollo who came to Tigray with the intention of taking Šayḥ 'Umar back to Wollo to assign him as a teacher. But the Šayḥ refused. His teacher Muḥammad Nur Bigiddo argued that he would not find as many students in Tigray as in Wollo. But Šayḥ 'Umar said he would knock at each door in Tigray to get students. The path of knowledge Šayḥ 'Umar took can be identified from the manuscripts he produced. His manuscripts deal with such topics as the biography of King Najāšī, Islamic inheritance system, Unity of God (*Tawḥīd*), praise of saints, glorification of the Prophet s, rights of parents and Islamic jurisprudence.

Šayḥ 'Umar was not limited to writing; he was also active in teaching. According to my informants when he returned from Wollo he preferred to remain solitary in a room. The Šayḥ did not, however, want to remain in solitude when the society was in need of overhauling. The concerned members of the society felt that Muslim identity was lost, moral laxity was rampant, Islamic jurisprudence was neglected; the faith was corrupted by superstition and local attitudes. So he campaigned hard and succeeded in reforming the society. He was instrumental for the rebirth of the society he lived in. Šayḥ 'Umar thus commanded respect and he is remembered as a practical and pious teacher, or *murabbi* as it is written on the colophon of MS 2.

It appears prophetic that the young ‘Umar chose for himself the prophetic name Kaḥsay long ago. In Tigrinya the name implies restoration or retrieval. Indeed the young Kaḥsay set out to do what his martyred father intended, that is, to fill the gap left as the result of the flight of Muslim teachers due to fear of persecution.

2.3. Livelihood and Family

According to Šayḥ Aḥmed, Šayḥ ‘Umar’s son, their livelihood was essentially dependant on the agricultural land they had. Nevertheless, the merchant cousin of the Šayḥ, Azmač Mohammed Abdu, also used to help the family. Šayḥ ‘Umar married a Tigriyan woman named Meryem, and had twelve children: Ruqiyya, Ḥajji Muḥammad, Mustafa, Fāṭima, Ḥadija, Abrār, Aḥmed, Tuha, Yasin, Zeyneb, Mardiyya, Sofīa. Among his children the following are alive: Mustafa, Aḥmed, Yasin and Mardiyya.

2.4. Contribution to Society

The contributions of Šayḥ ‘Umar are not limited to teaching and writing. He was also engaged in social activities. A shrine to the seventh-century king of Axum, Aṣḥama Ibn Abjar (Ella ṣaḥam) and popularly known as Najāšī, was erected at his initiative. A clever trick was involved. According to Šayḥ Aḥmed the local people sent some notables to Emperor HaileSELLASIE to request permission to build the shrine at the tomb of Najāšī. However, the Emperor refused. Then the Šayḥ proposed to Azmač Muḥammad Abdu, his cousin, to ask the governor of Tigray, Ras Səyyum, for permission to build the tomb of his (the cousin’s) father. Ras Səyyum agreed. But, instead it was the tomb of Najāšī which was built. Regarding the tomb, Bušrā Šayḥ Yaḥyā (2011:65-66) states that it was constructed “with the permission” of Ras Səyyum.

The local Muslim community then announced that the shrine of Najāšī was built. Buses belonging to the well-known merchant Azmač Muḥammad Abdu brought people from different parts of the country to visit the newly built shrine. But there were Muslims who were against the construction of the shrine. They argued that the money could have been better spent on matters related to the teaching of the laity. However, Šayḥ ‘Umar responded that his intention in building the shrine was to let the history of the just and friendly king of Abyssinia become known.

Šayḥ ‘Umar also served as *Qāḍī* ‘judge’ during the Italian occupation and after the return of Emperor Haileselassie. Later he resigned, partly for fear that he might be tempted to do something that would displease God. Justice administration requires much time and that did not suit the Šayḥ, who was committed to teaching and writing.

It is also worth mentioning that Šayḥ ‘Umar was politically sensitive and knowledgeable. The divide-and-rule policy of Italy lured some sections of the Muslim population and innocent Šayḥs with false promises. Šayḥ ‘Umar stood against that policy and advised his people not to do anything that might displease and hurt their Christian brothers and sisters, as that would have bad consequences in the future. He challenged the seemingly benevolent gesture of the Italians by inviting them to come to the fold of Islam, if they were sympathetic to it (source: Šayḥ Aḥmed, Šayḥ Ali).

2.5. Linguistic skill

It has been mentioned that Šayḥ ‘Umar produced *manzūmas* in Tigrinya. In recognition of his valuable contributions to the development of elevating Tigrinya literature, a certificate was posthumously awarded to Šayḥ ‘Umar by the Association of Tigray Artists and the Regional State of Tigray on November 8, 2008. The Arabic and Amharic knowledge of the Šayḥ was also profound, as can be observed from his Arabic and Amharic texts. Moreover, members of his family and students testify that the Šayḥ used to communicate with the Italians in Italian, both in speech and in writing.

2.6. Old age and death

Among the things Šayḥ ‘Umar achieved in his old age was the performance of *Ḥajj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca. According to Šayḥ Ali, he was sponsored by the Italians; but according to Šayḥ Aḥmed he was sponsored by his cousin Azmač Muḥammad Abdu. After performing the *Ḥajj* the Šayḥ wanted to visit the Prophet’s mosque in Medina where his tomb is located. However, given his deep love and respect for the Prophet his cousin feared that the Šayḥ might remain in Mecca. Hence, the cousin promised Šayḥ ‘Umar that he could return for another visit during the next *Ḥajj*, and they went back to Ethiopia. However, the Šayḥ fell ill. After three years in bed, he breathed his last in 1967 at the age of eighty-eight (Šayḥ Aḥmed). His grave is in the town of Nāgaš, surrounded with metal fencing.

CHAPTER THREE

Survey of the manuscripts of Šayḥ ʿUmar Abrar

3.1 General information about the manuscripts

Šayḥ ʿUmar Abrar authored a number of manuscripts. As mentioned in section 1.5 of chapter one, I came across fifteen manuscripts of the Šayḥ. They are neither titled nor dated except for one which I identify as manuscript 2 (MS 2). The MSS I have come across are identified in this chapter. The manuscripts are of two types: a) those written in local languages but in Arabic script (*ʿajamī*), b) Those written directly in Arabic. The Šayḥ's writings in *ʿajamī* can again be grouped into two: while most of the manuscripts are completely in Tigrinya, some contain some Amharic.

All of the *ʿajamī* manuscripts are written in poetic language, that is, as *manzūma*. However, in MS 1 the *du ʿā* (invocations) and in MS 2 the text on the first three folios is in prose. The Šayḥ improvised special characters to represent Tigrinya sounds that are absent in Arabic. Usually dots are added to the Arabic letters; in one case, two Arabic letters are employed for a single Tigrinya sound (gn (jīm, nūn) = ṅ). The innovations that Šayḥ ʿUmar has made and the characteristic linguistic features of his manuscripts are treated in chapter five. Most of the Šayḥ's manuscripts are in the custody of one of his sons, Šayḥ Aḥmed, who lives in Mekelle, the capital of the Tigray regional state particularly the Ṭabya ʿAydār part of the city. MS 8, 9 and 10 are with Šayḥ Nurḥusen Bərhan who lives in Mekelle in Ṭabya Sämen. I provide brief descriptions of the manuscripts in the following two sections. Section 3.2 deals with the *ʿajamī* manuscripts while 3.3 treats the Arabic ones. The original manuscripts are written mostly in *madd*, locally made ink; however, modern pen is also used occasionally. Copies of the manuscripts are written with *madd* or modern pen; there is one manuscript that apparently exists only in photocopy form.

3.2. *ʿAjamī* manuscripts

The *ʿajamī* manuscripts of Šayḥ ʿUmar that I have come across are eleven in number. They are written as indicated above, either completely in Tigrinya or in Tigrinya including some Amharic parts. A brief description of each of the manuscripts is provided below. (The *ʿajamī* transcription system is discussed in chapter 5)

MS 1

This is the principal manuscript which the thesis is concerned with. It is essentially on Najāšī, and chapter four is devoted to it. It can be briefly described as follows.

- i. **Language:** Tigrinya (*‘ajamī*), with some parts in Amharic and some parts in Arabic
- ii. **Title:** none
- iii. **Topic:** biography of Najāšī, *du ‘ā*’, popular saints, *manzūmas* about the Prophet
- iv. **Status:** original⁴
- v. **Physical material:** the text is written on ruled sheets of paper, with 17 lines. Black ink was used for consonants and red for vowel diacritics. The front and back covers are sewed together and are covered with cloth decorated with red and blue flowers. The word *manzuma* is written on the cover in elaborate style. There are additional words in blue ink but they are partly illegible.
- vi. **Pagination:** the manuscript has 51 folios, that is, 102 pages including blank ones. Those on which texts appear are 85 pages while the other 17 pages are blank. The page sequence is based on catchwords at the bottom of the verso of the folios. There are also page numbers in Arabic numerals at the top of both the recto and verso of the folios. The numbers go from right to left. Each *manzūma* has its own pagination. Each *manzūma* starts from page two: the first *manzūma*, about Najāšī: pp. 2-25, including the closing *du ‘ā*’ the second on saints, pp. 2-17; the third on the Prophet (as an intercessor), pp. 2-21; and the fourth on the Prophet (panegyric), pp. 2-25. No page number is given for the doxology on the first folio, and for the short supplication on the verso of page 25. At the end of the manuscript there is a brief additional, unpaginated *manzūma* in Arabic which is not in Šayḥ ‘Umar’s handwriting and which as a result I do not treat in chapter four. Finally there are unpaginated blank sheets. One could be curious why the Šayḥ indicates the first page of each *manzūma* as page 2. According to one of my informants (Šayḥ Ali), the first page of each *manzūma* is reserved for a doxology. For two of the *manzūmas* the space for the doxology is left blank. For the *manzūma* about Najāšī and the one on saints, specific doxology is written in the MS.
- vii. **Size:** 10.5 cm x17.25 cm

⁴ This MSS and the other manuscripts I have categorized as “original” are all written in the same handwriting and they are with Šayḥ Ahmed, Šayḥ ‘Umar’s son, as an inheritance.

- viii. **Condition:** the manuscript is old, the sheets are fragile and a bit damaged; some pages (pp. 1, 2 and 3) are ripped and part of the lines are not clear; some of the lines are completed in blue ink in a different handwriting. The cloth covering is old so that the edge of the hard cover of the manuscript is ragged. The cloth on the inner side of the cover is well preserved.
- ix. **Writing style:** The four '*ajamī manzūmas*' are composed of short and long lines; that is, there are three to nine short lines of verse concluded with a long line which is written curving upward at the end of the line. The pattern repeats to the end of each of the four *manzūmas*. Each set of the short lines between the long ones is a rhyming set. The long lines at the end of each rhyming set of short lines all have the same rhyme. There is editing in the margin and above the verses, sometimes upside down. The concluding *du 'ā'* of the first *manzūma* and the isolated *du 'ā'* on the verso of folio thirteen are written in prose.
- x. **Detailed content:** The manuscript has four *manzūmas*. The first *manzūma* deals with the history of Najāšī including his enthronement, the fairness of his rule, the relationship he had with the Prophet and the importance of visiting his tomb. It concludes with a *du 'ā'* in Arabic for Najāšī and for those who come to visit his tomb. The second *manzūma* is on the status of the saints. The text shows the great value of saints who can do miracles and are believed to have the power to intercede. The third *manzūma* is on the Prophet. It starts with the importance of praising the Prophet in a group (ḥaḍra). It then tells about the position of the Prophet among the other prophets. The fourth *manzūma* is on the importance of *ṣalawāt*. The poem underscores that through *ṣalawāt* one can avoid the miseries of this world and be successful in the hereafter. The Prophet's mercy is described as extending not only to humans but also to animals. The Prophet's death is mentioned as an agony where some became deaf and others dumb due to the intense love they had for him. Finally there is a short Arabic poem which praises the Prophet and an isolated *du 'ā'* for those who got relief after a disaster.

MS 2

- i. **Language:** Tigrinya (*'ajamī*) and Arabic
- ii. **Title:** none
- iii. **Topic:** inheritance, the unity of God, homily, an Arabic poem on praise and another one on saints, and the five pillars of Islam.

- iv. **Status:** scribal copy
- v. **Physical material:** The text is written on sheets from the days of the Italian occupation. The sheets are used with the bottom side turned up. Black ink was used for consonants and red for vowels, titles and words that the author wanted to emphasize. The manuscript is bound with a thin cardboard cover and again covered with decorated white and red cloth. Just inside the hard cover there is a sheet which is thicker than the rest of the sheets; on the sheet in the front there are few Italian words (commodity names).
- vi. **Pagination:** there are 112 pages (56 folios). The manuscript is a modern one and it is paginated with the European numbers at the edge of each recto and verso of the folios. The recto (left) of one folio and the verso (right) of the preceding folio are identified with the same page number. In some pages, where the numbers are not visible the copyist used catchwords to indicate page sequence.
- vii. **Size:** 22 cm x 33.5 cm
- viii. **Condition:** the sewing is loose, the last *manzūma* is not complete but the manuscript is clean and easy to read.
- ix. **Writing style:** different styles are observed. Some of the *manzūmas* are composed in two columns; that is, a line of the first column rhymes with a corresponding line of the second column. Other *manzūmas* are composed of alternating indented and non-indented lines. Still others are composed of short and long lines as in the writing style of MS 1. Each *manzūma* has its own doxology. However, in the inheritance part, each issue is provided with its own heading.
- x. **Detailed content:** the first part of the manuscript, written in Arabic, is about the five pillars of Islam: belief in the uniqueness (*Tawhīd*) of Allah and that Muḥammad is his messenger, performing *ṣalāt* (prayer), fasting, giving alms (*zakāt*) and *Ḥajj*. The second part is a *manzūma* which discusses the importance of inheritance as dictated in the Qur'an and Ḥadīth. It discusses the people who are entitled to inheritance and the amount of the inheritance in detail. The third part focuses on the *Tawhīd*: that is, believing in one Creator and that He has twenty attributes like the power to 'see', 'hear', 'speak', and so on. Then, the prophets of Allah and their qualities of truthfulness and trustworthiness are presented. The features of Angels especially of the ten prominent ones, their names and responsibilities are described. The fourth part gives an extensive account of the Last Day, or the Day of Judgment, where

every human being is supposed to stand in front of Allah to get his/her actions weighed. The part ends with *ṣalawāt* on the Prophet and those who follow his footsteps. It states that the Prophet is the origin of life. The Prophet's soul was the first to be created. Using the *nūr* (light) of the Prophet, God created the other prophets and other creations like the sun, the moon, and the stars. It points out that the prophets of God were given high position because they were created from this *nūr*. The events that took place when the Prophet came to this world are described. In the month of *Rajab*, the seventh month of the Islamic calendar, there was celebration in Heaven when it was heard that the Prophet Muḥammad was in his mother's womb. The miracles that occurred after his birth are listed. The fifth part of the manuscript is a homily. It starts with thanking Allah for His guidance and then presents *ṣalawāt* on the Prophet. It then provides advice in relation to the mission of the Prophet. The *qabr*, the grave, is also discussed as a terrible and painful home for those who committed bad deeds. The right of parents over their offspring is another issue that is treated. The focus is that those who do not discharge their responsibilities to their parents will not enter paradise but rather are sent to hell. The importance of *ṣalāt* (prayer) and the divine punishment for not doing it is also given due attention. The final *manzūma* is a short version; a fuller version appears in MS 10.

- xi. **Colophon:** it has a triangular shape and states the date, the person who compose the MS and the person who copied it. Lastly there is a prayer to Šayḥ 'Umar by the copyist (his student).

MS 3

- i. **Language:** Tigrinya ('*ajamī*')
- ii. **Title:** none
- iii. **Topic:** *Mawlid* and intercession of saints
- iv. **Status:** original
- v. **Physical material:** the text is written on ruled sheets of paper. Black ink was used for consonants and red for vowels. The text is on recto and verso of the folios. The manuscript is bound with cardboard which is covered with red cloth. The cloth covering has a strap which is designed in such a way as to hang down from the shoulder.

- vi. **Pagination:** the number of pages is 148 (74 folios). The *Mawlid* part uses catchwords. On the other hand the whole is paginated with European numbers at the bottom starting from the end to the beginning (left to right).
- vii. **Size:** 14.8 cm x 20 cm
- viii. **Condition:** some of the sheets are loose so that some of the pages are not ordered correctly.
- ix. **Writing style:** The two *manzūmas* have two kinds of handwriting. The second *manzūma*, on the importance of celebrating the birthday of the Prophet (*Mawlid*), is written with light *madd* in Šayḥ ‘Umar’s handwriting. The first *manzūma*, on interceding to Allah through the saints, is written with bold *madd* and is not in the Šayḥ’s handwriting. The *manzūmas* are composed of short and long lines like the style of MS 1.
- x. **Content:** The second *manzūma* discusses the importance of celebrating the birthday of the Prophet. Celebrating *Mawlid* is presented as a means by which one can get close to Allah. The first *manzūma* asks Allah for blessings through the intercession of saints.

MS 4

- i. **Language:** Tigrinya (‘*ajamī*’)
- ii. **Title:** none
- iii. **Topic:** about Hashim, the great-grandfather of the Prophet
- iv. **Status:** original
- v. **Physical material:** the text is written on ruled sheets of paper of notebook size. Black ink was used for consonants and red for vowels.
- vi. **Pagination:** the number of pages is 16 (8 folios). Pagination is indicated by catchwords at the bottom and European numerals at the top.
- vii. **Size:** 10.5 cm x 15.25 cm
- viii. **Condition:** not bound
- ix. **Writing style:** The *manzūmas* appear in two columns; that is, the hemistich in the first column rhymes with the hemistich in the second column.
- x. **Content:** It starts by indicating that life originated with the creation of the Prophet. *Nūr* (light) passed to Adam and to other prophets so that they attained a high position. This light was then passed on to righteous people until it reached Hāšim, the great-grandfather of the Prophet Muḥammad, where temporarily the transmission stopped. Hāšim was worried, so he

went to the Ka'ba and prayed. There he was told that he should marry a woman named Salmā who would bear a son who would become the grandfather of the Prophet, Abdulmuṭṭalib, who was known for coordinating the religious rites at the Ka'ba and for providing food to the pilgrims.

MS 5

- i. **Language:** Tigrinya (*'ajamī*)
- ii. **Title:** none
- iii. **Topic:** *Jum'a ṣalāt* (Friday prayer)
- iv. **Status:** original
- v. **Physical material:** sheets of paper, folded in half, with text on verso and recto of each half as if the folded sheet was two folios in a book. Black ink is mainly used for writing but on some pages red ink was used.
- vi. **Pagination:** number of folios 6 (12 pages) with some catchwords.
- vii. **Size:** 10.5 cm x 18 cm
- viii. **Condition:** loose sheets, not sewn together, but they cohere thematically as a single document.
- ix. **Writing Style:** composed of alternating indented and non-indented lines.
- x. **Content:** how to conduct the *Jum'a ṣalāt* (Friday prayer) according to the different *maḏāhib* (schools of legal thought).

MS 6

- i. **Language:** Tigrinya (*'ajamī*)
- ii. **Title:** none
- iii. **Topic:** miscellaneous
- iv. **Status:** original
- v. **Physical material:** the text is written on paper verso and recto with black ink for the consonants and red ink for the vowels.
- vi. **Pagination:** 32 pages (16 folios) paginated using catchwords but not consistently.
- vii. **Size:** 11 cm x 17 cm
- viii. **Condition:** separate sheets of paper.

- ix. **Writing style:** two styles are used: alternating indented and non-indented lines on the one hand; text in columns, on the other hand.
- x. **Content:** These unbound pages are all written in the same handwriting, but because of their diverse content it is hard to know whether they are “a single manuscript”. Many issues are discussed; among them is the steadfastness of the Prophet’s companions when they were persecuted by the Quraysh⁵. The case of Bilal, the first Ethiopian convert to Islam, is cited. Further themes are the terrifying nature of the grave, the importance of *ṣalawāt*, and the miracles on the day the Prophet was born and the response of Abdulmuṭṭalib to Abrāha’s plan to destroy Mecca.

MS 7

- i. **Language:** Amharic and Tigrinya (‘*ajamī*’)
- ii. **Title:** none
- iii. **Topic:** praise of the Prophet and about persecution by the Quraysh
- iv. **Status:** scribal copy
- v. **Physical material:** the text is written in black ink
- vi. **Pagination:** ten pages (five folios) with Arabic numbers at the bottom
- vii. **Size:** 22 cm x 33 cm
- viii. **Condition:** no cover and the pages are not sewn together. From the pagination and also based on content it was clear that the pages form a single manuscript.
- ix. **Writing style:** composed of short and long lines just as in MS 1.
- x. **Content:** Praise of the Prophet and persecution of his companions, giving Bilal as an example of steadfastness in the face of persecution.

MS 8

- i. **Language:** Tigrinya (‘*ajamī*’),
- ii. **Title:** none
- iii. **Topic:** the marriage of Ḥadija to the Prophet, and *Mawlid*
- iv. **Status:** photocopy of a scribal copy

⁵ The Quraysh were the noble tribe to which the prophet Muḥammad belonged. The Quraysh, before embracing Islam, persecuted the first Muslims, some of whom the Prophet advised to emigrate to Ethiopia.

- v. **Physical material:** bound photocopied sheets. The letters are in the black color of a photocopy.
- vi. **Pagination:** there are 102 pages (51 folios) paginated with European numbers at the bottom going from right to left.
- vii. **Size:** 18 cm x 24.25 cm
- viii. **Condition:** the *Mawlid* part is not complete.
- ix. **Writing style:** composed of short and long lines like the style of MS 1.
- x. **Content:** It discusses how Ḥadija (the first wife of the Prophet) was impressed by the Prophet. Their marriage ceremony is then discussed in detail. There is also a *Mawlid* part.

MS 9

- i. **Language:** Tigrinya ('*ajamī*'), Amharic ('*ajamī*') and Arabic
- ii. **Title:** none
- iii. **Topic:** Najāšī, saints and praise
- iv. **Status:** scribal copy
- v. **Physical material:** the text is written on bound sheets of paper. The consonants are written in blue ink whereas the vowels, subtopics and punctuation marks are written in red ink.
- vi. **Pagination:** there are 200 pages (100 folios), marked with catchwords and also page numbers at the bottom. Out of the 100 folios 64 contain writing while 36 are blank.
- vii. **Size:** 14 cm x 20.5 cm
- viii. **Condition:** well preserved
- ix. **Writing style:** some are composed in short and long lines as in MS 1. Others are composed in two columns like MS 4, while others are composed of alternating indented and non-indented lines.
- x. **Content:** part of the manuscript is a copy of MS 1 (the biography of Najāšī and the superiority, miracles and contributions of the saints). There is an Arabic poem, similar to what is found in MS 2, and again a copy of the *du'ā'* part from MS 2. Description of Muslim scholars in Hawzen (eastern Tigray) and how the death of those scholars affected the Šayḥ and the discomfort of living with ignorant people are included. There is one Amharic poem on the Prophet. And there is a short *manzūma* in Tigrinya on Najāšī.

MS 10

- i. **Language:** Tigrinya (‘*ajamī*’)
- ii. **Title:** none
- iii. **Topic:** the homily part from MS 2. It also contains the last *manzūma* of MS 2 in a fuller version. See MS 2 for details.
- iv. **Status:** scribal copy
- v. **Physical material:** bound ruled sheets of paper whose texts are written with *madd*.
- vi. **Pagination:** there are 196 pages (98 folios) paginated with numbers at the bottom. 40 folios are blank.
- vii. **Size:** 20.5 cm x 27.75 cm
- viii. **Condition:** well preserved
- ix. **Writing style:** composed of short and long lines like the style in MS1. The last letter of each indented line is black, red or green. He also uses green for headings and red for emphasis.

MS 11

- i. **Language:** Tigrinya (‘*ajamī*’)
- ii. **Title:** none
- iii. **Topic:** praise to the Prophet
- iv. **Status:** scribal copy
- v. **Physical material:** unbound sheets of paper written with *madd*
- vi. **Pagination:** not paginated and it has only four pages (two folios)
- vii. **Size:** 11 cm x 15.5 cm
- viii. **Condition:** the paper is fragile
- ix. **Writing style:** composed of short and long lines like the style of MS 1.
- x. **Content:** praise of the Prophet

3.3. Arabic manuscripts

Among the manuscripts of Šayḥ ‘Umar Abrar, apart from the eleven treated in the preceding section 3.2, there are four manuscripts written in Arabic. I refer to these as MS A, MS B, MS C and MS D. Of these Arabic MSS one (MS D) is a copy as mentioned earlier in section 2.2. Nevertheless, at the end of the manuscript, there is a half-page Arabic text by the Šayḥ. As I have

done for the foregoing eleven manuscripts, brief descriptions of the four Arabic manuscripts are given below.

MS A

- i. **Title:** none
- ii. **Topic:** supplications
- iii. **Status:** original
- iv. **Physical material:** partly a bound book; partly loose sheets of paper. The text is written in black ink.
- v. **Pagination:** there are 126 pages (63 folios). Catchwords are used but not consistently
- vi. **Size:** 10 cm x16 cm
- vii. **Condition:** fragile paper
- viii. **Writing style:** prose
- ix. **Content:** supplication extracted from the tradition of the Prophet and other scholars

MS B

- i. **Title:** none
- ii. **Topic:** genealogy
- iii. **Status:** original
- iv. **Physical material:** a bound manuscript. The text is written in blue ink but some of the contents are also written in *madd*.
- v. **Pagination:** not paginated
- vi. **Size:** 10.5 cm x 19.5 cm
- vii. **Condition:** well preserved
- viii. **Writing style:** the first part is in prose but there are also parts written in poetry.
- ix. **Content:** the genealogy of Šayḥ Abadir of Harar, with which Šayḥ ʿUmar identifies himself, is written in about three to four pages. The manuscript also contains other Arabic contents and *manzūmas*.

MS C

- i. **Title:** none
- ii. **Topic:** miscellaneous
- iii. **Status:** original
- iv. **Physical material:** sheets of paper detached from binding. The text is written with black ink and blue ink, and occasionally in red ink for bulleting.
- v. **Pagination:** 69 pages
- vi. **Size:** 11 cm x 15.75 cm
- vii. **Condition:** loose sheets of paper
- viii. **Writing style:** prose with a few poems
- ix. **Content:** it deals with a wide variety of topics including jurisprudence, *tawhīd* (unity of God), *tajwīd* (Quranic articulation), genealogy, history and praise of Allah.

MS D

- i. **Title:** none
- ii. **Topic:** supplication
- iii. **Status:** original
- iv. **Physical material:** unbound sheets of paper but they cohere thematically as a single document. The text is written with black ink.
- v. **Pagination:** 12 pages (6 folios); catchwords are used for pagination
- vi. **Size:** 11cm x 19 cm
- vii. **Condition:** not bound
- viii. **Writing style:** alternating indented and non-indented lines of verse.
- ix. **Content:** supplication, beseeching Allah through his names. There is also a discussion of the benefit and harmfulness of medicines.
- x. **Colophon:** the Šayḥ writes that it was copied from his teacher. The title of the manuscript is stated: *Asmā' Allah a- ḥusnā* 'the beautiful names of Allah'. But no date is provided.

CHAPTER FOUR

Analysis of the Manuscript on Najāšī

Brief descriptions of the manuscript on the pious Abyssinian king, Najāšī, along with the descriptions of fourteen other manuscripts of Šayḥ ‘Umar Abrar, have been given in the preceding chapter. Here, I single out the manuscript on Najāšī, MS1, and provide the analysis of its contents.

The great majority of the *manzūma* texts of the manuscript are in Tigrinya ‘*ajamī* while some texts are in Arabic and a few in Amharic. Reading the texts is sometimes difficult, because some of the edges of the folios are torn, vowels have not been consistently provided and missing line-ends written vertically in the left margin have sometimes been added in ball-point pen. To overcome the problems, I resorted to listening to a recorded version of the *manzūmas* which I bought. The recording was done by Šayḥ Nurḥusein in whose custody is a copy of the manuscript. Furthermore, I consulted with two of Šayḥ ‘Umar’s students: Šayḥ Ali and Šayḥ Seid Aḥmed.

The original version of the manuscript (in the custody of Šayḥ Aḥmed ‘Umar, Šayḥ ‘Umar Abrar’s son) and the copy (in the custody of Šayḥ Nurḥusein) are very similar except for the doxology part. In the doxology of the original manuscript the intercessor is Najāšī whereas in that of the copy the appeal is to Najāšī himself.

I analyse the four major parts, that is, the four *manzūmas* of the manuscript, by quoting, transliterating, translating and by discussing the targeted parts. I first give the original ‘*ajamī* text (in Arabic script) in the form of a photocopy of the original. This is followed by transcription in Latin letters, then by an English translation.

To verify completeness and authenticity I have referred to supplementary sources. I have drawn from sources in Arabic, English and Amharic.

The structure of this chapter follows the structure of the manuscript, MS1, itself. It has a prologue and an epilogue of praise; in other words, it is prefaced with a doxology, praise to Najāšī, and concludes with a panegyric, extolling the Prophet Muḥammad. Among the topics

which appear between the two praises are: the enthronement of Najāšī, the welcoming of the Prophet's companions, Najāšī acting on behalf of the Prophet for his marriage, the importance of visiting Najāšī's tomb and narratives about saints. After the doxology, the main parts of the manuscript are the four *manzūmas*: i) on Najāšī; ii) on popular saints; iii) on the intercessor Prophet and iv) panegyric to the Prophet. The last *manzūma* (iv) is what I refer to as epilogue.

In the transcriptions below, I use several conventions:

[] indicates that the oral text which I am familiar with disagrees with the written text; I put the oral text in brackets. Also, there are cases where the written text seems not to make sense; here I add a correction in [].

() indicates a dittography (unnecessary repetition) in the written text.

I have tried to transcribe clearly Arabic words using normal Arabic transcription, and clearly Tigrinya words using normal Tigrinya transcription. Arabic loanwords which have become part of Tigrinya are transcribed according to Arabic convention.

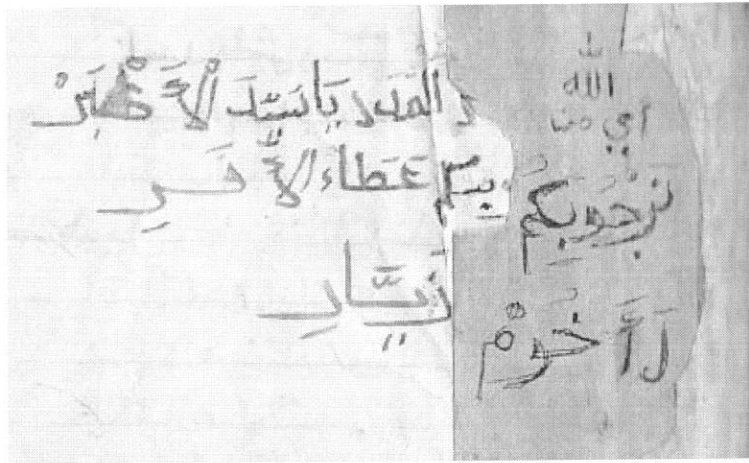
In transcribing Tigrinya, the vowel-letters ɣ, ɔ, and ɪ do not indicate length as in Arabic but only vowel quality. (Tigrinya has no vowel length.)

As indicated above, the chapter is concerned with a descriptive analysis of the contents of MS1. As to the linguistic and transcriptional features of the manuscript, some discussion is provided in chapter five.

4.1. Doxology

On the recto of the first folio of the manuscript on Najāšī appears the *mašrab* (doxology) which is given below. It is a poem praising Najāšī which consists of three lines. The *mašrab* is recited by the congregation after each stanza, consisting of short verses of the *manzūma* culminating with a long one, is sung by the leading singer. The first and the second lines are in Arabic while the third is in Tigrinya⁶.

⁶ Since the paper here is partly torn off, the doxology physically has the form of a collage created by sticking two pieces of paper together, the original paper and a "patch" added to supply the missing text. Consequently, in the first line the phrase *al-madad* is invisible except for the last letter. In the second line, the word *bikum* is unduly repeated.



al-madad al-madad yā-sayyid l-'akbar

Narjū bikum (bikum) 'a ṭā'l-'a[w]fari

Lā' aḥum zayyāri

Oh great lord we ask aid

We hope for abundant gift through you (from Allah)

On account of visiting you (your tomb)

The doxology is about the intercession of Najāšī. Šayḥ 'Umar, on behalf of the visitors to Najāšī's tomb, asks for the intercession of the pious king.

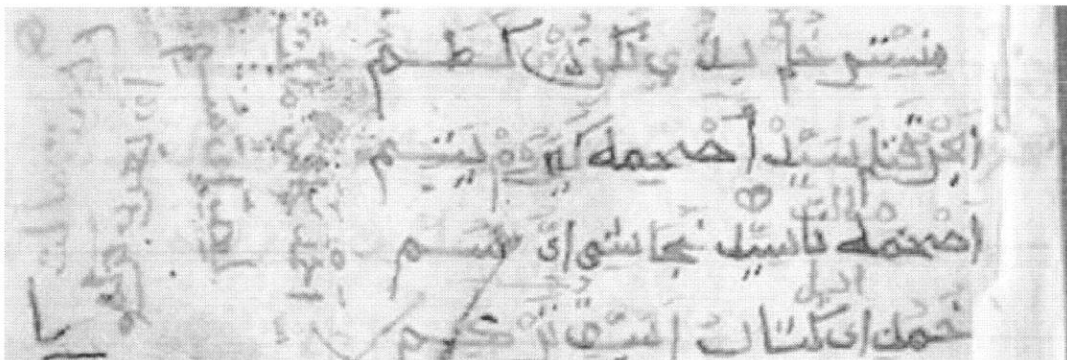
In reciting the doxology people say '*naṭlubu minkum*' 'we ask from you', instead of *narjū bikum* 'we hope through you' (the second line in the doxology above). The difference between the two phrases is a point of theological debate. It can be assumed that the lyrical piece was originally written with the second option, *bikum*. Plausibly the Šayḥ inserted the marginal comment '*ay min Allah*' 'that is, from Allah' as a response to the controversy.

Top right, the expression '*ay min Allah*' 'that is from Allah' is a later addition to point out the abundant gift is sought from Allah.

4.2. Aṣḥama al- Najāšī⁷

In Šayḥ ‘Umar’s manuscript on Najāšī, MS 1, two Ethiopian kings are mentioned. The first is King Abḥur who was in power before the advent of Islam, while the second is King Aṣḥama ibn Abḥur later better known as Najāšī. The latter was contemporary with Muḥammad’s prophethood.

King Aṣḥama is referred to by various names by different authors. Šayḥ ‘Umar’s manuscript mentions Aṣḥama apart from Najāšī (3)⁸.



Aṣḥama malāt nasayyid Najāšī, ‘əyyu səmu

Wəhbāt malāt ‘əyyu bə‘ Arab turgumu⁹

Ḥāmzi ‘ilu kitāb ‘aṣḥabbiqu torgimu

‘Aḥmed Najāšī, malāt lə‘addi ‘əyyu səmu *Jawāhir al-Ḥisān* bərgəṣ fassāri

Aṣḥama is the name of Lord Najāšī

Whose meaning in Arabic is ‘gift’¹⁰

A book has translated this well

‘Aḥmed Najāšī is a name of a locality; *Jawāhir al-Ḥisān* explains this well

⁷ The Arabic definite article *al* ‘the’ and the noun (name) Najāšī ‘king’ are orthographically represented separately. However, in pronunciation, the alveolar lateral sound /l/ of the definite article is assimilated by the next alveolar nasal sound /n/ at the beginning of Najāšī and the pronunciation of *al-Najashi* becomes *anNajashi* ‘the king’. Locally, the name is used without the definite article and in the Ethiopian pronunciation *Najāši*.

⁸ The number of the page from which a direct quote is taken appears in parenthesis.

⁹ Line 2 of the verse is retrieved from what is written vertically to the left of lines one, three and four.

¹⁰ ‘Gift’ is not a usual meaning of the word *aṣḥama* in Arabic.

Aṣḥama¹¹ is the name more commonly used by Islamic sources. On the other hand, Ethiopian (Christian) sources recognize him as Adriaz (Sergew 1972:185). Many Muslims in Ethiopia consider Aḥmed Najāšī as the king's name, but the Šayḥ notes that this is actually the name of a place, citing the book known as *Jawāhir al-Ḥisan*.¹²

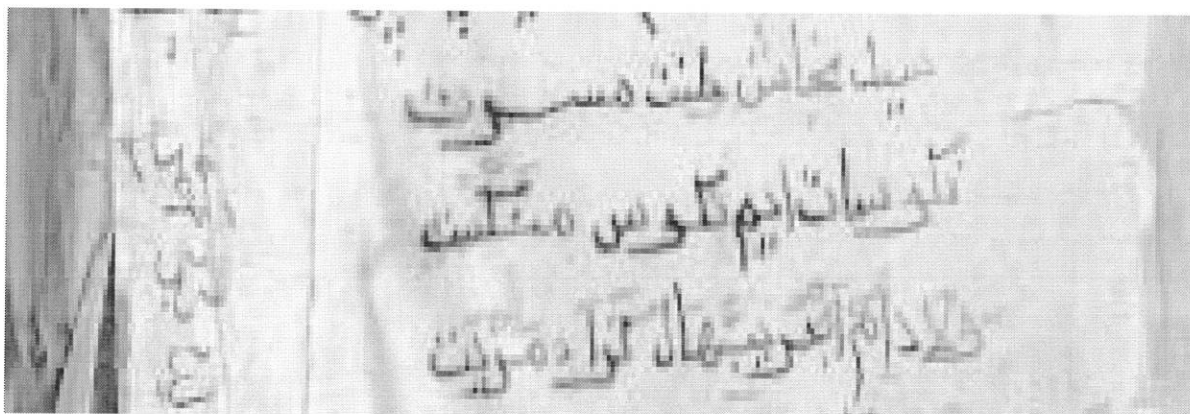
In this thesis the name Najāšī, by which the king is generally known, is adopted. His fairness, and the hospitality he extended to the Muslim emigrants who were persecuted by the Quraysh, which is a major theme of the manuscript under discussion, won him broad recognition in the Muslim world. Consequently he has become a source of pride to Ethiopia.

4.2.1 Enthronement

In the long history of Ethiopia, leaders used to assume power in two ways. Conventionally, a royal family, used to assign the eligible individual to the throne purely on the basis of its rules of succession. However, a capable individual who subdued all his competitors could also assume leadership by himself based on his own merit. The manuscript under examination considers that the enthronement of Najāšī took place both in the former manner, that is, through the rules of succession, and also due to his merit and competence.

4.2.1.1 Power through succession

According to Šayḥ 'Umar the succession of the monarchic power passed from Abḥur, the father, to the son, Najāšī. The Šayḥ describes the lineage in verse in the following manner (2).



¹¹ Ahmeddin (2003:46), referring to Encyclopedia Aethiopica, mentions that the original name was Ella Ṣaḥam.

¹² The name Aḥmad has been attached to Nāgaš probably to give it an Islamic flavor. According to Šayḥ Ḥedir, many places in Tigray are known after influential Muslim personalities such as 'Addi Kābirā for 'Addirgud.

Sayyid Najāšī ʔəntā mäsäräti

Nəgusat ʔəyyom nəgusä mängəsti

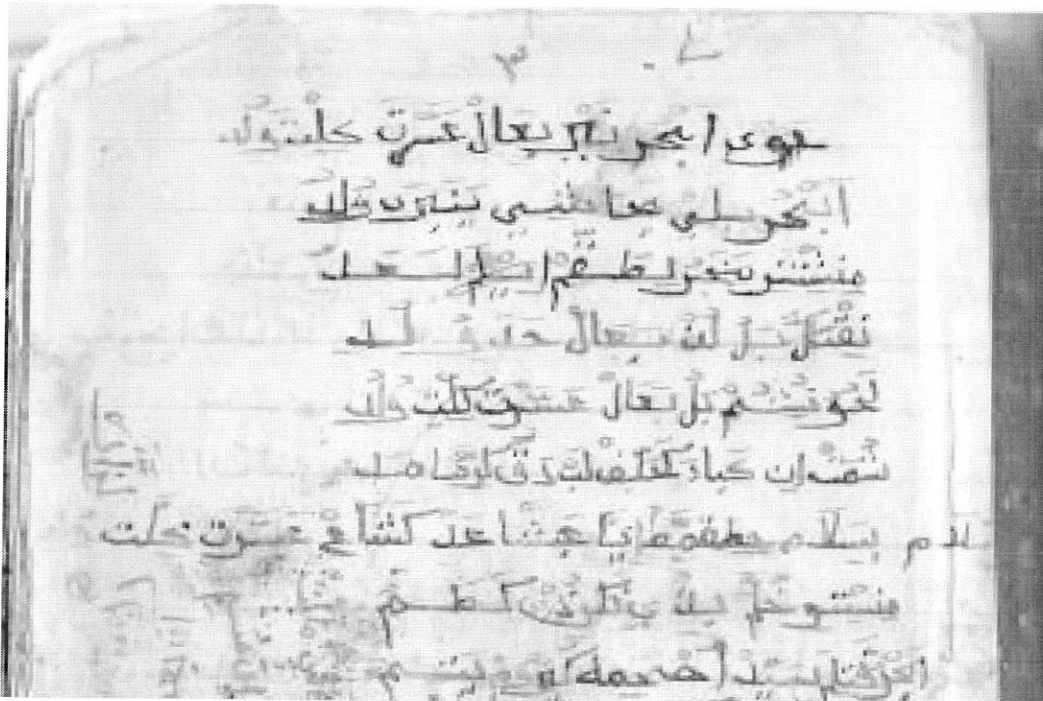
Wäladiʔom ʔAbḥur yəbbāhal gäzaʔi märyäti.

Lord Najāšī has origin from time immemorial

His ancestors royal

His father Abḥur, ruler of the land

The Šayḥ also describes how the nobility plotted to overthrow king Abḥur to replace him with his brother for the simple reason that king Abḥur had only one son, Najāšī, while Abḥur's brother had twelve sons. The nobility were worried that the succession of Najāšī would not last long if they let it happen since he had no sibling to take over after his death. So, they decided to kill and depose Abḥur, to deny Ašḥama, Najāšī, his right to the throne. The nobility went ahead with their plot, that is, they killed Abḥur and brought his brother to power. They did this assuming the country would be guaranteed peace for a long time when the twelve sons of Abḥur's brother succeeded each other.¹³ Šayḥ ʔUmar describes the scenario as follows (3).

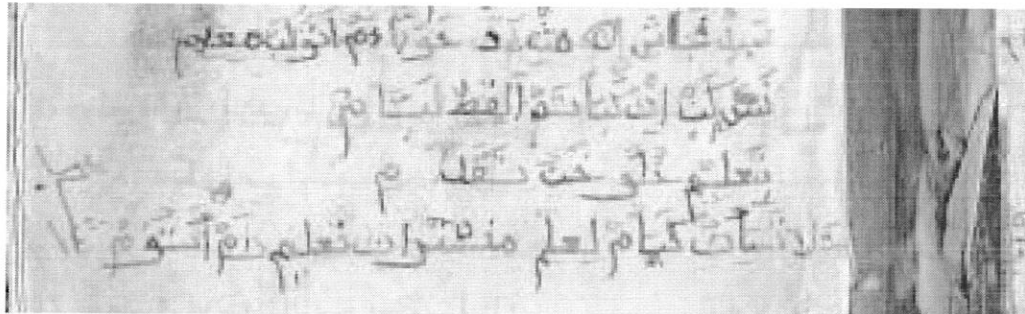


¹³ In fact, this very naive hope did not come true; the text tells us that the country was not at peace, which was why Najāšī was recalled.

Haw 'abḥur näyru bā'al 'assärtä kältä wuludi
 'Abḥur bäläy Najāši yänäbäroy wuludi
 Ministər mähäru ləṭək'k'əm ' ilom lə'ddi
 Nəqtällo bälu ləzu bā'al ḥadä wuludi
 Ləḥawu nəšum bälu bā'al 'assärtä kəllətä wuludi
 Šumät 'ənkaba'u ['ənkab'u] kəḥalləf lab däk'k'u kərrämamädi
 Bəsälam (Bəsälam) ḥətk'əmmät 'əyya ḥabäša 'addi kəša' 'assärtä kältä ləzzazuri
 Ministər ḥullom bəzuy nägərzuy gəṭämu
 'Abḥur k'ät ilom sayyid Aşḥama gäbäruwwom yatimu

The brother of Abḥur had twelve children
 While Abḥur had no other son than Najāši
 The ministers discussed the future of the nation
 To kill the one with only one son
 And replace him with the one who had twelve sons
 So that succession can pass to the sons
 Abyssinia will then be peaceful until the twelve sons get their turn to rule
 All the ministers agreed on this idea
 They thus killed Abḥur and left Najāši an orphan

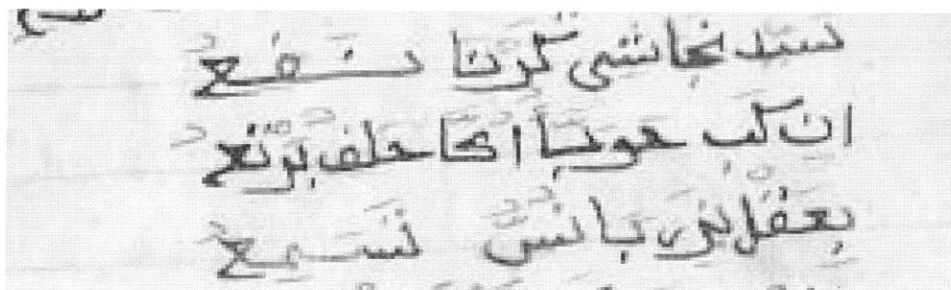
Nevertheless, the situation was not favorable to the ministers as Najāši continued to impress. He even outdid the king, his uncle, not only in matters of knowledge but also in the art of speech and conversation. The Šayḥ depicts this in the following lines (3).



Sayyid Najāšī mäs dāk'k'i ḥawəbbo'om 'atāwu lab mə'əllami
Nəssom konu 'ənkab'atom 'alāk'əṭ läbbami
Bə'ilmī ḥullu ḥonu tāk'[q]äddami
Ḥadä täs'inu käm'om lö'əlləmi minisətrat ta'līm ri'om 'atāwom šəbbəri

Lord Najāšī entered training together with his cousins
He was found to be the wisest among them
He excelled in all aspects
None was even close to his knowledge. The ministers started getting worried

As expressed below, Najāšī's knowledge exceeded not only his cousins' but also that of his uncle (4).

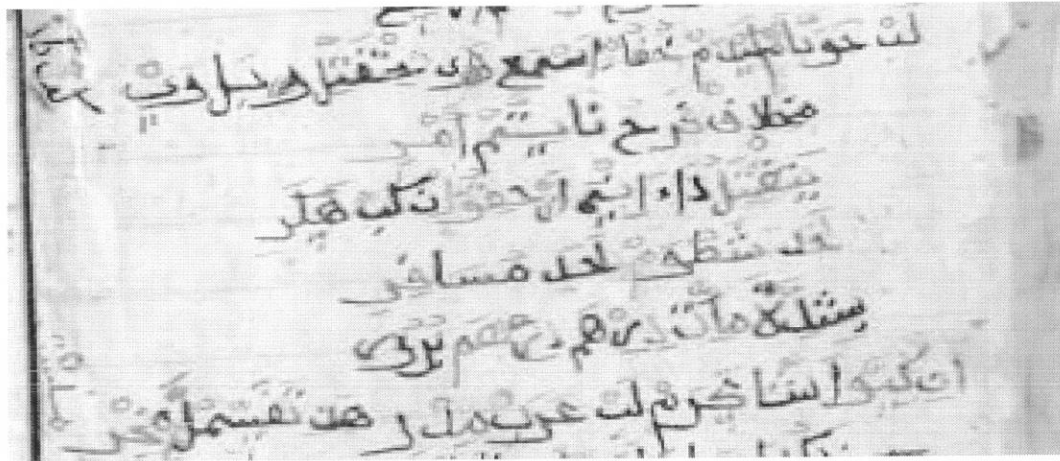


Sayyid Najāšī kārna näfi'u
'Ənkab ḥawəbbo'om 'əkk^wa ḥalifu bārtī'u
Bə'ak'[q]li bəzārəba nəssu täsämi'u

Lord Najāšī really excelled
He was even wiser than his uncle (the king)
He was favoured of his intelligence and speech

The courtiers were determined to do whatever it took to ensure that Najāšī wasn't a source of danger. So they came up with a plan to get rid of him as they were afraid he would make his own move. They brought the idea to the king, Najāšī's uncle. The king agreed to their proposal and

banished Najāšī, selling him into slavery. The following citation from the manuscript briefly relates how the banishment was carried out (4).



Lab ḥawəbbo'om kāydom ḥəfu' 'asmā'u wāy ḥənk'ätlo bālu wāy kənābbarəri
Məḥlaf fəriḥu nayatom 'amri
Yätək'[q]tälu dä'a 'ənbäy 'arḥək'[q]əwwo 'ənkab hagäri
Ləḥadä šätəwwom ləḥadä musāfiri
Bəšuddə[š]tä mi'ti dirham dirham bururi
'Ənkəyyow 'aššagärom lab 'arāb mədri həzi təfāšimullom məḥri ministiri

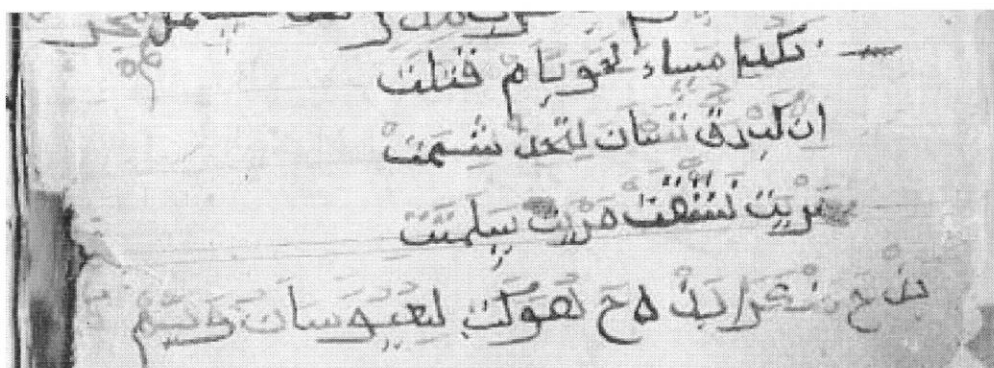
The ministers went to his uncle to propose either to kill him or banish him
Fearing to differ
(The king) chose to have him exiled
They sold him to a traveler
For six hundred dirham of silver
He was taken to the land of the Arabs to the satisfaction of the ministers¹⁴

¹⁴ This story is reminiscent of the story of Joseph in the Quran and the Bible.

But the plot of the courtiers and the decision of the king did not hold for long. After a short time, as seen in section 4.2.1.2 below, the status quo changed and Najāšī was brought back from slavery and enthroned.

4.2.1.2. Power through merit and competence

According to the manuscript, the king (Najāšī's uncle) died of a thunderbolt. To make matters worse, none of his sons proved to be competent enough to replace the king. The country was thrown into political turmoil. The Šayḥ describes the episode as follows (4).



Nāgoda māšī'a ləḥawəbbo'om k'ätälät

'Ēnkab dāk'k'u tās'anä lətəḥz šumät

Märyät täč'č'ännäk'[q]ät märyät šälmätät

Bäzhä mänkära bäzhä həwkät lə'ayuwwo sä'anu wäyyom ministry

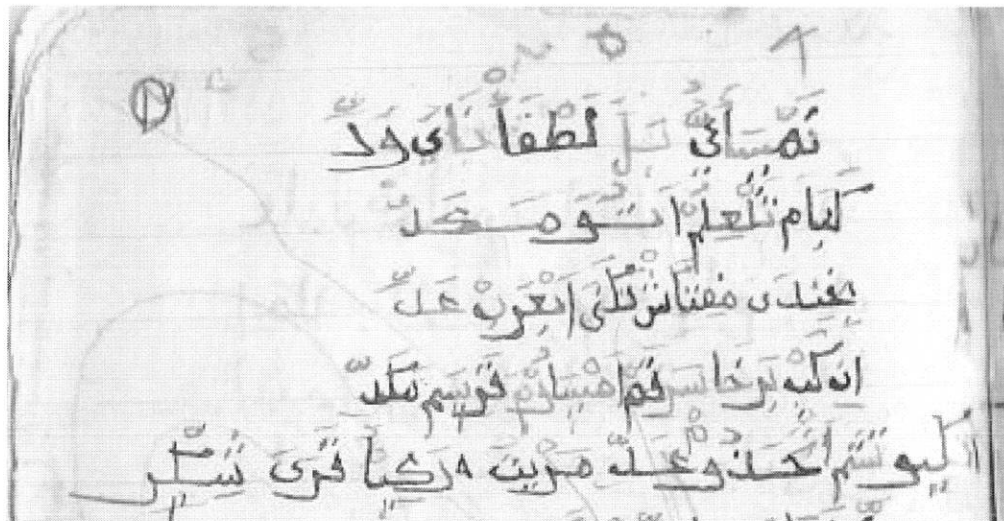
A thunderbolt killed the uncle

None of the sons proved capable of assuming power

There was huge turmoil and chaos

The ministers did not know what to do

To turn to Najāšī became inevitable. The search for him is portrayed in the citation below (5).



Nämşä'äyyo bälu läṭfa'nayyo wäddi

Gäbä'om[gäli'om] täl'ilom 'atäwu mägäddi

Bəḥəndäy məfəṭtaš təgänäyä 'ab 'aräb 'addi

'Əkab bäräḥa särik'[q]om 'amş'uwom k'orişom mägäddi

'Ənkəyyow täšomu 'athazuwwom 'addi märyät rägi'a k' [q]äräyä šəggəri

Let's bring the one whom we banished

Some of them (ministers) set off on the road

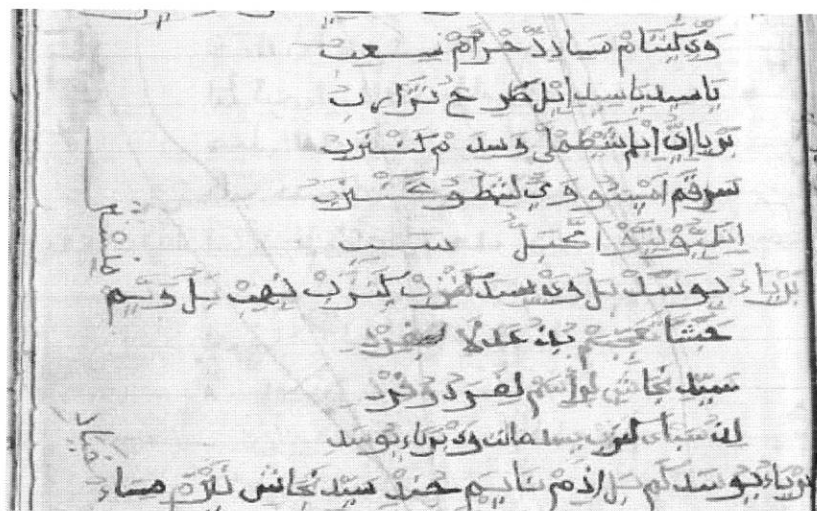
He (Najāšī) was found after a long search

They stole him from the desert and brought him back, cutting the road short

He was immediately enthroned to rule the land; things went back to normal and there was no more suffering

Despite the fact that his father was unfairly killed and Najāšī was originally denied power, although he had every right, ultimately Najāšī was enthroned. The Šayḥ considers the latter event as an outcome of his fairness and wisdom. He deserved to be a king for his qualities more than his mere descent from a royal family.

Najāšī's fairness and wisdom were demonstrated even as a new leader coming back from slavery, that is, long before the historic incident with the Muslim emigrants from Arabia. One dramatic illustration of this happened when the master of the ex-slave Najāšī came all the way from Arabia to Abyssinia looking for his 'lost slave'. Without knowing that the king of Abyssinia was Najāšī himself, the slave owner sued the nobility around Najāšī because they took the slave they had once sold to him without bothering to pay the money back. The case was brought to King Najāšī's court. To the surprise of all, King Najāšī offered either to return the stolen slave or to pay the money that was due. This made a lasting impression on the people, who understood well what the consequence of the options would be. That is, if the ministers decided to give the slave back, it was Najāšī himself who would be taken away. The Šayḥ gives this account in his manuscript as follows (5).



Wäyyo goyto'om mäši'u daddəhri'om sə'ibu
 Ya-sayyidi ya-sayyidi 'ilu țäri'u tazaribu
 Barya 'ayyu 'ilom šäytomuläy wäsedom gänzäbu
 Särik'[q]om 'ams'uwwo wäyyo ləšätuwwo gänzäbu
 'Enkəyyow ləyyow 'akkäbällu säb
 Bärya'u [baryu'u] yəwsäd bälu wäy yəsäd gänzäbu gänzäb nəhəb 'ina bälu wäyyom ministri
 Həbäša tä'ajjibom bəzu 'adli fərdi
 Sayyid Najāšī ləra'som ləfäräduwwo fərdi

Ləzu sərb'ay gänzab yəsäd malät wäy barya'u [baryu'u] yəwsädi

Barya'u[baryu'u] yəwsäd kəmbälu 'əzom nayom jundi sayyid Najāšī näyrom məs'u hāyadi

His (Najāšī's) master followed after him (King Najāšī)

He exclaimed, "My master, my master,

The ministers took money for a slave they sold to me

Then stole the slave back."

He (Najāšī) immediately called the ministers

He declared, "Let him take either his slave or his money back".

The ministers agreed to pay back the money

The Abyssinians were struck by the fairness of the ruling,

The judgment Lord Najāšī gave on himself

That the master should get his money back or his slave

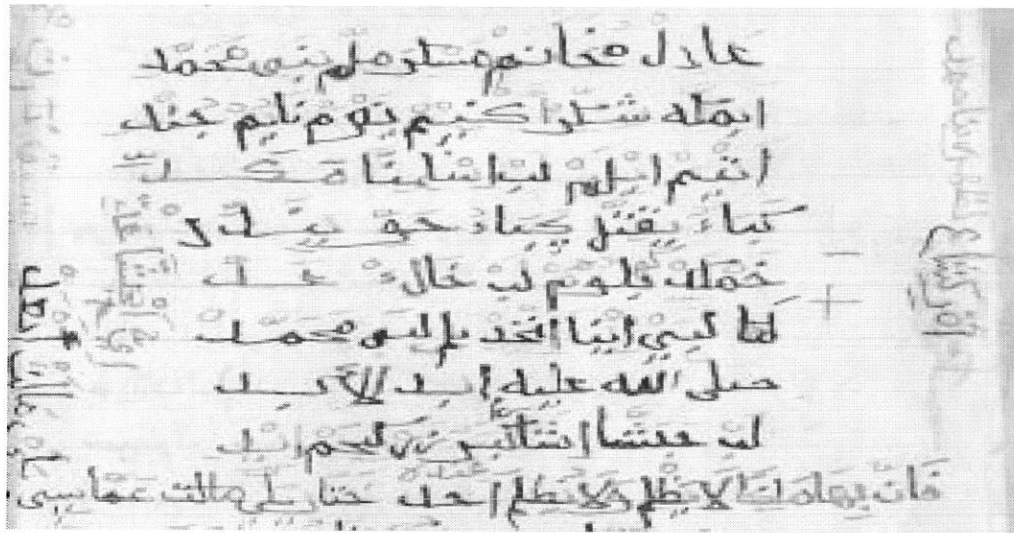
Had the ministers chosen to give the slave back

It would have been King Najāšī that would have gone

As can be seen above Najāšī was a king known for his fair administration. In reference to Najāšī the prophet underscored, "...where no one is unfairly treated in his land" (Abdusselam 1989: 65).

4.2.3. Welcoming the Prophet's companions

Not long after that event the Prophet Muḥammad sent a group of emigrants to seek asylum in Abyssinia. The emigration to Abyssinia did not happen by chance. It was an order from the prophet Muḥammad who advised his adherents to flee persecution by the Quraysh. The following is a citation from Šayḥ 'Umar's narration about the initiation of the emigration (6).



'Ādil məḥʿanom mäskiromullom nabi Muḥammadi

'Ab makka šəggər 'agnəyom näyrom nayom jundi

'Atyom 'ilom lab 'əsləmənna mägäddi

Gäba'u[Gäli'u] yəqəttäl gäba'u[Gäli'u] ḥawwi yənäddədi

Ḥämkädkum bäluwvom lab ḥali' 'addi

'Amru kəša' ləzəhər rabbunā şamadi¹⁵

Labäy 'ina lənəḥäd bälu lə-nabi Muḥammadi

Şallallāhu 'alayhi 'abad al-'abadi

Lab Ḥäbäša 'išara gäbäru zärgiḥom 'idi

Fa-'inna bihā malikan lā-yazlimu wa-lā-yuzlamu 'indahu 'a ḥadun ḥättari yälläy 'amma şi yälläy

Malät 'əyyu 'ab Ḥäbäša 'addi bəşəbbuq nəgus maḥmud al-ḥabari¹⁶

The Prophet Muḥammad witnessed Najāšī's fairness
 When his followers were persecuted in Mecca
 For accepting Islam
 Some of them were killed and others burnt
 He advised them to leave for another land
 Until the Lord makes it safe

¹⁵ Line 6 of the verse is retrieved from what is written vertically in the margin.

¹⁶ The same holds for Line 11.

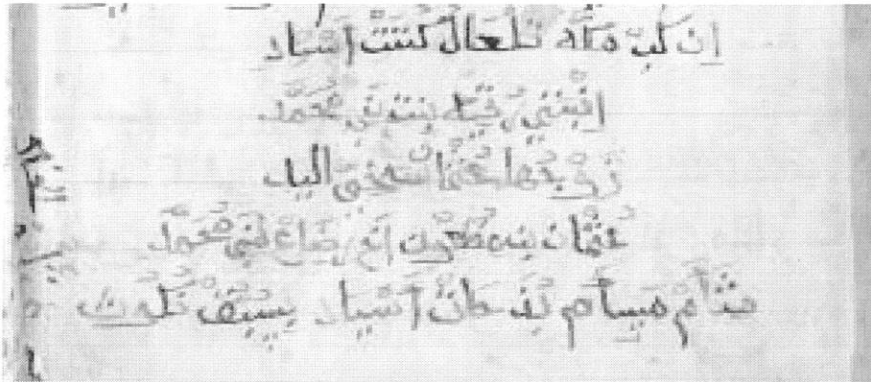
Where to? they asked the Prophet Muḥammad,
May Allah's mercy be upon him forever
He pointed to the land of Abyssinia
There is a king under whose rule no one either oppresses or is oppressed
There is neither robber nor rebellion

Regarding the persecution the followers of the Prophet underwent and their emigration to Abyssinia, Endris (2010) describes as follows:

According to Ibn Jarir al-Ṭabari (839-923), there came a trial which severely shook the people of Islam; some were seduced. The messenger of God commanded them to immigrate to Abyssinia. He told them that there was a righteous king in Abyssinia in whose land no one was oppressed and who was praised for his righteousness. The messenger of God commanded them to do this. A batch of refugees went to Abyssinia because of the coercion they were being subjected to. His fear was that they would be seduced from their religion.

The emigration of Muslims to Ethiopia happened in two rounds, the first and the second. The first one was ordered by the Prophet when the oppression of the Quraysh was intolerable to the Muslims. Safiy al-Raḥman (1979:118) describes the emigration as, "In Rajab of the fifth year of prophethood a group of twelve men and four women left for Ethiopia. Among the emigrants were 'Uṭman bin 'Affan and his wife Ruqaiyah the daughter of the Prophet".

However, they went back when they heard that the Quraysh had embraced Islam. But they found that the persecution had rather increased. Therefore, the Prophet instructed them to emigrate to Abyssinia for a second time. This second group of emigrants comprised eighty-three men and eighteen or nineteen women (Safiy al-Raḥman 1979:120-121). Šayḥ 'Umar mentions some of the names of the emigrants with admiration as follows (6):



'En kab makka täl'alu 'əzom gotät 'asyādi

'Enbäytäy ruqiyya bint nabi Muḥammadi

Zawjuhā 'Uṭman saḥiyy al-yadi

'Uṭman 'ibn Maz'un 'aḥi riḏā' lənabi Muḥammadi

Məs'om mäşyom bəzuḥat 'asyādi bəşəbbuq nəgus matluw al-ḥabari

The honorable emigrants began their journey from Mecca

Ruqiyya, the Prophet Muḥammad's daughter,

Her husband Uṭman, the generous

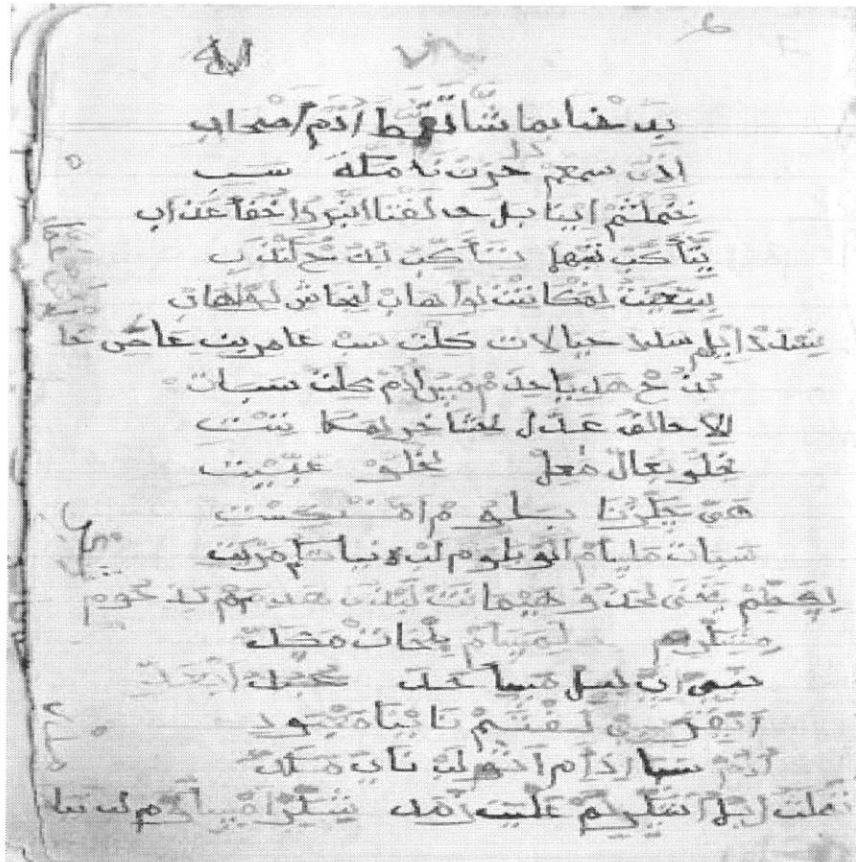
Uṭman Maz'un, "nurse-brother"¹⁷ of the Prophet Muḥammad,

More dignitaries were also in the group that came to the good and famous king

The Šayḥ mentions the names of the most notable ones of the emigrants: Ruqiyya, daughter of the Prophet, her husband Uṭman, the Prophet's best friend, who was considered generous, and Uṭman, the "nurse brother" of the Prophet. He generalizes that all were respected individuals.

The Quraysh, on learning of the hospitality of King Najāšī towards the emigrants, dispatched their own emissaries asking Najāšī for the handing over of the Muslim emigrants. The emissaries came with gifts to Najāšī's ministers and servants so as to win their hearts. But the scheme would not be effective under the straight, logical and fair king as discussed below (7).

¹⁷ According to Šayḥ 'Umar, Uṭman was brought up breast-fed together with the Prophet Muḥammad. Hence, in Arabic: 'aḥ al-riḏā' literally translated as 'nurse-brother'



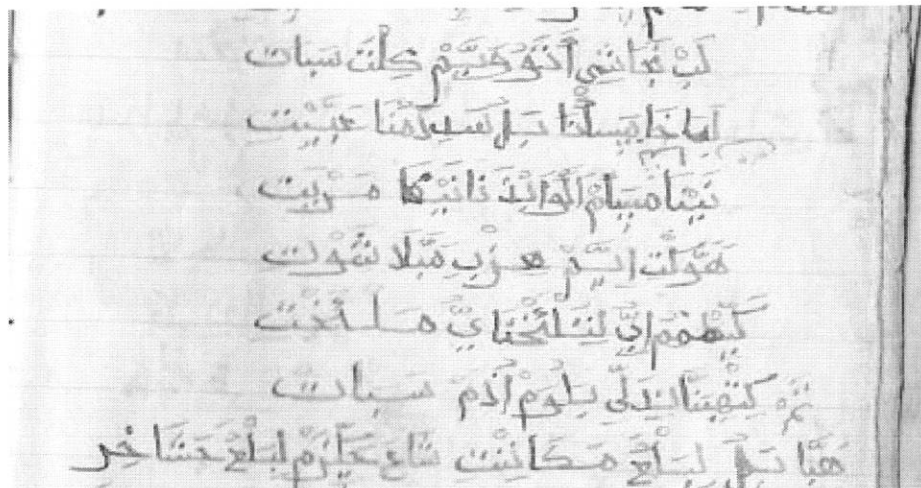
Bədəhna bəmaçça taqämmätu 'əzom aşhābi
 'Əziy sāmi'om dā'a həzānu na-makka sāb
 Hənmālsom 'ina bālu lafta 'ənābārwwa həfu' 'aḍāb
 Yəttä'akāb təbhilu tä'akkibu bəzuḥ gänzāb
 Bəbbə'aynātu ləmāk^wanənti ləwwāhab lə Najāši ləwwāhab
 Nəsdād 'ilom sādädu ḥayyalat kəltä sāb 'Amr bin 'Aşi ḥal'ayu 'Amiri
 Bəzuḥ hədəyya ḥizom məşu 'əzom kəltä səbat
 'Əlla ḥaläfu 'addälu ləḥaşahər ləmāk^wanənti
 Ləḥullu bā'al mā'al ləḥullu 'abbäyti
 Hayyə ḥaggəzuna bəluwwom 'ammängəsti
 Səbat məşi'om 'alləwu bəluwwom lab nayatkum märyäti
 Ləgätṭəm yəḥonäy ləḥazuwwu haymanot labzuy hadimom bəziḥuwwom şəggəri

Məşəggar ləmāşom bəlḥat mägäddi
 Nabi 'əyyä ləbəl mäşi'u ḥadä 'ab 'addi
 'Ayyəqärəbəy laftom nayna ma'b üdi
 'Əzom säbat 'zi'om 'atäwu lab nayu mägäddi
 Tämäläsu 'ilu 'aşəgğirullom 'alyät zämädi şəgğər 'amşi'uwvom lab nayatkum mədri

Upon hearing this (the well-being of the emigrants), the Meccans were dismayed
 They started plotting to bring them back to the previous harsh punishment
 Money was amassed
 To be given to the ministers as well as to Najāşī. They sent two diplomats
 Amr bin al-'Aş and Amir
 The two individuals came with many gifts
 They distributed them among the servants as well as the nobles
 To all the ministers and the great ones
 They urged them to help them in their case:
 That they (the emigrants) have a strange religion
 That they had fled after getting punished
 A man arose in the town (Mecca) claiming to be a prophet
 He does not even get close to our gods
 And these people joined his party
 Family and relatives tried to reconvert them
 But they came to your land.

The poem has very similar contents with the narration of Mohammad Ṭayib (2007:14) but in his version the names of the two Quraysh messengers are 'Amr ibn al-'As and Abdullah Ibn Rabi'ah.

According to Šayḥ ‘Umar, the emissaries appearing before Najāšī presented their case as follows (8).



Lab Najāšī ‘atāwu wäyyom kältä säbati

Labaḥa mäši’əna bälu sädidomuna ‘abbäyti

Nayna säbat mäši’om ‘alläwu ‘abzu nayka märyäti

Hawwäkti ‘əyyom həzbi məbbälašawti

Käyätməmu ‘əyyu lətäl’ aḥnayyo mäl ḥti

Kəthəbänna nədälli bäluwom’ əzom säbat

Habbatom bälu ləbäl’u mäk^wanənti ša’a ḥaggizom ləbäl’u ḥašəḥəri

The two men entered Najāšī’s court

They said, we came to you, sent by noble people

A few dissidents have come to your land

They are disobedient, corrupting people

We have been sent to prevent this

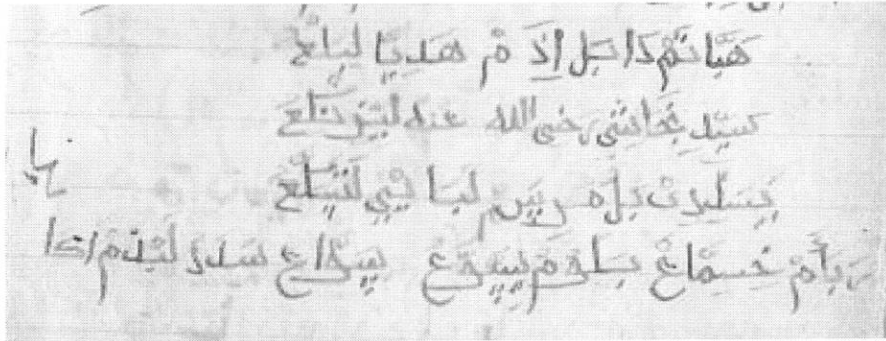
We request you to hand them over to us

The ministers who took gifts supported the request

The servants too who took gifts supported

The incident was critical. ‘Amr bin al-‘As was no ordinary man. He was carefully chosen to persuade Najāšī with his eloquence. Along with the distributed gifts the pressure on Najāšī was immense. ‘Amr tried to convince the king that the emigrants professed a strange and corrupt religion. The ministers also supported the claim and pressured the king to turn the emigrants over to the Meccan Quraysh.

King Najāšī, however, did not succumb to the pressure. As a wise leader and, above all, a just king, he had to listen to what the emigrants had to say. He gave them a chance to present and defend their case (8).



Habbatom dā'a bālu 'əzom hadiyyā ləbāl'u

Sayyid Najāšī raḍiyallahu 'anhu lāyz əng'u

Yäsəddədəy bālu măriṣom labay lətäşəggə'u

Zäräbä'om ḥəsəmma' bāluwwom yəşşəwwu'u şəwwa'i sädädu labzom 'akābiri

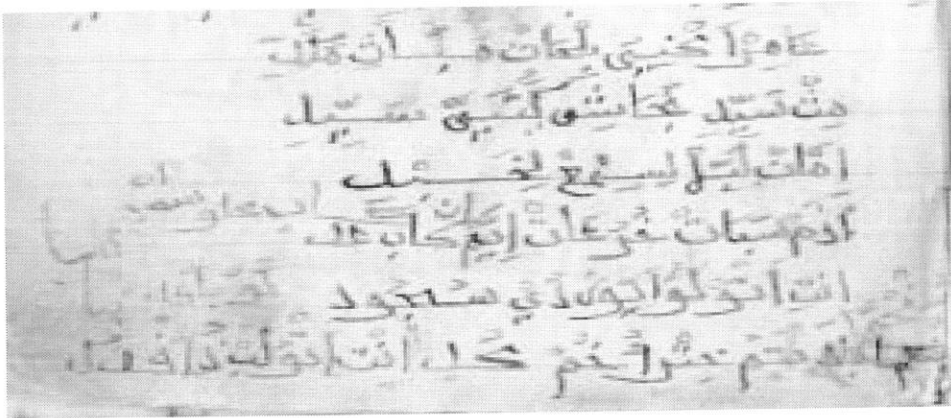
Turn them over said those who took gifts

Yet king Najāšī, may Allah be pleased with him, refused

I am not to turn over those who seek protection trusting me

Call them, and let's hear what they say

‘Amr made sure he exploited every opportunity to accomplish his mission. He seized upon the emigrants' manner of greeting, which could be considered very rude. In those times, people had to bow or even prostrate in front of kings, especially when they anticipated some kind of favor. The incident is presented in the Šayḥ's manuscript as follows (9).



'Amir 'agnäyā bəlḥat mābä'asi mägäddi

Məs sayyidi Najāšī goytay sayyidi

'Eman läbbəl ləsəma' ləḥābdi

'Əzom säbat ḥuru'at 'əyyom 'ənkab kullu 'addi

'Entə 'atwulläwu ayyəwärduy sujüdi

Şəḥumma bälatom ḥətri'u 'iḥum gud i 'əntə'atwu lab zu 'afdäggä bäri

'Amr got a means to cause discord between the emigrants

And Lord Najāšī

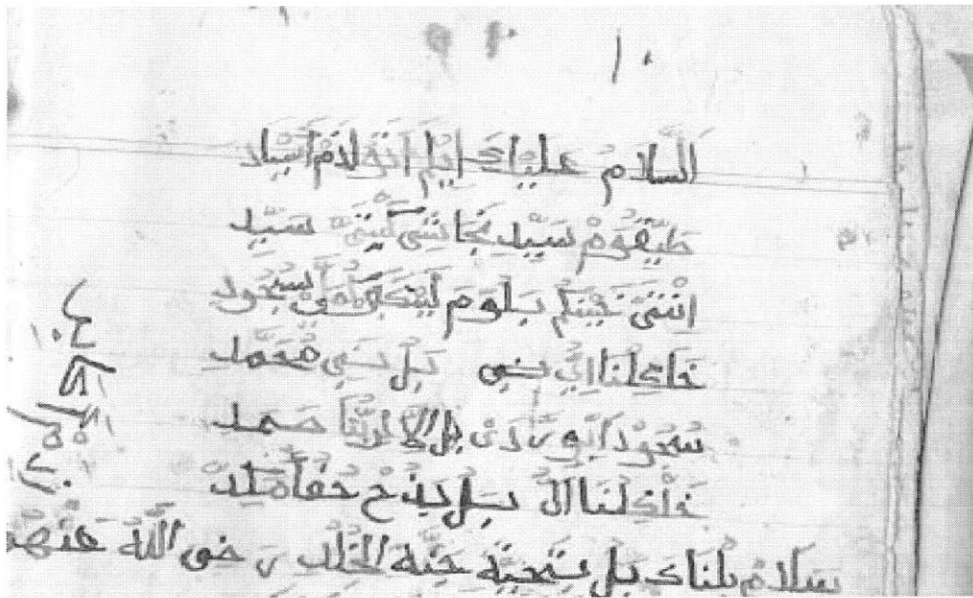
Which is convincing

These people are arrogant

When they enter they do not bow down

You will see when they enter at the gate

The emigrants were exercising the new code of conduct as taught by the Prophet Muḥammad: no one prostrates in front of another human being, regardless of status difference. Prostration is reserved for the Creator only. The following lines from the manuscript present the response of the emigrants (10).



'Assalāmu 'alayka 'ilom 'atawu 'əzom 'asyādi

Täyyəquwom sayyid Najāšī goytay sayyidi

'Entay ḥ^wenkum bāluwwom läygäbärkumulläy sujūdi

Ḥälkilunna 'əyyu bālu nabi Muḥammadi

Sujud 'ayyəwərrädəy bilu['ilu] 'illā lə-rabbunā şamadi

Ḥälkilunna 'allo bālu bəzuḥ ḥəfu' mägäddi

Sālam bilnakä [bilnakka] bālu bi-taḥiyyati jannat al-ḥuldi raḍiyallahu 'anhum 'əzom 'akābiri

The dignified (emigrants) said peace be upon you, on entering the court

Lord Najāšī asked them

How come you did not bow?

The Prophet Muḥammad has prohibited it, they said

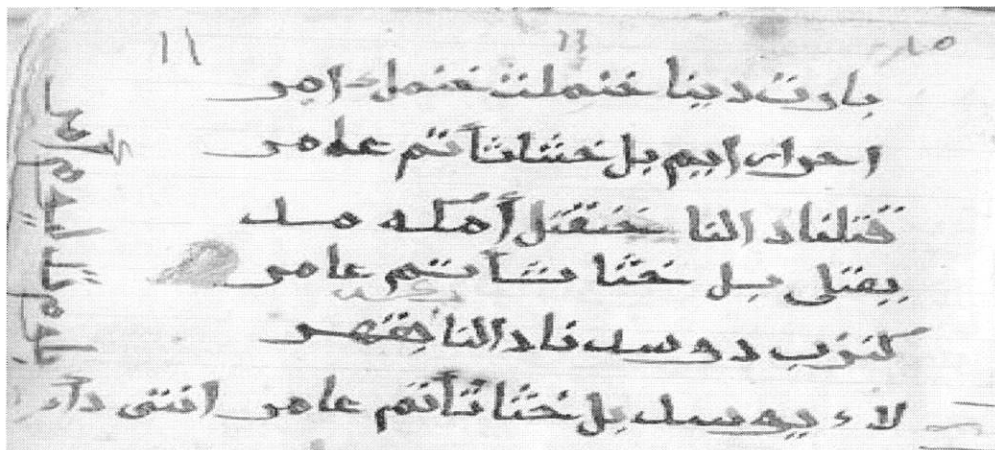
No more prostration except to the Eternal Lord

He prevented us from committing evil acts, they said

We have greeted you with the salute of the people of paradise

May Allah be pleased with those noble people.

King Najāšī then asked Lord Jāfar , the cousin of the Prophet, to speak on behalf of the emigrants (11).



Barot dina hənməlläs hənməllə' 'amri

'Ahrār 'əyyom bälä häsasi'atom 'Amiri

K'ätılno 'alläna hənək'əttäl 'ammakka mədri

Yäk'[q]ätäluy bälä häsasi'atom 'Amiri

Gänzäb wäsıdnado 'alläna bək'[q]ahri

Lä' yäwäsäduy bälä häsasi'atom 'Amiri 'əntay dä'a bäluwuwm tədälyuwom 'amri

Are we slaves that we should return and fulfill their orders?

'Amr, the accuser, answered, they are free people.

Did we kill people so that we should be killed in Mecca?

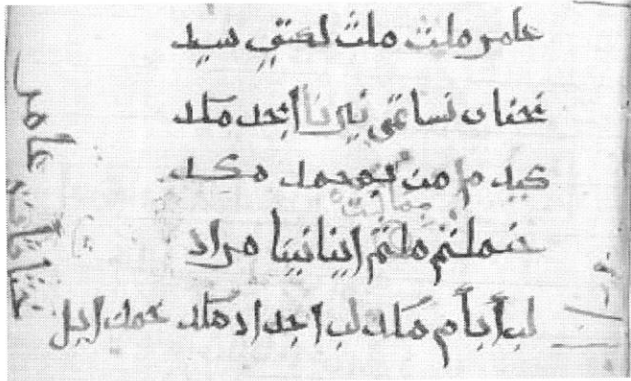
They did not kill, said their accuser 'Amr.

Did we take money by force? they asked.

No, they did not take, said 'Amr, the accuser

Then what wrong did they do?

‘Amr responded as follows (11).



‘Amr mālisu mālsi ləgoytay sayyidi

Nəhñay nəssatomiy nerna ’ab ḥadā mägäddi

Käydom ’amānu bə Muḥammad mägäddi

Ḥənmälsom bəmalät ’ina nayna muradi

Lab ’abbo’om mägäddi lab ’ajdədi mägäddi ḥämzuy ’ilu ḥäsasi’atom ‘Amiri

‘Amr replied to the king

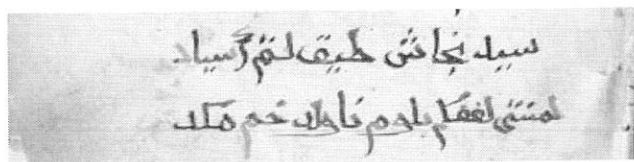
We and these people used to follow one path

But they went over to Muḥammad’s path

All we want is to bring them back

To the way of our forefathers

Amr’s argument could not go beyond accusing the emigrants of abandoning the religion of their forefathers. What is interesting, as portrayed by the Šayḥ, is the response of Najāšī, which is consistent with his character. He always gives a chance to the accused, too. One can imagine the situation in the court with emotional tension rising while King Najāšī maintains his composure trying to arrive at the truth underlying the rift between the Quraysh delegates and the Muslim emigrants (11).



Säyyid Najāšī ṭäyyik'[q]u lətom 'asyādi

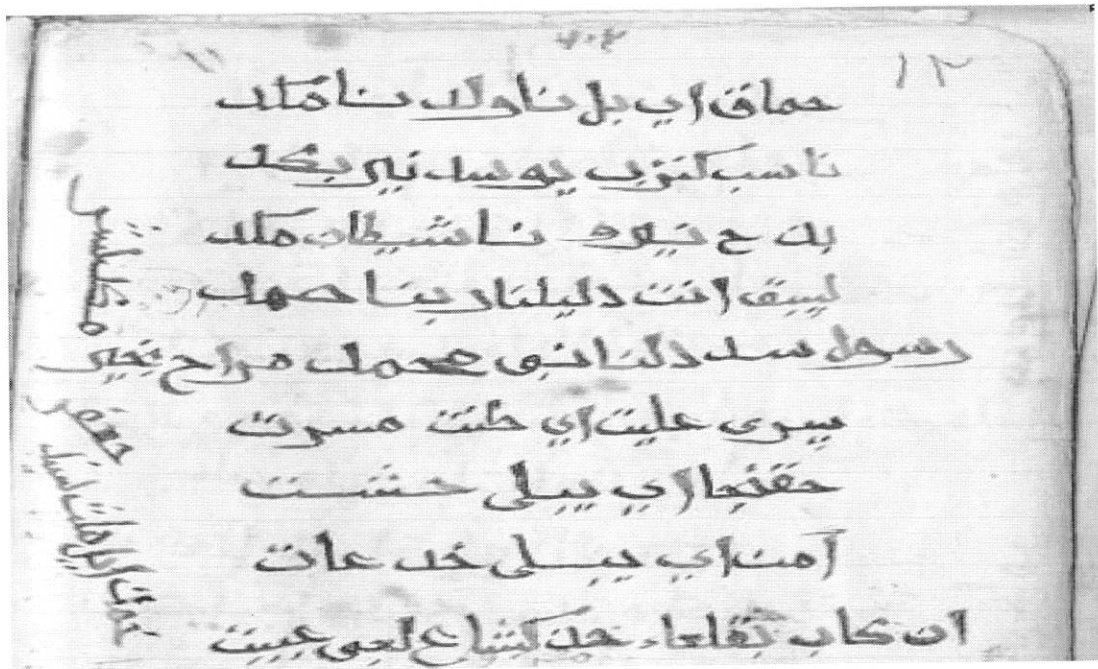
Ləmntay lāk'ik'kum[läqiqkum] bəluwwom nawälādḥum mägäddi

King Najāšī asked the noble ones (emigrants)

Why did you abandon the path of your forefathers?

Ja'far declared why they chose to follow the Prophet Muḥammad. He explained that the religion they decided to embrace has values that would not accept the 'established' customs of Meccan society, no matter how popular such customs might be.

The manuscript briefly provides the argument of Jāfar at the court, which has been reported by many historians (12).



Ḥəmmak'[q] 'əyyu bälə nawäläddəna mägäddi

Nasāb gänzāb yəwəssād näyru bəgəddi

Bəzuḥ näyruwwo našäyṭan mägäddi

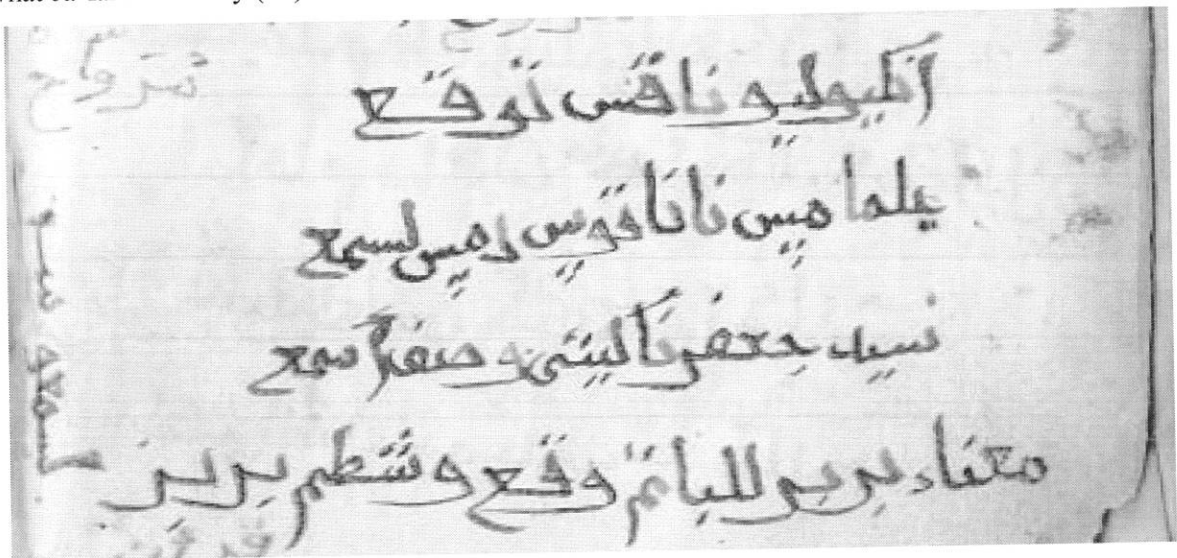
Ləšəbbuq 'əntədälyälna rabbunā šamadi

Rasūl sädidulna nabi Muḥammadi mərəḥi bəḥayri mägädfi ləšərri

Şəruy 'alyät 'əyyu təntä mäsäräti
 Həqqäñña 'əyyu yäbəlluy həşoti
 'Amin 'yyu yäbəlluy həd'ati
 'Ənkab bəqol'a'u hizu kəşa' lə'abbi 'əbyät həmziy 'ilu mälisu sayy id Ja'fari

Our forefathers' path was an evil one
 It was normal to usurp peoples' money
 It was full of devilish acts
 But when the Lord chose for us a better path
 He sent us a messenger; the Prophet Muḥammad Who guides to the good and
 forbids the bad
 He has a fine genealogy
 He is truthful and knows no lies
 He is trustworthy with no deception
 From his childhood to adulthood. In such a manner did master Ja'far present his
 reply.

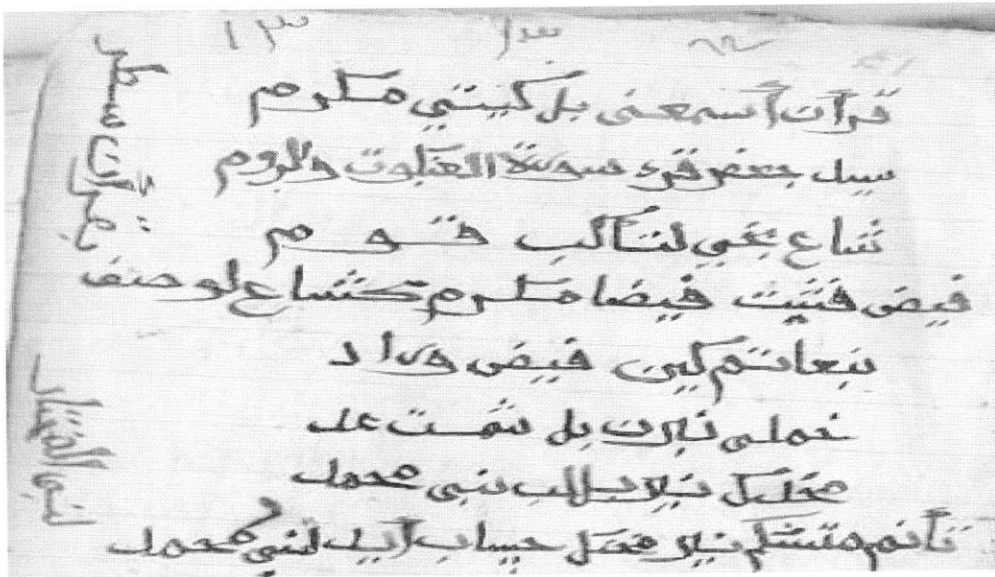
The Şayḫ emphasizes in the manuscript that King Najāsi called his officials and clergy to listen to what Ja'far had to say (12).



'Ēnkyow ləyyow naqus tawāqī' u
 'Ulamā māṣu nanaqus dəmṣi ləsām' u
 Sayyid Ja'far nagoytay waṣfi 'asm' u
 Ma'nā' u bārbiru lələbbatom wāqī' u wuṣṭom bārbiru ləsām' uwwo sirri

Immediately a bell rang
 The clergy came in upon hearing the bell
 Master Ja'far presented the attributes of the Lord
 Which touched their hearts and minds
 It was a new enlightenment

Such was the power of description of Ja'far who moved the clergy. The king was keen to compare the words of Ja'far with the teachings of his religion. Therefore, he asked Ja'far to recite some verses from the revelation sent to the Prophet (13).



Qur'an 'asm'uni bālu goytay mukarrami
 Sayyid Ja'far k'ari' u surat al-'Ankabūt wa al-Rūmi
 Ša'a bāhyu lətā'akkābā qawmi
 Faydi fāsisu faydan mukarrāmi kəša' ləwəssaf bəqur'an saṭri
 Nəb'atom koynu faydi wāradi

Ḥāmlāy nābārānni bālu šumāt'addi

Məḥādku näyrä bālu lab nabi Muḥammadi

Sa'nom [mətäšäkkämku} näyrä məḥonku ḥaṣabi 'id lənabi Muḥammadi lənabiy l-muḥtari

The king asked to hear the Qur'anic verses

Ja'far recited the suras of the Spider (sura 29) and the Romans (sura 30)

Every one of them wept

Tears poured, tears of the king to the extent that it was expressed in Qur'anic lines

His tears gushing out, he said

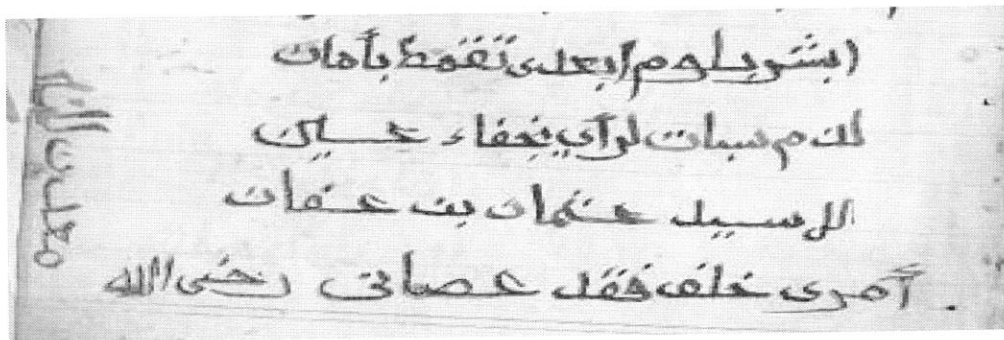
I wish I had no leadership responsibility

I would have gone to the Prophet Muḥammad

I would have carried his shoes and served under him, the Prophet Muḥammad,
the chosen one

The king was touched by the teachings of Islam as presented by J'far. The same story is told in a similar way in most of the history books, but the Quranic suras vary. The sura which is recited is Mary (sura 19) in many sources (e.g. Abdusselam 1989:70).

Najāšī's dedication to protecting the emigrants is expressed in the manuscript as follows (13).



'Abširu bāluwwom 'ab 'addäy tāqämmäṭu bə'aman

Ləzom säbat lərə'äyā bəḥəfu' 'ayni

Ləllə sayyid 'Uthman 'ibn 'Afan

'Amräy ḥəlifu faqad 'ašāni raḍiyallahu 'anhu ma'din al-ḥayri

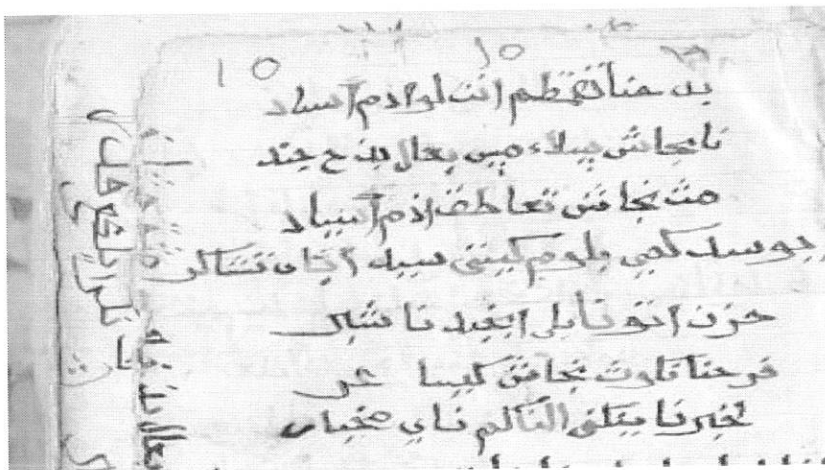
Be glad and live in peace in my country
 Whoever looks at these people maliciously
 At the group of Uṭman ibn Afan (one of the emigrants)
 He has disobeyed me; (may Allah be pleased with him, as he is a mine of
 goodness)

This was the final blow to the Meccan envoys as King Najāšī affirmed his continuous protection of the emigrants.

As can be seen above King Najāšī was not only a source of peace for his country but also for the emigrants who sought his protection. In fact this was a milestone in setting a crucial example to the rest of the world. This legacy has also been a model for imitation even in modern times (Endris 2010).

4.2.4. An attack on Najāšī

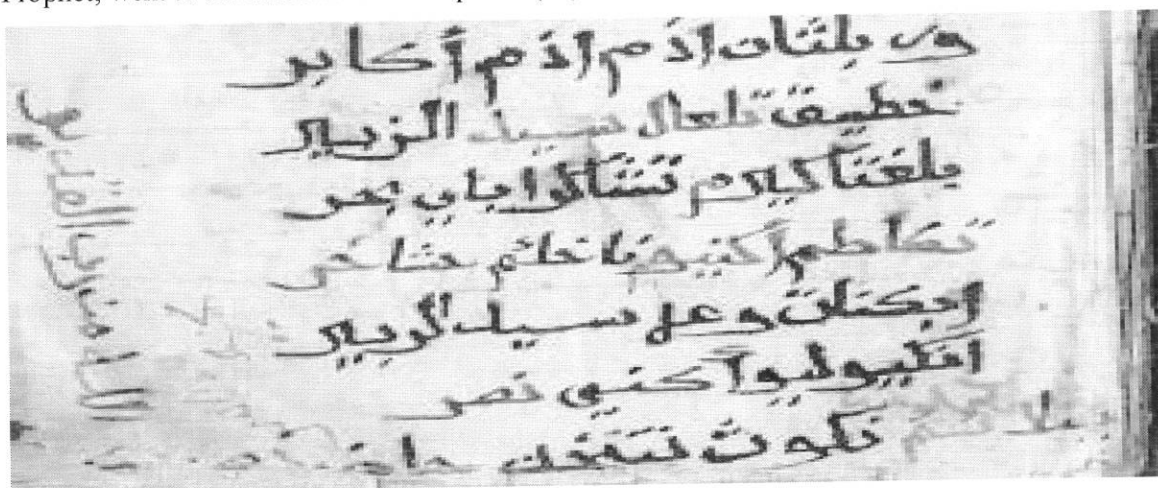
According to Šayḥ ‘Umar’s manuscript, Najāšī’s kingdom was attacked from the direction of the Nile River. The attack was to overthrow the king. Najāšī went to the battlefield, which was on the other side of the Nile River. Šayḥ ‘Umar discusses the emotional attachment the emigrants had to the King. Having enjoyed a long, peaceful and stable situation, they were concerned that things would not be the same without Najāšī. Thus they volunteered to participate in the battle on his side, which Najāšī declined (15).



Bədaḥna təqəmmitom 'əntäläwu 'əzom 'asyādi
 Na Najāšī şāla' i mäşä bāal-bəzuḥ jundi
 Məs Najāšī tā'aḫqu 'əzom 'asyādi
 Yāwəsədäkkuməy bāluwwom goytay sayyidi' abbay täşagiru m əstom ḥaşaḫəri
 ḥazän 'atāwänna bālu 'ab ḥäbdəna şəbbər
 Färiḥna nəgus Najāšī käyyəsä'ar
 Lähbəränna yänəgənnəy 'ilna kām nayu məḥbar

While the emigrants were living in peace
 An opponent of Najāšī came with a large army
 The dignified ones prepared together with Najāšī for the battle
 Najāšī refused to take them and he crossed the Nile with his soldiers
 They (emigrants) said, we are grieved
 We are terrified that King Najāšī might lose the battle
 Thus we might lose the honor he afforded us

When the news of the battle was delayed, Zubair, one of the prominent companions of the Prophet, went to the battlefield and inquired (15).

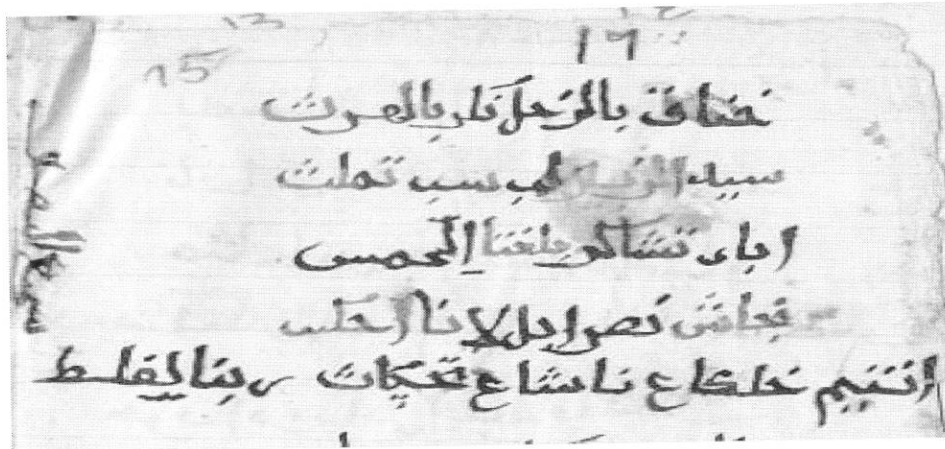


Wärä bəlsä'anu 'əzom 'əzom 'akābiri
 Ḥəṭəyyəq təl' alä sayyid al-Zubayri
 Bələqota gäyrom täşagäru 'abbay baḥri
 Təggaṭämu 'agnəyuwwom naḥullı'om ḥaşaḫəri

ʿAb k^winat wäʿalä ʿassayid al-Zubayri
 ʿĤnkəyyow læyyow ʿagnäyu näsri
 Şälaʿ iʿom nəgus täḥizu häḍara nasrun minallāhi min rabbil qadir

When the dignified ones could not get news of the battle
 Zubair went to inquire
 He crossed the Nile with (an inflated) animal skin
 He found the two armies fighting
 So he joined the battle
 Immediately the army won the battle
 The enemy king was caught and brought back; the success was from Allah

The siding of the emigrants with Najāṣī highlights how closely attached they were to him. The level of concern they had is discussed in the following lines (16).



K^winat bəlzāḥalä nəgär bəlʿaräsä
 Sayyid al-Zubayr lab säbu tämäläsä
 ʿAbbay täṣagiru bəlāqota ʿəllaḥammäsä
 Najāṣī näsiru ʿilu ləʿana ʿahäggosä
 ʿĤntaymo ḥələkkaʿ naṣaʿu taḥəg^was rabuna yəfälləṭ samiʿ al-baṣir

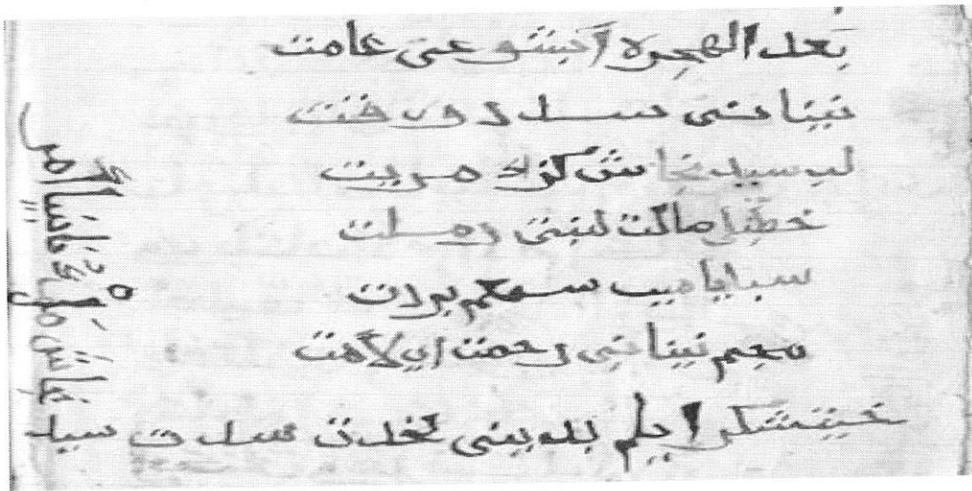
Once the battle settled down
 Lord Zubair returned

Crossed back over the Nile swimming with (an inflated) animal skin
 Najāšī was victorious, which made us happy
 Our (the emigrants’) joy was immeasurable; only God knows how much we were
 happy

The scenario of the battle is yet another manifestation of the relationship between the emigrants and Najāšī. Their worry when the king went to the battle and their joy at his victory testify to the strength of the bond between them.

4.2.5. Representing the Prophet for his marriage

The special relationship between the Prophet Muḥammad and King Najāšī was enhanced when the Prophet married one of his wives, Ramla, who was then in Abyssinia. Ramla, widely known as Umm Habibah, was the daughter of Abu Sufīan who was one of the leaders of Quraysh. In Islamic marriage, both the bride and the bridegroom are required to give their approval to their marriage. If they are not around, the fathers or other close family members serve as legal representatives. The Prophet requested the hand of Ramla whose husband, ‘Ubaydah bin Jaḥš, had been converted to Christianity and later died while in Abyssinia. King Najāšī was honored to serve as the Prophet’s representative to conclude the marriage (16).

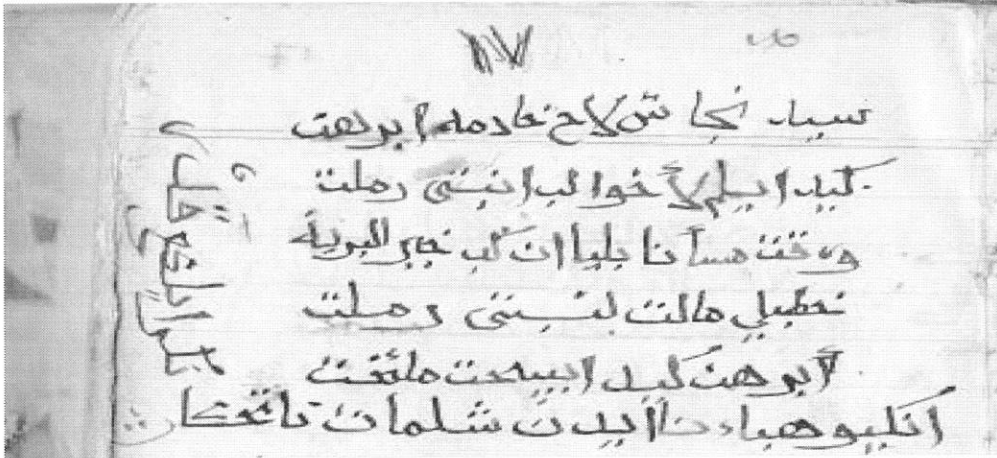


Ba'd al-Hijra 'ab šaw'attä 'amäti
 Nayna nabi sädädu wäräqäti
 Lab sayyid Najāšī gäza' i märyäti
 Ḥuṭäbälläy malät lənbäytäy Ramlati

Säb'aya moytu sämi'om bäriddäti
Mäččäm nayna nabi raḥmät 'əyyu ləummäti
Ḥäytəšəggär 'ilom bədinäy ləḥädät səddät sayyid Najāšī mäl'u nanabiyyina 'amri

Seven years after the Hijra
Our Prophet sent a letter
To King Najāšī the lord of Abyssinia
Asking him to get for him Lady Ramla in marriage
Whose husband died as an apostate (became Christian)
Our Prophet of course is merciful towards humanity
Concerned for her (Ramla) who emigrated professing Islam. King Najāšī fulfilled
the Prophet's request

The response of Lady Ramla is shown in the following lines (17).



Sayyid Najāšī lə'ihu ḥadimatu Abrähäti
Kidi 'ilom lə'aḥuwwa lab 'ənbäytäy Ramlati
Wäräqät mäši'unna bäliyya 'ənkab ḥayr al-bariyya
Ḥuṭäbälläy malät lənbäytäy Ramlati
Abrähät käyda abšähät mäl'ḥti
Enkiyyow haba'a na'idän šəlləmat nataḥg^was nāgär 'ayləkka'əy qädri

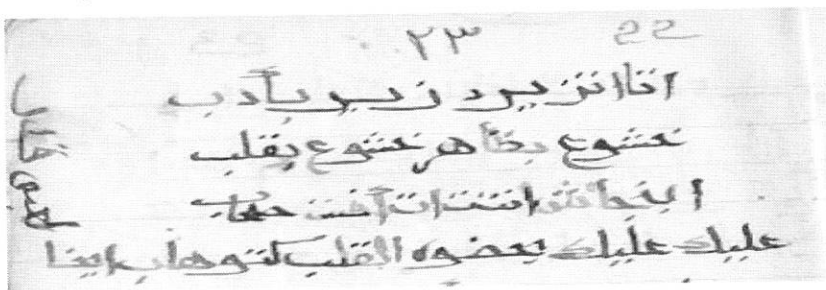
Lord Najāšī sent his servant Abrāhāt¹⁸
 He sent her to Lady Ramla
 Tell her that a letter has been sent to us from the best of human being (the
 Prophet)
 To Betroth Ramla to him.
 Abrāhāt delivered the message
 Out of delight she (Ramla) gave her her bracelet

Endris (2010) relates this story as follows:

His wife Ummu Habiba immediately separated from him [her former husband]. She was shocked at the incident [i.e his conversion to Christianity]. He died as a convert in Abyssinia. In the seventh year of the Hijra, 627 AD, the Prophet then sent to Ja'far to propose to her in his name. When she consented al-Aṣḥama betrothed Ummu Habiba to the Prophet and sent her across the Red Sea with a wedding present of 400 dinars. On the other hand, Ummu Habiba's father, the Meccan Quraysh leader, was not able to hide his delight over the marriage and later he also accepted Islam.

4.2.6. Najāšī as companion of the Prophet

Some scholars consider Najāšī to be a *Ṣaḥābi*, that is, a companion of the Prophet Muḥammad. Other scholars consider him as *Tābi'i* 'follower', a title given to one who follows the Prophet's teachings as transmitted by the companions (the *Ṣaḥābis*). Šayḥ 'Umar considers Najāšī as one of the companions of the Prophet (23).



¹⁸ Abrāhāt, literally 'she gave off light', is a typical Tigrinya woman's name.

Atta 'ətəzəyyər zäyyər bə'adāb

Ḥuṣū' bəzahir ḥuṣu' bə-qalbi

'Ab Najāṣī 'əntə'atī 'aftu ṣaḥābi

'Alayka 'alayka biḥuḍur l-qalbi kətəwwahab 'iḥa lə'abäyā qadri

Whoever visits should do so with utmost discipline

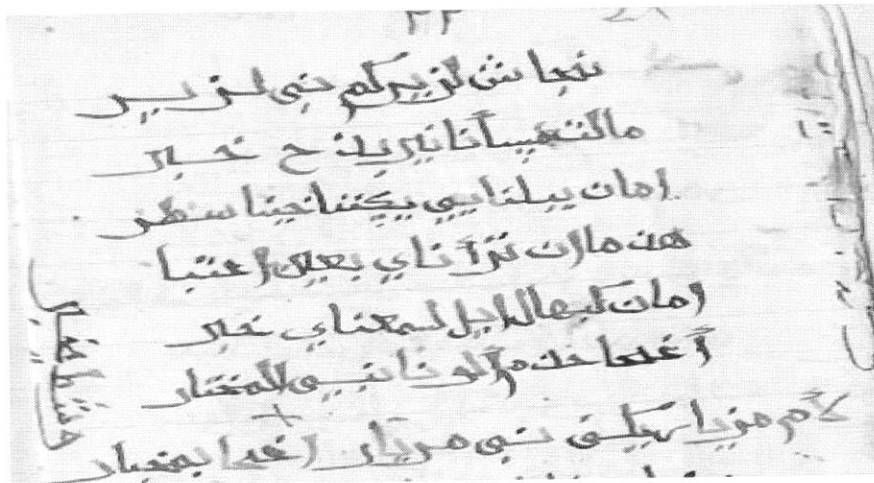
With internal and external concentration

When you enter the shrine of Najāṣī, the companion,

It is crucial to have full concentration; you will then be rewarded with great value

4.2.7. Importance of visiting Najāṣī's tomb

Visiting the Prophet's grave is one of the recommended actions in Islam. Šayḥ 'Umar draws a parallel between visiting the grave of King Najāṣī and visiting the grave of the Prophet (22).



Najāṣī lə-zayyara kām nabi ləzayyara

Mallät māṣī'unna näyru bəzuh ḥabari

'Emman yäbālnayyoy yägnānay ḥ^wenna saṭri

Häzimma 'əntära'nayyo bə'ayni 'i'tibāri

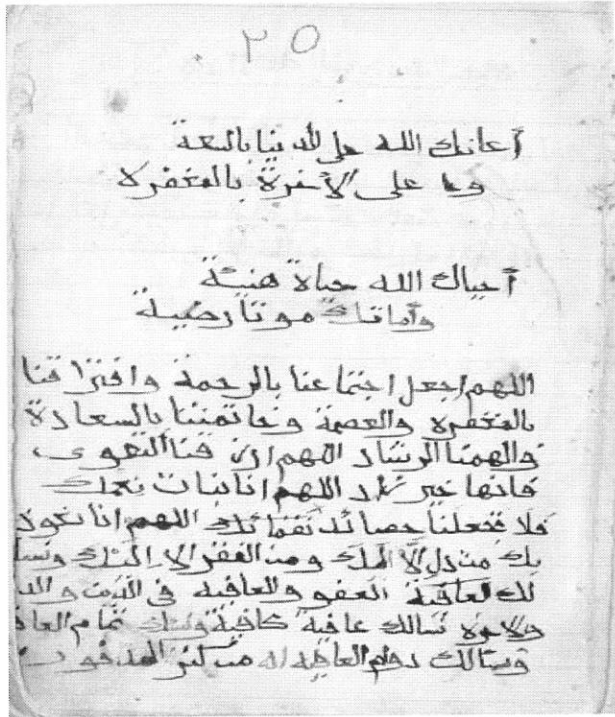
'Emman kəbbāhal 'ilu ləsāma'nayyo ḥabari

'Aqḥa ḥizom 'allāwu na-nabiy l-muḥtāri

lə'om məzəyyar yəgənnā nabi məzəyyar 'aqḥa bəmḥbar wəṣtu yəḥəbbār

Visiting Najāšī is like visiting the Prophet
 We have heard similar stories
 We could not trust them as there was no written source
 But when we look into it
 We tend to believe what we have heard
 He (Najāšī) has something (knowledge) he got from the chosen Prophet
 Visiting him is visiting the Prophet; respecting something is respecting what is in it

The poetic narration, the *manzūma*, concludes with the following Arabic *du‘ā* (invocation) to Najāšī and to the congregation of visitors (25).



'A'ānaka Allāhu 'alā al-dunyā bisṣa'ā

Wa'alā al-'ahira bi-l-maḡfira

'Ahyāka Allāhu ḥayātan hāni'a

Wa'amātaka mawtan raḍiyya

May Allah take care of you in this vast world

And in the hereafter with forgiveness
May Allah make your life pleasant
And your death agreeable

Allāhumma 'ij' al ijtīmā' anā bil -rāḥma wa-ftirāqanā
bil-mağfirati wa-l- 'iṣmā, wa-ḥātīmatunā bis-sa'āda
wa- 'alhimnā al-rašād. Allāhumma 'irzuqnā 'at -taqwā
fa- 'innahā ḥayru l-zad. Allāhumma 'innā nabātu ni' amik
fa-lā taj' ālnā ḥāṣā' ida niqmā' ik. Allāhumma 'innā na' ūdu
bika min ḍullin 'illā ' ilayk wa-min al-faqrī 'illā ' ilayk. Wa-nas' aluka¹⁹
al- 'afwa wa-l- 'āfiyata fī-d-dīni wa-d-dunyā
wa-l 'aḥirā nas' aluka 'āfiyatan kāfiyatan wa-n' as' aluka tamām l- 'afiya
wa- 'as' aluka dawām al- 'afiya. min Kanz al-Madfūn

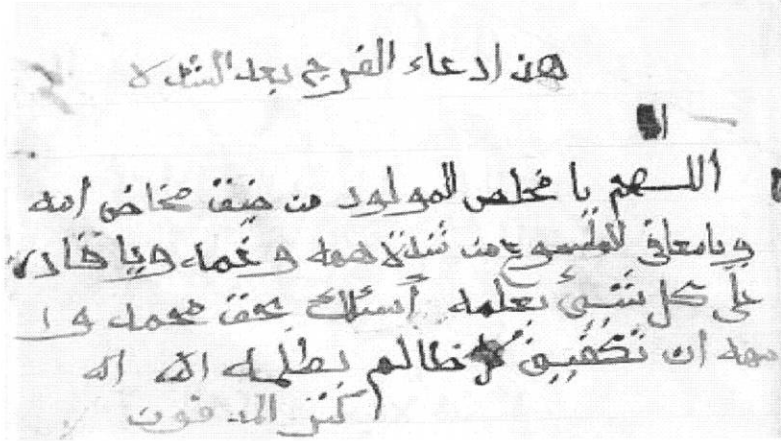
Oh Allah make our gathering full of mercy and our departure
Full of forgiveness and protection, our end joyful
And inspire us with guidance. Oh Allah bestow on us piety
Since it is best of all provisions. Oh Allah we are the plants of your favor
And do not make us harvesters of your indignation. Oh Allah we ask refuge
from being humiliated except by you, and from being impoverished except by
you. We also ask you forgiveness and well-being in our religion and in this world
and in the Hereafter. We ask you for sufficient and completeness well-being.
And I ask you for eternal well-being

At the end of the *du'ā* Ṣayḥ 'Umar indicates that it was drawn from *al-Kanz al-Madfun* 'the buried treasures'.

¹⁹ The Ṣayḥ doesn't follow defined formats for word breaking.

4.3. *Du'ā'*

On the verso of the preceding Arabic *du'ā'* (not paginated) there is a short *du'ā'* recited after a relief from anxiety.



Haḍā *du'ā'* al-faraj ba'd al-šidda

Allahumma yā-muḥalliṣ al-mawlūd min ḥīf maḥāḍ 'ummihi

Wa-yā mu'afī-l-malsū' min šiddati hammihī wa-ḡammihī wa-yā qādirun

'ala kulli šay'in bi-'ilmihī 'as'aluka bi-ḥaqqi Muḥammad wa-ismihī

'An- takfiyani kulla zālīmīn bi-zulmihī. (Kanz al-Madfūn)

This is an invocation recited after the time of hardship

Oh Allah you frees the baby from the grief of the labor pains of his mother

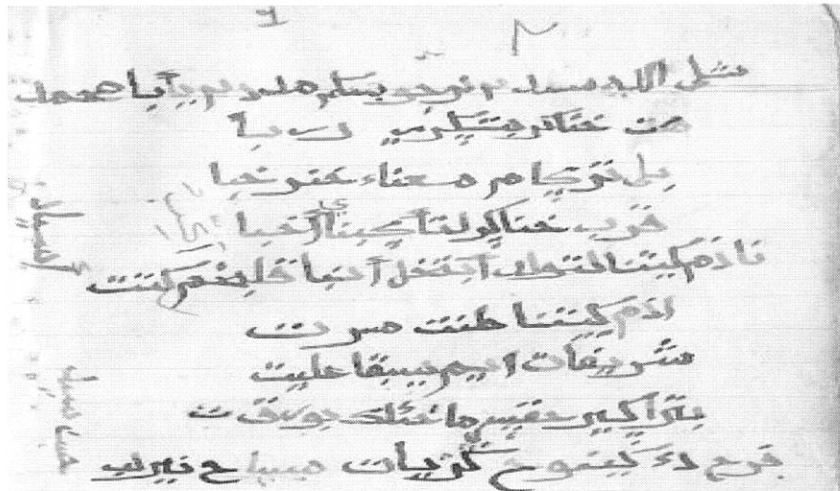
You are the healer of the one who is stung from his grief and anxiety; you are the mighty who is capable of everything. I ask you by the rights of Muḥammad and his name that you protect me from any oppression of an oppressor

At the end of the *du'ā'* the Šayḥ indicates that it (like the previous one) is drawn from Kanz al-Madfūn 'the buried treasure'.

After this isolated *du'ā'* there are six blank pages; then comes the following *manzūma* on saints.

4.4. Popular saints

This section of the manuscript which contains seventeen pages discusses the status and contributions of popular saints. The manuscript identifies four saints. Among them, 'Abba'ay Šaliḥ²⁰ (also known among clerics as Kābirā Saliḥ) is the most popular. The manuscript dwells on this saint at length. I focus also on him. According to the manuscript the saint was born in Tiḥillu Emba (now in Eritrea) and he is a descendant of the Prophet through Hasan the grandson of the Prophet (2).



Šilillāḥ sayyidi 2²¹ narjū bikum madad 2 yā 'abā Muḥammad ('Abba'ay Šaliḥ)

Hazi ḥənnagār bəṭəgray zārāba

Bəläy torg^wami ma'na'a ḥənrāḥba

K'urub ḥənnagār lətä'akkäbnayyo 'aḥāba

Nazom goytana('abba'ay Šaliḥ) lətäwälädu 'ab T əḥillu 'Emba k'alb əḥum 'akk əbu gotät 'asyādi

'Əzom goytana ṭəntä mäsərräti

Šäriḥat 'əyyom šəbbuqat 'alyäti

Bəṭära gäyrä kəqoşər məḥ'alku bəwäraqāti

²⁰ 'Abba'ay Šaliḥ (the popularly used form of the name) is probably the contracted form of 'Abboy 'Abiy Šaliḥ, as it appears elsewhere in the manuscript.

²¹ The number 2 signifies that the phrase preceding it should be recited twice. I observed this from a recording of another manuscript, MS 9, where marked phrases are recited twice.

Färihä dä'a käyänwəho gizäyat mäbšahhu näyrä lab Ḥassan sayyidi

We ask for Allah's help through you Oh the father of Muḥammad (abba'ay Ṣaliḥ's son)

Now let me speak in Tigrinya

So that we comprehend the meaning

Let me say a few words to the congregation

Of our lord ('Abba'ay Ṣaliḥ) who was born in Təḥillu 'Əmba ; listen with concentration, honorables

Our saint has descent from time immemorial

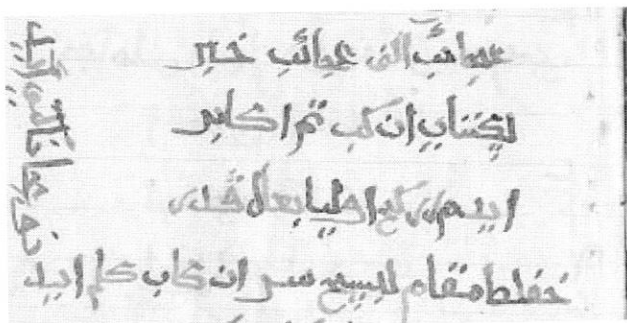
The genealogy goes back to the Prophet

I could have traced it back in detail on paper

But I am afraid it would take too long; otherwise I could have traced it back to Hasan (grandson of the Prophet)

'Abba'ay Ṣaliḥ is considered to be a descendant (fifth generation) of Abadir of Harar. Abadir begot Muḥammad (who went from Harar to Tigray to the place called Arra (Enderta)) and begot Ismail and Ismail begot Musa (who went to Təḥillu 'Əmba (now Eritrea). Musa (commonly known as Feqih Musa) married and begot 'Abba'ay Ṣaliḥ (source: Ṣayḥ Kedir).

Then the manuscript discusses the status of Kābirä Ṣaliḥ among other saints. According to the manuscript, the saints raised their hands up. When they did the hand of Kābirä Ṣaliḥ was found to be the longest. He was, thus, proven the best of the saints (3).

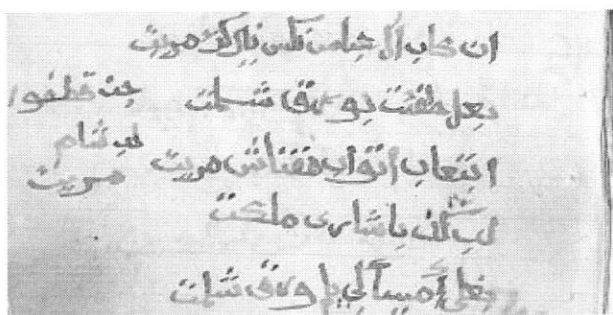


'ajā'ib 'allāni 'ajā'ib ḥabari

Lägnänayyo 'ənkabtom 'akābiri
 'Idom zārgħu 'awliyā bā'al k'ādri
 ḥəfālṭu maqām ləbāšḥ[əwo] sirri 'ənkab kullom 'id nāwiḥa naḡoytay 'idi

I have an amazing story
 Which we got from the elders
 The saints raised their hands
 To know the level of knowledge they get from Allah. Of all the hands
 that of Aba'ay Ṣaliḥ emerged the longest.

Saints are believed to have *karāma* (Spiritual power). 'Abba'ay Ṣaliḥ is known for his saintliness. The manuscript portrays in the following lines a case where the saint used his *karāma* (3).

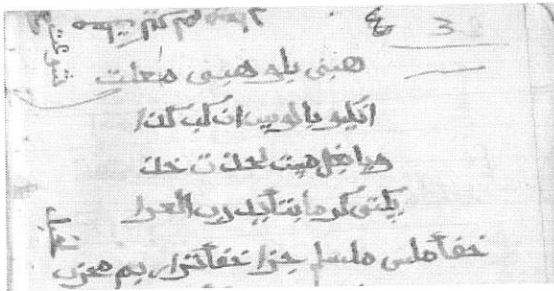


'Ənkab 'Ali 'Abbās nəḡus nəyru gāza' i mārḡāti
 Bāqli ṭāfi'atto bəwārḡ'i šəlləmṭi
 Jinni k'āṭifuwwa lab Šām mārḡāti
 'Ab tā'ab 'atāwu 'ab məfttaš mārḡāti
 Lab gāza [kädä] bə'šara mələkkəṭi
 Bāqläy 'amṣə'ulläy bälom wārḡ'i šəlləmṭi

A king came from the family of Ali 'Abbās
 He lost a mule decorated with gold
 A demon took it to the land of the Šam (Syria)

He started looking for it
 He went to the saint guided by people
 Bring back my mule which is decorated with gold, said he

The manuscript discusses the *karāma* of the saint as follows (4).

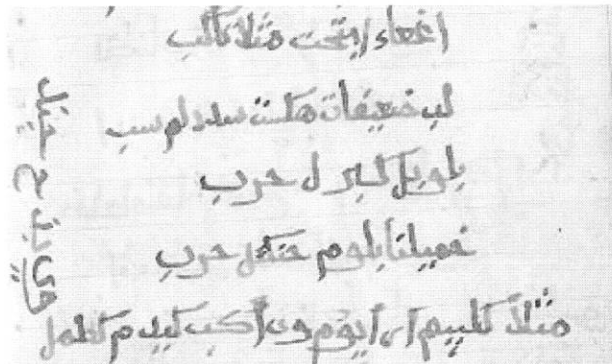


Habānni bāluwwo habānni māalti šāw'attā mā'alti gāyrullom mi'adi
 'Enkəyyāw bəlwāšā 'ənkab gāza
 Wāyya bāqli māšāt ləhazātto hiza
 Bəgoytay *kar[ā]ma* bə-ta'yīd rab al-'izzā
 Həfu' mālsi mālisullom jazā həfu' tazarābom māhzāni ləhābdi

Give me time, he said to him; he gave him a week²²
 As soon as the king went out
 The mule came back with what it was carrying
 Through the miracle of the saint with the support of Allah
 But he responded to the favor with bad words

The saint was displeased at the king's harsh words and they quarreled. When the saint realized that the quarrel could lead to an armed clash he sent men to the king of his country. The king responded that it would be too risky to engage in war against a strong king. The saint brought the guns of the Turkish king put them under his rug. He showed the guns to his countrymen who then concentrated on preparing for a battle (4).

²² The saint is addressing the Turkish king, according to oral tradition.



'Aq'a'u ['Aqha'u] 'ab təḥti maṭallā tā'akkibu

Lab ḍa'ifāt māngəsti sādidullom sābi

Bāluwwo bālu gəbārāllu ḥarbi

Ḥāmelna bālləwwom ḥənk'əl ḥarbi

Maṭallā gāliṣom 'ar'āyuwwom wāyyo 'əkkubi kāydom gəṭāmullu wāyyo bəzuḥ jundi

His “things”²³ were gathered under the rug

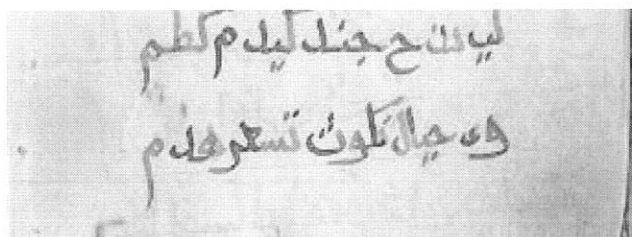
Messengers were sent to the weak ruler

Tell him to fight

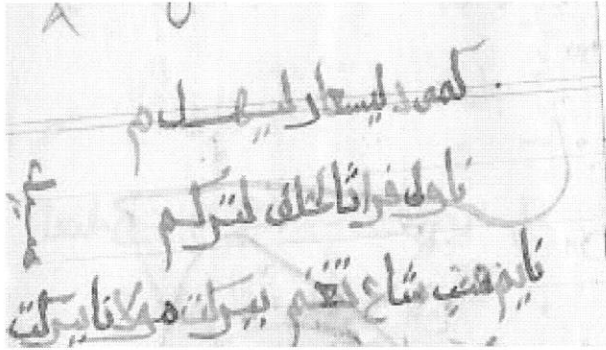
How can we fight against the strong king? was his response

He raised the rug and showed them the “things”; then they went and fought

And the enemy king was defeated (6 and 7).



²³ The “things” may be Turkish weapons.

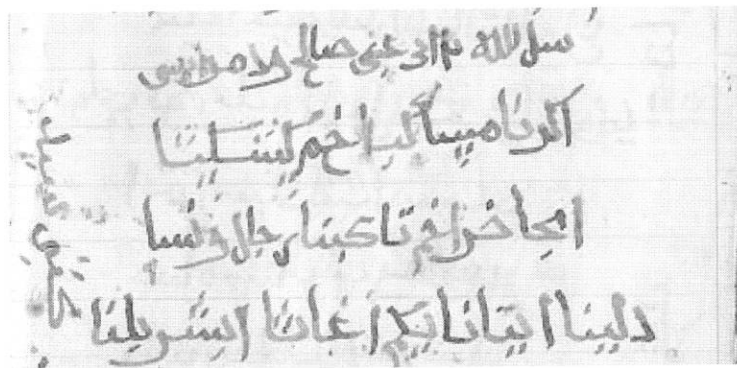


Lab bəzuḥ jundi kāydom gāṭāmu
Wäyyo ḥayyal nəgus täs'iru hadimu
Kämäy dä'a läyässä'aru läyhadmu
Nawaliyyi firāṭa [firāsa] ləḥalfu lətärägāmu
Nayom həzbi ša'u tağanimu bə-barakat mawlānā bəbarakat sayyidi

They went and fought against a large army
The strong king was defeated
He lost the battle
Those who act badly against saints are cursed
His people emerged victorious by the blessings of the saint

According to Šayḥ Aḥmed, the Turkish army attacked Embasineityi (near Adwa in Tigray) and started extracting gold from around Wära'i. The saint took the initiative to fight against the Turks and to restore sovereignty. As indicated above, the people were frightened. But he encouraged them and promised to help both in fighting and prayer. He took a gun and told one of them to shoot an erected pole but failed. He took the same gun and gave it to another person who was able to hit the target. He told the people to consider the first gun as that of the Turks and the second as their own. The people were filled with confidence and went to the battlefield and won the battle. The place where the battle took place is still known as *Məmwat Turki* 'death of the Turks' while the district is known as Addi Kābirā after the saint.

The manuscript then describes how people visit the tomb of the saint and ask for his intercession (16).



Šilillah 2 Aba'ay Šāliḥ wāddi Mūsa

'Ēgrna māšya labāḥum gāsgisa

Abḥaḥuraḥum ['Abḥuraḥuraḥum] tā'akkibna rijālan wanisā

Dālina 'ina naykum 'igāsā 'abširu bāluna goytay sayyidi

Oh Aba'ay Sāliḥ son of Musa

Our feet have hastened towards you

We, men and women are gathered by your heels

We need your intercession; welcome us

The tomb of 'Aba'ay Sāliḥ is located in 'Addərgud in Tigray (source: Sheikh Ahmad 'Umar).

4.5 Panegyric

This section of the manuscript is panegyric, that is, a *manzūma* in praise of the Prophet Muḥammad. It is written in Tigrinya and Amharic 'ajamī, switching irregularly from a stanza in one language to a stanza in the other. The focus is on the importance of praising the Prophet in a group (2).

'Abširu bäluna nəhna həntək'k'am 'əntähonä bəgahdi wäla'k^wa bə-mānam

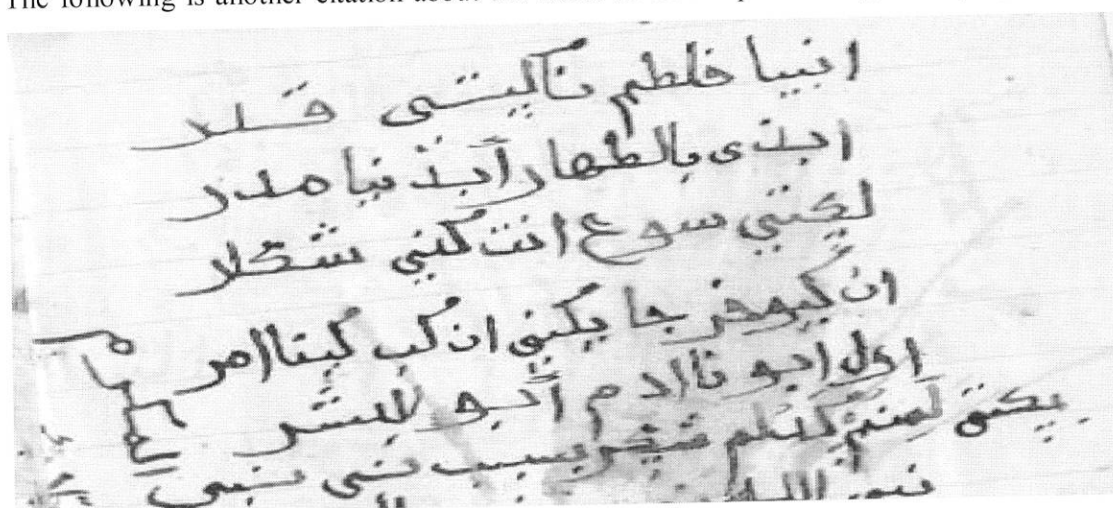
Oh handsome, handsome best of all creatures

Oh handsome, handsome medicine for all creatures

Oh handsome, handsome light of the world

Cheer us up in reality or in dreams

The following is another citation about the status of the Prophet among other prophets (6).



'Anbyā fāliṭom nagoytay k'adri

'Abzuy bəlzahāra 'abə-ddunyā mədri

Ləgoytay šəwə'u 'əntägnäyu šəggari

'Enkəyyow farajā yägnəyu 'ənkab goyta 'amri

'Awwalu 'abuna 'Adam 'abu-l-bašari

Bəgoytay lämminom käydulom šəggəri bə-sabab nabi nabi-l-mukarrami

The prophets of God knew his (Prophet Muḥammad's) status

When he came to this world

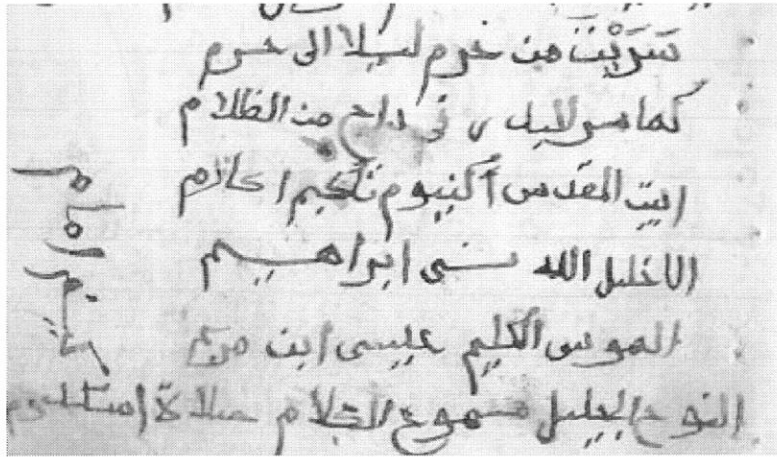
They call upon my Lord when they face a problem

Immediately they receive a solution

The first was our father Adam, the father of all humans

He asked the intercession of the respected Prophet and his problem was solved

The status of the Prophet is also expressed in a blend of Tigrinya and Arabic as follows (7).



Sarayta min ḥaramin laylan' il ā ḥarami

Kamā marra l-badru fi dajjin mina z-ḡalāmi

'Ab bayt al-maqdis 'agniyom tā' akibbom 'akārimi

'Ellə ḥaliluallah nabi 'Ibrahimi

al-Mūsa al-kalīmu 'Isa ibn Maryami

al-Nūḥ al-jalīlu masmū' al-kalāmi ṣalāt 'asgāduwom koynom 'imāmi

You went from one holy place (Mecca) to another (Jerusalem) at night

As the light crept out from the dark

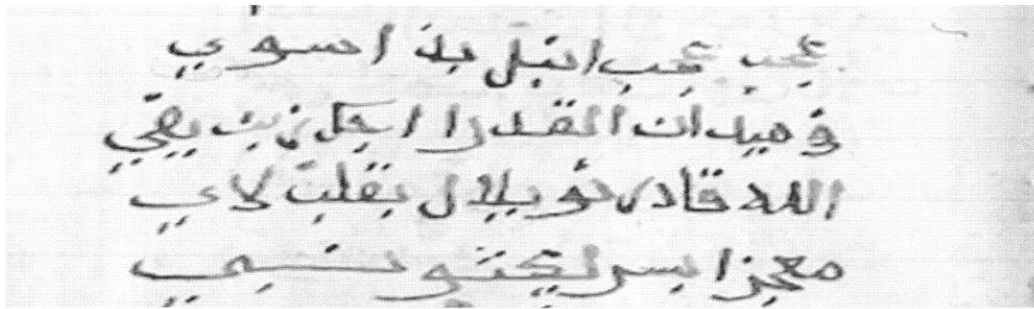
Then the Prophet found all the prophets before him

Ibrahim, the beloved of Allah,

Moses, the one who spoke (with Allah), and Jesus son of Mary

Eloquent Noah, they performed *ṣalāt* with the Prophet as imām

As indicated above, Šayḥ ‘Umar Abrar was versed not only in writing in Tigrinya ‘*ajamī* and in Arabic but also in Amharic ‘*ajamī*. The following excerpt is another illustration of his ability. Though the piece is in Amharic some Arabic elements are apparent (9).

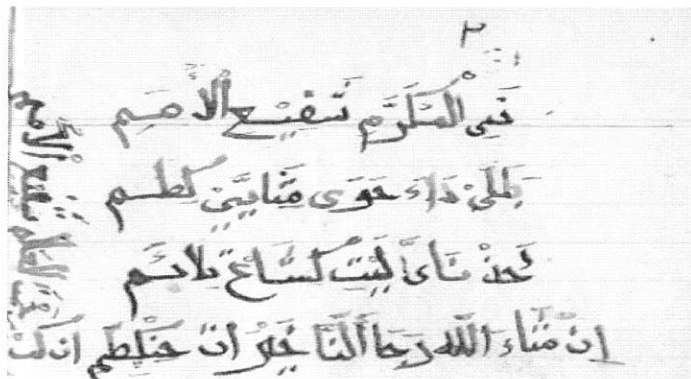


‘Ajab ‘ajab ‘ənbäl bāzza sāwyyä
 Fi-maydan al-qudra ‘əjjəg zābän yäk’oyyä
 Allah qadir näw yilal bāqälb layyä
 Mu‘jizā b-s-r [lisära] läggäsäw nabiyyä

Let us be amazed by that man
 Who stayed long in the world of decision
 A person who sees him knows the power of Allah
 Allah granted him to perform miracles

4.6. The Prophet as intercessor

This section of the manuscript presents a text which has the nature of *ṣalawāt* (prayer/praise). Although it is basically in Tigrinya, Arabic expressions are also incorporated (2).



Nabi al-mukarrami šafi' al-'umami

Bälälläy dä'a ḥawäy məsayyäy gəṭämi

Ləḥaznayya läyti kəša' təlla'ami

'Inšā' Allah rajā['] 'allänna ḥayrät kəngəṭäm 'ənkab raḥmat-l-'alami šafi' u-l-'umami

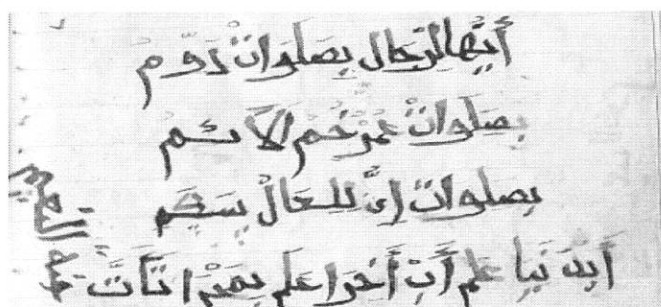
Respected Prophet, the intercessor of nations

Brother, say this with me

During this night till morning

By the will of God we will be given many good things through the intercessor of Nations

The next piece underscores the importance of *ṣalawāt* (4).



'Ayyuhā l-rijāl bəṣalawāt dəwwəmu

Bəṣalawāt 'umrəḥum 'alla'mu

Bə ṣalawāt 'əyyu ləllä'al ṣägämu

'Abəddunyā 'alam 'ab 'aḥirā 'alam bəmähra tə'atti jannat l-na'imi

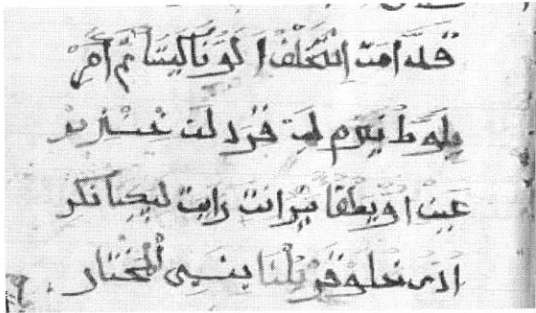
Oh you men take time to make *ṣalawāt*

In performing *ṣalawāt* you will be blessed with longevity

Through *ṣalawāt* problems will be solved

In this world and in the hereafter, through his mercy you will enter paradise.

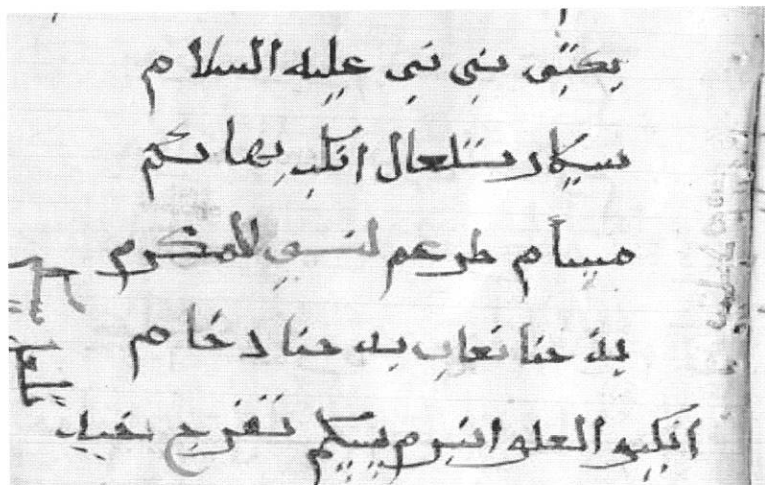
The intercession of the Prophet is most highly valued as expressed in the following citation (11).



K'āddamot 'əntəhālfu 'allāwu nagoyto'om 'amri
 Yələwwātu näyrom lab qirdi lab hinziri
 'Ayni 'əwwən yəṭäffə' näyru 'əntə ri'u läygəbba' nägär
 'Ezuy ḥullu qäryulna bə-naby l-muḥtāri

When the people of the past transgressed
 They were changed to monkeys and pigs
 They became blind if their eyes sinned
 All this has been avoided through the chosen Prophet

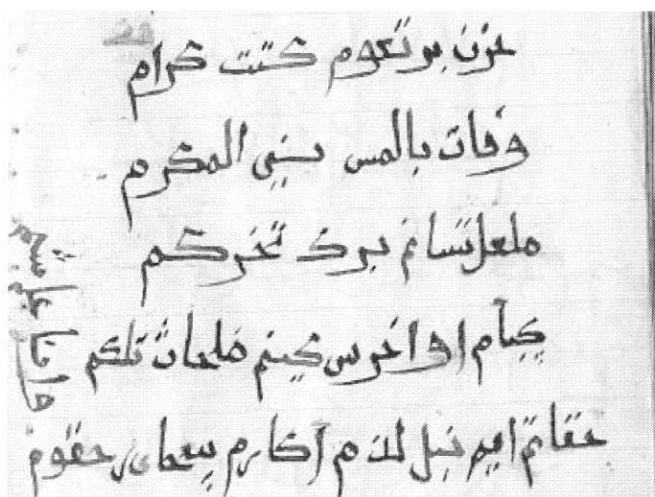
The Prophet is also presented as being merciful towards animals (13).



Bəgoytay nabi nabi 'alayhi 'assalāmi
 Şəggar täl' ilu 'ənkab bahā' imi
 Mäşi' om ƚəri' om lə-nabi al-mukarrami
 Bəzihunna ta'āb bəzihunna dəhāmi
 'Enkiyyow 'al' allu 'ənəbārom şägāmi täfärriju həydu täl' ilu şägāmi

By my Lord the Prophet, peace be upon him,
 Problems were solved for the animals
 They came to the Prophet and complained
 That they were overburdened and exhausted
 Immediately he solved their problems

The following brief quote is from the description of the death of the Prophet (14).



Hazān bārti' uwwom gotāt kirāmi
 Wafātu bəlmäşä nabi al-mukkarrami
 Məl' al täs' anom bərki təhärkimu
 Gäbi' om 'əwwən 'aħras koynom mälħas täloggimu
 Hak'k'atom 'əyyom nəbäl ləzom 'akārimi şəhay riħəquwwom wanna' alām şum

They (the companions) were so much grieved
When they heard of the death of the Prophet
They were unable to stand up
Some became dumb
They were right [to do so], we can say, the honorable ones; the sun
[the Prophet] drifted away from them, the ruler of the world

At the end of the manuscript on Najāšī there is an Arabic text *ṣalawāt*. From the style of writing, the poetic text does not seem to have been written by Šayḥ ‘Umar. Hence I have not treated it in the analysis of the manuscript.

CHAPTER FIVE

'Ajamī Transcription and Linguistic Features

Šayḥ 'Umar wrote his manuscripts in three languages, Tigrinya, Amharic and Arabic. For all three languages he employed the Arabic script. As pointed out in the introductory chapter, the Tigrinya and Amharic texts written in the Arabic letters are referred to as *'ajamī*— languages other than Arabic that are written in the Arabic script. The majority of Šayḥ 'Umar's manuscripts are in Tigrinya *'ajamī* while some are in Arabic and some of the texts in Amharic. In some cases, the Šayḥ blends Tigrinya with Arabic expressions and also Tigrinya with Amharic.

Since the main focus of the thesis is on the manuscript I have labeled as MS1, the concern of this chapter is analyzing the transcription and linguistic features of this same manuscript, especially the *'ajamī* texts.

The transcription and linguistic features of the *'ajamī* texts of MS 1 that are to be analyzed include the following:

1. Consonant representation
2. Vowels and gemination
3. Loanwords in Tigrinya *'ajamī*
4. Dialect

5.1. Sound Representation

5.1.1 Using standard Arabic symbols

Below are given Arabic symbols which match (or almost match) those of Ethiopic in their representation of the corresponding consonantal sounds. Each pair of the corresponding Arabic and Ethiopic symbols is given the equivalent phonetic symbol. The *'ajamī* texts below will be transcribed in phonetic script to facilitate the comprehension of the reader. In cases where an Arabic character does not have an equivalent Ethiopic character, the slot is left open.

<u>Arabic characters</u>	<u>Fidäl characters</u>	<u>Phonetic representations</u>
1. ء	h	ʔ
2. ب	ɒ	b
3. ت	t	t
4. ث	—	t̪
5. ج	ǰ	j
6. ح	h	ħ
7. خ	ħ	ħ
8. د	ɖ	d
9. ذ	—	d̪
10. ر	ɹ	r
11. ز	ʒ	z
12. س	ʃ	s
13. ش ¹	ʃ̣	ʃ̣
14. ص ²	—	ʂ
15. ض	—	ɖ
16. ط ³	ɱ	ɬ
17. ظ	—	ʐ
18. ع	θ	ʕ
19. غ ⁴	[ʕ̣]	<q> (phonetic [g̣])
20. ف	f	f
21. ق ⁵	q	kʰ
22. ك	h	k
23. ل	l	l
24. م	m	m
25. ن	n	n
26. ه	u	h
27. و	w	w
28. ي	ɣ	y

Notes:

1 ش is used interchangeably for two Tigrinya sounds: š (ሸ) and č (ሻ).

2 Although Arabic ص (velarized) corresponds linguistically to fidäl s', **θ/ʔ** (ejective), the Šayḥ clearly did not feel these two sounds to be similar. He writes s' in a different way (see below).

3 Arabic ط (velarized) corresponds linguistically to fidäl ṡ (ejective). Here the Šayḥ apparently did feel the sounds to be similar, because he uses ط to transcribe ṡ.

4 The letter غ = [g̠] is used by the Šayḥ to transliterate fidäl ġ, the fricative allophone of φ(k') in Tigrinya. This is a uvular fricative or approximant. I will transcribe it as <q>, which however will not have its usual value of a uvular stop, but a uvular fricative.

5 The Šayḥ uses Arabic ق to transcribe fidäl k' φ. The Arabic letter here does not have its Arabic value of a uvular stop [q], but has the fidäl value [k'], and I will transcribe it as <k'>.

In the above list, 22 Ethiopic characters correspond directly with those of Arabic. Šayḥ 'Umar employs these for the *'ajamī* texts more or less without any alteration. Of the five remaining Arabic letters, the four characters ط ض ذ ث have no phonetic equivalent in Tigrinya, and indeed the Šayḥ never uses ط ض in Tigrinya transcription. Since Arabic ث (t) is pronounced as [s] by Tigrinya speakers, the Šayḥ sometimes transcribes ḥ[s] as س, sometimes as ث, apparently at random. Similarly, the voiced equivalent H [z] is sometimes transcribed as ز, sometimes as ذ as exemplified below.

Ethiopic character	Arabic character	Tigrinya word	Literal transliteration	Gloss	Page/Line
ḥ (s)	س (s)	سبات	sābat	persons	8/1
	ث (t)	مث	məṭ	with	14/4
H (z)	ز (z)	حزنو	hazānu	they were grieved	7/2
	ذ (d)	بذح	bəḍuḥ	many	7/4

There are three Arabic characters which the Šayḥ uses only for Arabic loanwords. These characters are: ص (ṣ), ض (ḍ) and ظ (ẓ) which appear in such loanwords as the following.

Arabic character	Arabic loanword	Tigrinya pronunciation	Gloss	Page/Line
ص (ṣ)	نصر	näsiru	he won	16/4
ض (ḍ)	فيض	fäydi	flood	13/5
ظ (ẓ)	لظهر	ləzəhər	will manifest	6/6

In these words the endings -u, -i and the prefix lə- represent “Tigrinyanization” of the Arabic words.

5.1.2 Using innovated symbols

For Tigrinya sounds that are absent in Arabic, Šayḥ ‘Umar devised special symbols by adding diacritic dots. In one particular case he uses a sequence of two characters for the representation of a single sound.

a) Adding dots

The following are devised symbols formed by adding dots.

Innovation	Tigrinya word	Tigrinya pronunciation	Gloss	Page/Line
گ (g)	بٲکرای	bəṭəgray	in Tigrinya	2/3
ٲس (ts’)	ٲسٲق	šəbbiqu	became beautiful	4/2
س (č’)	تسٲنقت	täč’ännäqät	worried (fem.sg)	4/17
س (č’)	تسٲنق	täč’ännäqu	worried (they)	4/3

Note that [č’] can be represented in two ways, س and س, with just one example apiece, both on the same page (page 4).

However, the added dots are used inconsistently. In the following examples, in (a) the Arabic characters /ك/ and /س/ employed for the Tigrinya /g/ and /s/ respectively are dotted while in (b) they are not.

a) Dotted Arabic character	Transcription	Gloss	Page/Line
هگیر	hagār	country	4/11
پسلاء	ṣāla'i	enemy	15/2
b) Undotted Arabic	Transliteration	Gloss	Page/Line
بكد	bəgəddi	by force	12/2
مسانا	māṣi'unna	it reached us	17/3

b) Sequence of two characters

To represent the Tigrinya palatal nasal (ñ) the Šayḥ joins two Arabic characters, ج ن (ǧn) – ج on the left (!), ن on the right, thus: نج. Here he was influenced by the Italian script with which he had acquaintance. In Italian, the palatal nasal sound is <gn> as in *Bologna* (name of a city). However, there is a discrepancy between <ج ن> and <gn>. Since Arabic is read from right to left the first to be encountered is /ن/ (n) whereas in the Italian case it is /g/; the Arabic reproduces the visual ordering of the Italian.

Innovation	Tigrinya word	Tigrinya pronunciation	Gloss	Page/Line
نج	حَقْنَجَا	ḥaqqāñña	truthful	10/11

Two of the Tigrinya labiovelars, /k^w/ and /ḥ^w/, are represented in Šayḥ 'Umar's manuscript with simple Arabic symbols /ك, خ/, the same symbols that are used for /k/ and /ḥ/. The labiovelar g^w is represented with the innovated Arabic character for /g/, /گ/. That is, both g^w and g are represented with گ while k and k^w are represented with ك.

Ethiopic Character	Representation in the manuscript	Tigrinya word	Transliteration	Gloss	Page/Line
k ^w	ك (k)	كَنَات	k ^w inat	battle	15/13
h ^w	ح (h)	مَخَانِم	məh ^w anom	that they are	6/1
g ^w	ك (g)	تَرچَا م	tärg ^w ami	translator	2/4

The preceding brief discussions are with respect to sound representations, that is, how Arabic characters are employed for 'ajamī purposes. Now we will look at some features of orthography observed in the manuscript.

5.2. Vowels and Gemination

In this section we will see some inconsistencies in vowel lengthening and gemination which are encountered in the manuscript. Moreover, unnecessary graphic vowel lengthening and incomplete representation of the seventh order characters are also observed. Let us look at the inconsistencies by citing examples.

5.2.1 Vowels: use of alif, wāw, and yā' as matres lectionis

Usually, Ca (4th-order fidäl) is represented with an Arabic long ā (consonant-alif):

$$ba = \text{ا} = \text{بَا}$$

The vowel Cä (1st-order fidäl) is usually represented with no alif:

$$bä = \text{ا} = \text{بَ}$$

However, this is not done consistently, so that sometimes بَا = ba and بَ = bä. Moreover, the Šayḥ sometimes adds the vowel-lengthening wāw and yā', either redundantly together with ḍamma or kiswa (bu=بُو, bi=بِي) or as a pure mater lectionis (bu=بُو, bi=بِي). (Tigrinya has no vowel length, so this added alif, wāw, or yā' does not indicate length in Tigrinya 'ajamī.)

(a) Added or missing alif	Transliteration	Gloss	Page/Line
كيدا (كيدا) [missing alif]	<käydä> = [käyda]	she went	17/5
مساء (مساء) [added alif]	<məsa'u> = [məs'u]	with him	9/7

(b) Unnecessary added wāw/ yā'	Transliteration	Gloss	Page/Line
لأخوم (لأخوم) [added wāw]	<lä'aḥūm> = [lä'aḥum]	for you	1/3
إينا (إينا) [added yā']	<'īna> = ['ina]	we are	14/2

5.2.2 Vowelings: other remarks

In the manuscript the first ten pages are written using vowels while the following fifteen pages are unvoiced. (I looked only at the first 25 pages of the MS.)

The examples below illustrate that Šayḥ Umar applies vowels in some cases and omits them in other cases.

a) Voweled word	Transliteration	Gloss	Page/Line
سب	säb	person	2/4
نفع	näfi'u	became smart	4/5
b) Unvoiced word	Transliteration	Gloss	Page/Line
سددلنا	sädidulna	he sent us	12/5
بأمان	bə'aman	in peace	13/9

The Šayḥ uses the short vowel signs properly in the cases where he provides vowels. However, with the seventh order Ethiopic consonants (Co) he uses mostly *fatha*, e.g. كيكيلم *käyk'ätlom*, but sometimes *ḍamma*. Moreover, for word-initial schwa (C) he employs *kisra* e.g. بأمان *bə'aman*. *Sukun* is used for the first element of a consonant cluster medially (e.g. نقتل *nəqtällo*.)

5.2.3 Consonant Gemination

In the examples below, the gemination sign (šadda) is used in (a) while it is missing in (b).

a) Gemination sign used	Transliteration	Gloss	Page/Line
حَقُّ	ḥak'k'i	truth	9/3
عَسْرَت	'assärtä	ten	3/5
b) Gemination sign missing	Transliteration	Gloss	Page/Line
أبعدي	'ab'adäy	in my country	13/9
تأكبم	tä'akibom	they were gathered	17/7

5.3. Loanwords in Tigrinya 'ajamī

The 'ajamī texts of Šayḥ 'Umar are characterized by the use of Arabic loanwords, alternating synonyms and, in some cases, phrases in word form which show assimilation.

5.3.1 Loanwords

Šayḥ 'Umar commonly makes use of Arabic loanwords in his 'ajamī texts. He does so by making whatever adjustments may be necessary so that each loanword fits in Tigrinya morphology. Examples are provided below.

a) Arabic

Arabic	Gloss	Loanword	Gloss	Page/Line
'amr	command	'amräy	my command	13/12
fahima	he understood	kəffāham	to be understood	2/11
dabbara	to plot	lədäbbäru	who plotted	2/16
ḥälafa	to disobey	ḥälifu	to disobey	13/12
ḥada'a	to cheat	ḥəd'at	cheating	12/8

In addition to Arabic loanwords, Šayḥ ‘Umar employs Amharic loanwords as the following examples illustrate. Tigrinya morphemes are added when necessary.

(b) Amharic

Amharic	Gloss	Loanword	Gloss	Page/Line
ṭəntä mäsärät	origin	ṭəntä mäsäräti	origin	2/13
’aläk’əṭ	in excess	’aläk’əṭ	in excess	3/14
’əwk’ät	knowledge	’əwk’ät	knowledge	4/1
šəbbər	terror	šəbbəri	terror	3/1

5.3.2 Synonyms

The practice of representing one concept with various words and using the words alternately is another common feature in Šayḥ ‘Umar’s manuscript. This is illustrated by the examples that follow.

a) the Prophet

- rasūl ‘messenger’
- nabiy ‘prophet’
- al-bašīr ‘announcer’

b) officials of King Najāšī

- ministiri ‘minister(s)’
- māk^wanənt ‘nobles’

c) companions of the Prophet Muḥammad

- ’aḥyār ‘chosen’
- ’asyād ‘lords’
- ’aṣḥāb ‘companions’

5.3.3. Sound Changes

Assimilation is a process of one sound influencing another neighboring sound so that they become more alike. This is common in speech. Šayḥ ‘Umar, at times, uses assimilation in his *‘ajamī* texts with the preposition *‘ab*.

Assimilation	Components	Gloss	Page/Line
‘ammadina	‘ab madina	at/in Madina	14/12
ammäyda	‘ab mäyda	at/in the field	21/7

Also sometimes word-initial schwa or *‘ə* can be deleted in word combinations; for example,

nägärzuy	nägär ‘əzuy	this matter	3/8
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5.3.4. Dialect

A mixed dialectal profile is observed in the manuscripts of Šayḥ Umar. This was due to his exposure to different dialects as he moved from town to town for teaching and even to Asmara while he was *Qadi* during the Italian period. This can be seen from the word use of his manuscripts.

Dialects from the Manuscript:

Northern dialect ²⁵	Page/Line	Other dialects	Page/Line	Meaning
kullu	2/4	ḥullu	3/15	all
hagär	4/11	‘addi	6/5	country
ḥaqqi	22/3	‘əmman	10/10	truth
kəzzaräb	2/1	ḥənnagär	10/13	I will speak

²⁵ The northern dialect is used in media.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion and Recommendation

Despite the widespread misconception that the northern Ethiopian highlands are strictly a Christian domain, this study unfolds the existence of a diverse wealth of Islamic traditions dating back to the emigration of the Prophet Muḥammad's companions to Abyssinia in 615A.D. The study is concerned with manuscripts produced by Šayḥ 'Umar of the Tigray region who was born in the 1870s and whose biography appears in chapter two of this paper. The Šayḥ wrote his manuscripts in three languages: his native language Tigrinya, Amharic and Arabic. However, he wrote mostly in Tigrinya. For all three languages he used the Arabic script. In addition to producing a number of manuscripts, Šayḥ 'Umar was socially very active. His initiative for the construction of the shrine of Najāšī, the king of Abyssinia who was contemporary with the Prophet Muḥammad, is a case in point.

In the course of my research, I examined fifteen manuscripts of Šayḥ 'Umar. Eleven are written in 'ajamī (mostly in Tigrinya and some in Amharic) and four in Arabic. Brief philological descriptions of the fifteen manuscripts are given in chapter three. Of the fifteen manuscripts I selected the one which I labeled as MS1 and which focuses on the seventh-century king of Abyssinia, Najāšī, who hosted the emigrant companions of the Prophet Muḥammad. This manuscript is the core of the thesis, and chapter four is devoted to it. Chapter five presents analyses of the 'ajamī transcription and of some linguistic features reflected in the Šayḥ's 'ajamī writing. The background of the study, review of related literature and other preliminaries are covered in chapter one.

The contributions of this thesis can be summarized as follows:

1. The first known presentation (apparently) of Tigrinya 'ajamī, which in turn pushes back the frontiers of research into the genre of 'ajamī in Ethiopia.
2. Identification of Šayḥ 'Umar Abrar, a Muslim clerical scholar of the Tigray region who produced a number of manuscripts especially in Tigrinya 'ajamī and some texts in Amharic 'ajamī as well as manuscripts in Arabic.

5.2.3 Consonant Gemination

In the examples below, the gemination sign (šadda) is used in (a) while it is missing in (b).

a) Gemination sign used	Transliteration	Gloss	Page/Line
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5.3.1 Loanwords

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ḥada'a	to cheat	ḥəd'at	cheating	12/8

3. Presentation of fifteen manuscripts by Šayḥ ‘Umar, of which I have dealt in some detail with one of them (MS 1) and the rest are briefly described.
4. Presenting the history of the advent of Islam in Ethiopia from an Ethiopian perspective (i.e the Šayḥ’s perspective). This concerns the introduction of Islam into Ethiopia through the emigrant companions of the Prophet Muḥammad in the seventh century during the reign of King Najāšī (Ella Şaḥam).
5. Enrichment of the history of the Ethiopian Muslims by further research into northern Ethiopia, which has been usually considered as a distinctively Christian domain.

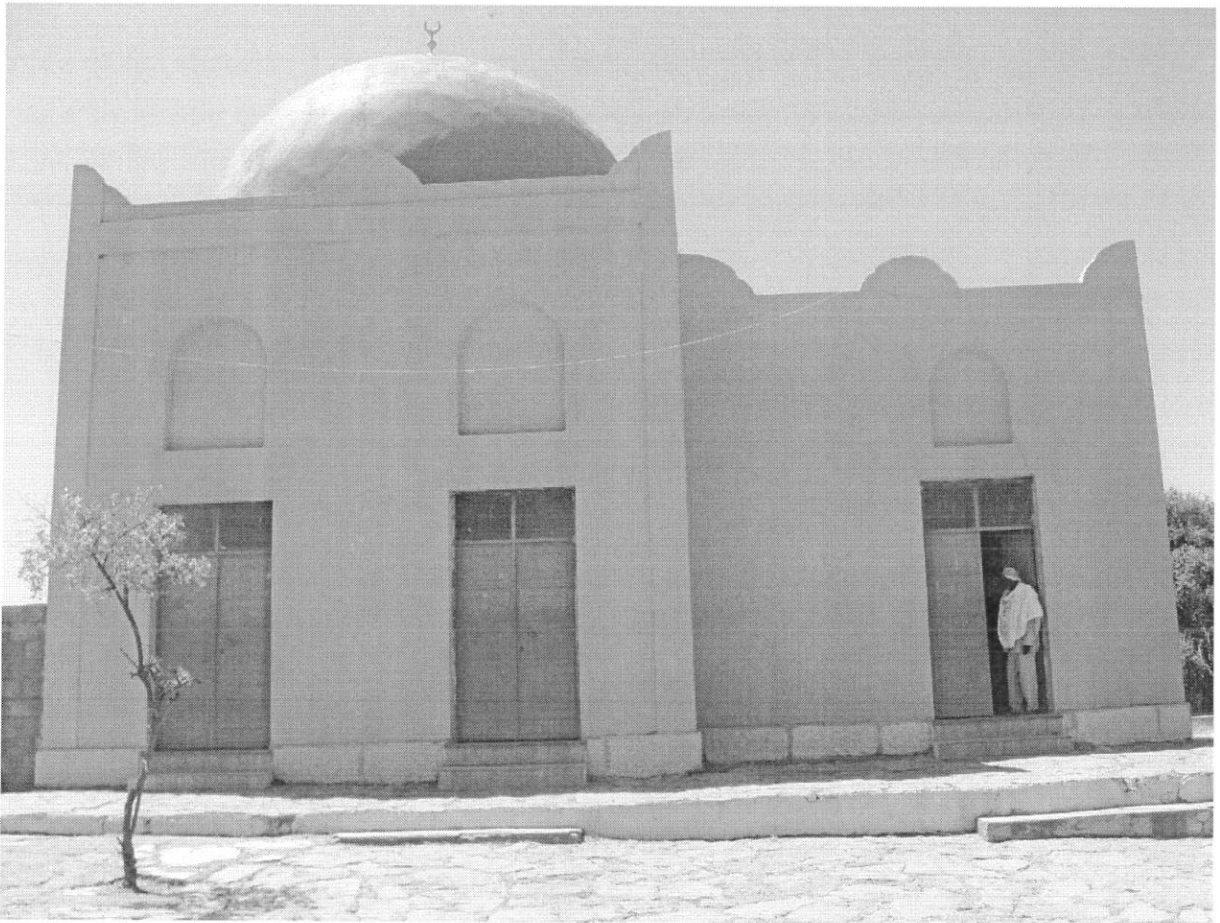
I believe that further investigation into the various manuscripts of Šayḥ ‘Umar, including the one the present thesis has focused on, could result in more findings that would fill gaps in Ethiopian history especially from the viewpoint of the Ethiopian Muslims. I also recommend that the search for and in-depth study of *‘ajamī* manuscripts should be strengthened so as to learn more about our history and in some cases other fields of knowledge as well.

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A certificate awarded to Šayh Umar by the Association of Tigray Artists and the Regional State of Tigray on November 8, 2008.



The tomb of Najāshī: external and internal view



Burial place of one of the companions of the Prophet at Nāgaš.