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The Sultanates of Medieval Ethiopia

Amélie Chekroun and Bertrand Hirsch

Given its geographical situation across the Red Sea from the Arabian Peninsula and the Gulf of Aden, it is perhaps not surprising that the Horn of Africa was exposed to an early and continuous presence of Islam during the Middle Ages. Indeed, it has long been known that Muslim communities and Islamic sultanates flourished in Ethiopia and bordering lands during the medieval centuries. However, despite a sizeable amount of Ethiopian Christian documents (in Gə'əz) relating to their Muslim neighbors and valuable Arabic literary sources produced outside Ethiopia and, in some cases, emanating from Ethiopian communities themselves, the Islamic presence in Ethiopia remains difficult to apprehend. It is so because it has not attracted the same amount of scholarly investment as Ethiopian Christianity, so much so that epigraphic and archeological evidence have long remained scanty and only recently started to produce a significant corpus of material evidence, which now allows to revisit the history of Islamic penetration in Ethiopia and of Muslim-Christian relationships through centuries.

As underlined several times by the Ethiopian scholar Hussein Ahmed,¹ historiography on the Muslim communities of Ethiopia during the medieval period is, in comparison with the one devoted to neighboring Christians, quite weak. Thus, the main turning points in the historiography can be rather quickly listed. First must be mentioned the pioneering work of Enrico Cerulli. Attached to the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Ethiopia in the 1920s and 1930s, he carried out an outstanding scientific work in parallel with his official appointments, and notably identified several endogenous Arabic texts that he edited, translated and analyzed in papers published between 1936 and 1971.² The value of Cerulli's work is reflected in the fact that almost no new textual document has been identified since his time, and his scholarly analyses remain the reference works on them. Two syntheses on Ethiopian Islam have also been published: *Islam in Ethiopia* by J. Spencer Trimingham in 1952 and *Islam en Ethiopie* by Joseph Cuoq in 1981. Both present a very similar narrative of the history of these societies, despite the thirty years that separate the two syntheses. Between them, the basic narrative has not been really questioned; apart from Cerulli's work, very few studies on specific points had been published. Finally, the anthropologist Ulrich Braukämper published in 2002 a collection of his papers, *Islamic History and Culture in Southern Ethiopia*. One of them, originally published in 1977, "Islamic Principalities in Southeast Ethiopia between the Thirteenth and Sixteenth Centuries"³ is

¹ Hussein Ahmed, "The Historiography of Islam in Ethiopia," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 3, 1 (1992): 15-46; idem, "Scholarly Research and Publications on Islam in Ethiopia (1952-2002): An Assessment," in *Afrikas Horn, Akten der Ersten Internationalen Littmann-Konferenz*, ed. W. Raunig and S. Wenig (Wiesbaden, 2005), 411-426; Hussein Ahmed and Ewald Wagner, "The Islamic and Related Writings of Ethiopia," in *Arabic Literature of Africa*, vol. 3, A: *The Writings of the Muslim Peoples of Northeastern Africa*, ed. Rex Seán O'Fahey (Leiden, 2003), 18-69, 126-136;

² All of his articles on Ethiopian Islam were collected in a book published in 1971 (*L'islam di ieri e di oggi* (Rome, 1971). A incomplete English translation of this book has been published recently (*Islam. Yesterday and Today*, trans. Emran Waber [n.l., 2013]), but the translator chose, as he explains it in his preface, to cut out "some isolated words, phrases or entire sections," "due to social, religious sensitivity or transgression of faith", because "Islam was, is and will remain unalterable." This translation must be taken with great caution.

³ Ulrich Braukämper, *Islamic History and Culture in Southern Ethiopia* (Berlin, 2003), 12-101.

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very valuable in systematically identifying the main sources concerning the different Islamic regions of Ethiopia in the medieval period, without, however, subjecting them to historical critique. These three publications remain the available reference works today, though many decades have passed since their publication.

In the last fifteen years, however, publications have begun to fill this historiographical gap and new data has been made available with which to address medieval Islamic Ethiopia afresh. Philologists have been interested in Arabic texts produced in or about Ethiopia and have begun publishing them.⁴ But it is archeological research⁵ that has greatly shaped new approaches to the subject, in providing material remains against which textual claims can be tested, in illuminating aspects of Islamic Ethiopian society little addressed by written sources, and in expanding the corpus of Islamic Ethiopian data such that the Christian sources, and the Christian perspective, need be relied upon less. A number of archeological investigations are still in progress, have not yet been the subject of detailed publications, and therefore not yet revealed their full potential. Future discoveries in the coming years should bring many essential elements to the history of Muslim societies in Ethiopia. Nonetheless, recent publications about the history of those societies notably by François-Xavier Fauvelle, Bertrand Hirsch or Amélie Chekroun⁶ indicate the directions of this research to date, and point to the important advances that are expected in the years to come.

Several sources speak of a Muslim presence in Ethiopia even before the great Hijra to Medina in 622 CE with which the Islamic calendar begins. These sources include the *Sīra* (biography of Muhammad) by Ibn Ishaq (c. 760) and completed by Ibn Hishām (d. 830), and two biographical dictionaries of the Prophet and his Companions: the *Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* by Ibn Saʿd (d. 845) and the *Ansāb al-ašrāf* by al-Balādhurī (d. 892). They recount that in 615, seven years before the Hijra to Medina, some of the Prophet's Companions (*ṣaḥāba* or *aṣḥāb*) were forced to flee Mecca and find refuge with the Ethiopian king, called *naḡašī* in the Islamic documentation, in what it is called "the first hijra to Abyssinia" (*al-hiğra al-ūlā ilā arḍ al-ḡabaša*). The *naḡašī* is said to have welcomed the new Muslims. Some traditions relate that he converted to Islam. The

⁴ See for example Ewald Wagner, "Three Arabic documents on the history of Harar," *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 12, 1 (1974): 213-224; Alessandro Gori, "Lo Yemen e l'Islam in Africa Orientale: contatti, testi, personaggi," in *Storia e cultura dello Yemen in età islamica con particolare riferimento al periodo Rasulide* (Rome, 2006), 201-218; Tamon Baba, "Notes on Migration between Yemen and Northeast Africa during the 13-15th Centuries," *Chroniques du Manuscrit au Yémen* Special Issue 1 (2017-2018): 69-86; Manfred Kropp, "La Corne Orientale de l'Afrique chez les géographes arabes," *Bulletin des études africaines de l'INALCO* 9, 17-18 (1992): 161-197; Franz-Christoph Muth, "A Globe-trotter from Maghrib in al-Maqrīzī's booklet on Ethiopia: a footnote from some Arabic sources," *Afrique & histoire* 4 (2005): 123-131.

⁵ Three regions have so far been the subject of archeological excavations: the former territory of the Awfāt Sultanate by the team led by François-Xavier Fauvelle and Bertrand Hirsch (2007-2010); the Čärčär and Harar region by the same team (2006-2009) then by the ERC project "Becoming Muslim" led by Timothy Insoll (2015-2020); eastern Təgray by the ERC project HornEast led by Julien Loiseau (2017-2022). Each of them will be described in this chapter. About the Arabic inscriptions, see Alessandro Gori, "Inscriptions - Arabic inscriptions in the Ethiopian regions," in *EAE* 3 (2007), 165-167.

⁶ François-Xavier Fauvelle-Aymar and Bertrand Hirsch, "Établissements et formations politiques musulmans d'Éthiopie et de la Corne de l'Afrique au Moyen Âge. Vers une reconstruction," *Annales Islamologiques* 42 (2008): 339-376; François-Xavier Fauvelle-Aymar and Bertrand Hirsch, eds., *Espaces musulmans de la Corne de l'Afrique au Moyen Âge* (Addis Ababa, 2011); François-Xavier Fauvelle, Bertrand Hirsch and Amélie Chekroun, "Le sultanat de l'Awfāt, sa capitale et la nécropole des Walasma". Quinze années d'enquêtes archéologiques et historiques sur l'Islam médiéval éthiopien," *Annales Islamologiques* 51 (2017): 239-295; Amélie Chekroun, *Les jihāds de l'imam Aḡmad (Éthiopie, XVIIe siècle). Lectures du Futūḡ al-ḡabaša* (Paris, forthcoming).

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memory of this contact between the Prophet's companions and a king of Aksum is still alive today: in the village of Nāgaš in the Təgray region are venerated the supposed tombs of twelve companions of Muhammad as well as the shrine of the *naḡašī*. This holy site, attesting to the primacy of Ethiopia in its contact with Islam, was known in the sixteenth century, according to the *Futūḥ al-Ḥabaša*, and is today one of the most important pilgrimage destinations for Muslim communities⁷.

After the first contacts at the time of the advent of Islam, two main axes of Islamization have been identified.⁸ The first route of Islamic penetration, from the ninth-tenth centuries on, was a north-south route, from the Dahlak Islands through eastern Təgray to the escarpment of the Central Plateau and the lakes region to its south. Then, from the twelfth-thirteenth centuries, a second dominant route connected the Gulf of Aden from the port of Zayla' to the highlands of the Eastern Plateau and the Rift Valley lakes.

First period: Ninth-Thirteenth Century

The Dahlak Islands (Eritrea): Gateway Between Ethiopia and the Islamic world

The Dahlak Islands are an archipelago stretching some 200 miles in the Red Sea and comprising more than a hundred islands, islets, and rocks, the most important of which is Dahlak al-Kabīr (45 km from west to east and 30 km from north to south). Located at the latitude of Massawa on the African coast and of the Tihāma region on the Arabian side, they occupied a strategic position that made them a crossroads for trade and culture: closely linked to the port of Massawa, they were an outlet for the main caravan route coming from the Christian kingdom and other inland regions, while their position in the sea and their proximity to Yemen opened them to long-distance trade and the Islamic world. This strategic position brought inhabitants from Africa, Arabia, and other parts of the Islamic world to the islands; it also meant that a variety of powers vied for control of them. Though a target of conquest by the Christian kings of Ethiopia, they were usually under Muslim control from the seventh century forward. To judge by available evidence, they were also the first gateway of Islam into Ethiopia and Eritrea: that is, the commercial networks they developed on the African mainland served as the principal point of entry for the establishment of Islamic communities in this region in the early Middle Ages. That evidence comes principally from its necropolis, which contains 266 funerary stelae with Arabic inscriptions from 864 CE to the sixteenth century. This corpus, the principal source for the islands' medieval history, has been studied by Madeleine Schneider in her outstanding work, *Stèles funéraires musulmanes des Iles Dahlak (Mer Rouge)*.⁹ Supplementary information comes from Arabic authors for whom the islands' proximity to Arabia, Islamic rulers, and traders coming principally from the Islamic world made them a topic worthy of mention.

As noted above, the Dahlak Islands were contested territory, and came under a variety of rulers before achieving independence in the eleventh century. Under the fifth Umayyad caliph 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān (r. 685-705), after Abyssinian piracy against Jedda in 702, the Dahlak islands were occupied by Muslims and became a prison (*ḥabs*), as recalled in the *Ta'rīḥ al-*

⁷ Alessandro Gori, "Nāgaš," in *EAE* 3 (2007), 1107-1109.

⁸ Fauvelle-Aymar and Hirsch, "Établissements et formations politiques."

⁹ Madeleine Schneider, *Stèles funéraires musulmanes des îles Dahlak (Mer Rouge)*, 2 vols. (Cairo, 1983). See also Giovanni Oman, *La necropoli islamica di Dahlak kebir. Epigrafi di varia ubicazione* (Napoli, 1987).

mustabşir by Ibn al-Muğāwir c. 1228-9.¹⁰ Several well-known figures were sent to detention there between 715 and 743-4.¹¹ A similar practice continued under the first Abbasid caliphs, in the 750s and 760s. According to al-Ya‘qūbī (d. 897/8), the Dahlak islands then fell under the control of the Christian ruler of Abyssinia in the ninth century.¹² In the late ninth and early tenth century, the Dahlak islands were controlled instead by the Ziyādid ruler of Zabīd, a town of the Tihāma region of Yemen.¹³ According to two Arabic authors, Ibn Hawqal (d. 988) and ‘Umāra al-Yamanī (d. 1174), the Dahlak Islands paid tribute to the fourth Ziyādid ruler, Abū al-Ġayş Işhāq b. Ibrāhīm (r. 903-981/2), consisting of “black slaves [500 Abyssinian and 500 Nubian female slaves], ambergris, leopard-skins and other objects.”¹⁴ For the period between 864 and 1010, the necropolis of Dahlak contains 89 stelae (56 undated and 33 dated), reflecting Ismā‘īlī influence and referring to various tribes in Arabia, Mecca, Syria, Iraq, Iran and Byzantium.¹⁵

In the first half of the eleventh century, the sources for the first time mention a ruler (*sayyid*) of the Dahlak Islands, and at the same time we have evidence of a relationship between the islands and Qūş, a big trade city in Upper Egypt,¹⁶ with stelae of the same deceased found in both Dahlak and Qūş.¹⁷ By the mid-eleventh century, we know who these rulers were: the Nağāhids, a dynasty of Ethiopian slaves who had ruled in Yemen from Zabīd between 1021/22 and their overthrow in 1063, and now made the Dahlak Islands their new base of power, from which they also reconquered Yemen in 1089. Under their aegis, the Dahlak Islands reached their height as an international trading hub. For this period, there are 62 stelae. Innovations appear in the *nisba*, with the mention of men, probably traders, from countries such as Georgia, the coast of the Caspian Sea, Morocco, Spain, and Tunisia. The market of Dahlak was important for the transit trade between Egypt and India, as shown by the commercial activities of Joseph Lebdi between Cairo and India in 1097-98.¹⁸ One of the stelae (n.°212) mentions the death in 1093 of the first sultan (“*al-sulṭān al-mubārak*”) of Dahlak, “client (*mawlā*) of ‘Alī b. Aḥmad.” The title of sultan, rare at this time, was probably not used outside the islands. Beyond them, the rulers of Dahlak were indicated under variety of titles by Arab authors, such as *şāhib*, *malik* or *mutamallik dahlak*.¹⁹

At the height of the commercial boom of the Dahlak Islands in the second half of the eleventh century, little is known about what went on inland along the north-south caravan route. It is certain that Muslim traders were settled along this trade route, but only one community has so far been documented, which seems to have also experienced its acme in the eleventh century.

¹⁰ Guy Ducatez, “Aden aux XII^e et XIII^e siècles selon Ibn al-Muğāwir,” *Annales Islamologiques* 38, 1 (2004): 159-200, at 174.

¹¹ René Basset, “Les inscriptions de l’île de Dahlak,” *Journal Asiatique* 9, vol. 1 (1893): 77-111.

¹² Aḥmad ibn Abī Ya‘qūb al-Ya‘qūbī, *Kitāb al-Buldān*, ed. Michael Jan De Goeje (Leiden, 1892), vol. 7, 319.

¹³ The rule of the Tihāma was transferred to the Ziyādid family by the seventh Abbassid caliph, al-Ma‘mūn (r. 813-833). The Ziyādid family remained in power in Tihāma until the very beginning of the eleventh century.

¹⁴ ‘Umārah b. ‘Alī al-Ḥakamī, *Yaman, its early medieval history by Nadjm al-Dīn ‘Omarah al-Hakamī* trans. Henry Cassels Kay (London, 1892), 8 and 143.

¹⁵ Schneider, *Stèles funéraires*, 431.

¹⁶ Jean-Claude Garcin, “Al-Şa‘īd,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., ed. P. Bearman et al. (Leiden, 1995), vol. 8, 861-866.

¹⁷ Schneider, *Stèles funéraires*, 29.

¹⁸ S. D. Goitein, “From the Mediterranean to India: Documents on the Trade to India, South Arabia, and East Africa from the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries,” *Speculum* 29, 2 (1954): 181-197, at 195; see also idem, *Studies in Islamic History and Institutions* (Leiden, 2009), 333.

¹⁹ Schneider, *Stèles funéraires*, 368-369 and 37 n. 147.

This is a place named Bilet, in the current town of Q^wiha in the Təgray region, where have been identified about forty funeral stelae with Arabic inscriptions, written in a simplified Kufic without diacritics, on basalt not squared. Twenty-three of them are precisely dated, the oldest from 361 AH (972 CE) and the most recent from 554 AH (1159 CE).²⁰ Bilet cemetery was therefore in use for at least two centuries, with however a peak of stelae (14) dated to the second half of the eleventh century. Bilet was integrated in more than one way in the networks of the Islamic world. The use of Arabic writing, the precise Hijra dating (often up to a mention of the day of the week of the death of the deceased, in a context where precise dates are otherwise extremely rare before the end of medieval times) and the Qur'anic references are very precise markers of Islamization. In addition, the *nisba* of some of the deceased link them with the Islamic world. The *nisba* of Ḥaḥḥ b. ‘Umar al-Yamāmī, buried in 972 CE, connects him to the Yamāma, in the center of the Arabian Peninsula. One of his granddaughters was buried in 980 CE in the graveyard of Dahlak al-Kabīr. Madeleine Schneider hypothesized that this family had passed through Upper Egypt in the Wādī ‘Allaqī mining area, where the Yamāma people were numerous, before settling in the second half of the tenth century in eastern Təgray and in the Dahlak Islands.²¹ The fact that the gold mines of Wādī ‘Allaqī employed many slaves may not be unconnected to the journey of the al-Yamāmī family and its settlement in Təgray, Ethiopia being in the Middle Ages a major slave supply area. The second interesting *nisba*, al-Damāmīlī, belonging to a man buried in 1056 CE in Bilet, connects him with Damāmīl, a locality in Upper Egypt. If all these clues show the importance of this Islamic settlement and its connections with the rest of the Islamic world and with long-distance trade, its relations with nearby Christian communities are unknown.²²

From the twelfth to the fifteenth century the commercial activities of the Dahlak Islands seem to have diminished sharply, as suggested by the scarcity of the documentation and the rather unvaried *nisba* in the Dahlak graveyard. For the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, some stelae from the necropolis mention sultans, who were probably only big traders, with surprisingly rich Sunni titles. With the exception of Rizqallāh b. ‘Abdallāh al-Ḥabaḥḥ al-Qirwāḥī (d. 1214), a Muslim of Ethiopia recorded on stela 239, all of them came from Arabian Peninsula. In the fourteenth century, for which there are no stelae, the Dahlak Islands seem to have become more of a regional hub and less a center for traders coming from all over Islamic world. According to Abū al-Fidā’ (d. 1331), the ruler of Dahlak was then an Ethiopian Muslim, who was in relation with the ruler of Yemen. In 1385, he gifted some wild animals to the Rasūlid ruler of Yemen, and in 1392-1393, male and female slaves to a Mamluk sultan. In the fifteenth century, the decline continued. Only one stela is known. Massawa and the Dahlak Islands were sacked several times by the Christian kings, who tried to establish Ethiopian influence over the Red Sea shore.²³ Finally, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, the *ṣayḥ* of Dahlak, who was then a

²⁰ About fifteen stelae were identified in the 1960s and published by Madeleine Schneider, “Stèles funéraires arabes de Quiha,” *Annales d’Éthiopie* 7 (1967): 107-117, and Wolbert Smidt, “Eine arabische Inschrift aus Kwiha, Tigray,” in *Studia Aethiopica in Honour of Siegbert Uhlig on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, ed. Verena Böll et al. (Wiesbaden, 2004), 259-268. The ERC HornEast team accurately identified the location of this cemetery and identified more than twenty new stelae in 2018 (see <https://horneast.hypotheses.org/616>) and is conducting archeological excavations. Julien Loiseau is preparing the publication of those inscriptions.

²¹ Schneider, *Stèles funéraires*, 223.

²² Marie-Laure Derat, *L’énigme d’une dynastie sainte et usurpatrice dans le royaume chrétien d’Éthiopie, XI^e-XIII^e siècle* (Turnhout, 2018), 120-123: some documents attest conflicts in the twelfth century between a Christian king, Ṭaṇṭawedem, and Islamic communities in Ṣera‘e, where Bilet is located.

²³ Johannes Kolmodin, *Traditions de Tsazzega et Hazzega* (Rome and Uppsala, 1912), A31, A32.

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vassal of the sultan of Aden, told the Portuguese that there were no more traders on the islands, only fighters. In 1520, the Portuguese occupied Massawa and the Dahlak islands, and in 1526, the sultan of Dahlak, Aḥmad b. Ismāʿīl submitted to them. During the jihad led by imām Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm, he joined the Muslim side and received Hergigo as ruler.²⁴ Stela n.º255 is dedicated to him: he is called “fighter for the faith” (*muğāhid*), “warrior of the frontier” (*murābiṭ*), the “sultan of Islam in the march of the well-protected Dahlak” (*ṣultān al-islām bi-ṭagr Dahlak al-maḥrūs*). He died on 16 *šawwāl* 946 AH (24 February 1540 CE). In 1541, as noted by the Portuguese, the Dahlak Islands were under the rule of the local ruler of Massawa.

The sultanates of Šawah and other Ethiopian Islamic polities of the Twelfth-Thirteenth Centuries

From the twelfth and especially the thirteenth century, the indices of Muslim communities multiply and point to more southern regions.

The *Dikr at-tawārīḥ* (literally “Annals”) is a short Arabic text (one folio) identified by Enrico Cerulli in 1936 in a miscellaneous Arabic manuscript dated 1863²⁵ and commonly (and misleadingly) untitled “Chronicle of Šawah.” It relates the rise of an Islamic power, possibly the “Sultanate of Šawah,” in the twelfth century at the southern end of the north-south route along the escarpment of the Central Highlands. It is the only written source emanating from this sultanate. This text, which relates events from 1063 to 1289/90 CE, deals mainly with internal quarrels between the different sovereigns who succeed each other at the head of the region from its Islamization in 1108 to the invasion of the region in 1285 by the head of a different Islamic dynasty, the Walasmaʿ, with the likely support of the Christian ruler. This text is ordered according to a temporal sequence involving three major periods. The first, dealing with the foundation of the Muslim community, covers the later eleventh and twelfth century, from death in 1063 of the queen Badīṭ and the Islamization of “Ġbbah” in 1108. The second details political events of the sultanate from 1183 until the end of the dynasty in 1285: it lists different sultans or sovereigns who succeeded one another, main famines, attacks of certain places, and the like. At the end of the text, the author notes that the sultan’s family, who ruled until the year 1285, belonged to the Maḥzūmī clan. Finally, a period corresponding to the first conquests of Wālī ʿAsmaʿ (1285-1289) seems to be a new time of foundation. The growing power of the Wālī ʿAsmaʿ family, which seems to have come from another region, became a menace to the Maḥzūmī family. A wedding between the sultan Dilmārrah and the daughter of Wālī ʿAsmaʿ in 1271 could be seen as an attempt to appease this new power. But finally, probably with the support of the Christian king, Wālī ʿAsmaʿ destroyed Šawah, killed all the Maḥzūmī family, and imposed his power on the whole region.

Rare information appears about the organization of this (or perhaps these) territories. The area was urbanized, as several cities are mentioned, including Walalah, Kālḥwr (noted Kālgor by Cerulli), or Ḥādbayah (noted Ḥādiyāh by Cerulli). The *Dikr at-tawārīḥ* gives the impression of small enemy political formations, each located in a city and engaged in seasonal raids against neighboring seigneuries. This hypothesis is confirmed by a note written in 1292 about the arrival in Cairo of an ambassador of the Christian king Yəkunno Amlak in 1274. Its author, a secretary

²⁴ Šihāb ad-Dīn Aḥmad b. ʿAbd al-Qādir b. Sālim b. ʿUtmān, *Futūḥ al-Habaša, The Conquest of Abyssinia (16th century)*, trans. Paul Lester Stenhouse and Richard Pankhurst (Hollywood, CA, 2003), 374.

²⁵ Enrico Cerulli, “Il sultanato dello scioa nel secolo XIII secondo un nuovo documento storico,” *RSE* 1 (1941): 5-42. Damien Labadie, as part of the ERC project HornEast, is preparing a new edition and translation of this text from the manuscript BAV MS. Vat. Ar. 1792.

of the Mamluk chancery named Ibn ‘Abd al-Zāhir, notes: “Among the kings of Abyssinia is Yūsuf b. Arsmāya, master of the territory of Ḥadāya [also noted Ġidāya], Šawā, Kalğur, and their districts (*a māl*), which are dominated by Muslim kings.”²⁶ In his scholarly study, Cerulli hypothesized that the Šawah Sultanate (we would rather say the “Muslim countries of Šawah”) could be located straddling the escarpment of the Central Plateau and the upper part of the escarpment, south of a line Dābrā Bərhan- Ćanno.²⁷ The arguments may seem fragile because they are based on oral traditions and toponymy, and no archeological remains of a Muslim occupation in this region have been identified. Nevertheless, some clues drawn from the internal criticism of the text suggest indeed an approximate location of Muslim Šawah in the twelfth-thirteenth centuries in this region, in the northeast of the current province of Šāwa. For example, the probable capital of some sultans, Walalah, could be identified with Wālāle, southwards of Ćanno.²⁸

One clear marker of the Islamization of this region is its urbanization, which in the Ethiopian context of that time always denotes Islamized societies. But there are other markers as well. The precise use of the Islamic calendar and of Arabic script and language are strong evidence of the presence of an Islamic scholarly elite. This literate elite is represented by the *faqīh* Ibrahīm b. al-Ḥasan, “*qādī al-quḍā* (lit. “cadi of the cadis”) of Šawah” whose death occurred in 1255. The title “cadi of the cadis” refers to the judge at the head of the judiciary of a state or of a city, and therefore presupposes a sophisticated judicial hierarchy. Finally, the mention of the capture of Baghdad by the “Tatars” (the Mongols) in February 1258 (although the author places it in 1255) indicates that this space was in contact with the rest of the Islamic world and that the echo of this important event had reached the heart of the Ethiopian highlands.

The *Dīkr at-tawārīḥ* attests to the existence of other Muslim communities in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries as well, such as Mūrah, ‘Adal, and Hūbat, territories attacked in 1288 by Wālī ‘Asma‘ after the destruction of Šawah and its surroundings. While those specific territories cannot yet be identified in the landscape, the existence of Muslim communities is confirmed by the identification of Muslim funerary stelae dated from this period in four distinct regions.²⁹ First, to the south of Christian Šāwa, around the present-day towns of Dābrā Zāyt and Nazret, three inscribed stelae have been discovered; though undated, they are attributed to the twelfth-thirteenth century on epigraphical grounds.³⁰ Further south, east of Lake Langano, a necropolis was identified by Azaïs and Chambard in the 1920s containing about thirty graves oriented in the direction of Mecca.³¹ The authors mention only four stelae bearing Arabic inscriptions, which do not include dates. Paul Ravaisse, who edited them, thinks they can be attributed to the thirteenth

²⁶ Quoted in Éric Vallet, *L’Arabie marchande. État et commerce sous les sultans Rasūlides du Yémen (626-858/1229-1454)* (Paris, 2010), 409. About letters and embassies between Ethiopia and Mamluk court, see Julien Loiseau, “The Ḥaḡī and the Sultan: Letters and Embassies from Abyssinia to the Mamluk Court,” in *Mamluk Cairo. A Crossroad for Embassies*, ed. Frédéric Bauden and Malika Dekkiche (Leiden, 2019), 638-657.

²⁷ Cerulli, “Il sultanato dello scioa,” 15.

²⁸ George Wynn Brereton Huntingford, *The Historical Geography of Ethiopia from the First Century AD to 1704* (Oxford, 1989), 76.

²⁹ George Wynn Brereton Huntingford, “Arabic Inscriptions in Southern Ethiopia,” *Antiquity. A Quarterly Review of Archaeology* 29 (1955): 230-233.

³⁰ Madeleine Schneider, “Stèles funéraires musulmanes de la province du Choa,” *Annales d’Éthiopie* 8 (1970): 73-78.

³¹ François Bernardin Azaïs and Roger Chambard, eds., *Cinq années de recherches archéologiques en Éthiopie* (Paris, 1931), 203-205, pl. LXIII-LXIV.

century. Further east, along the Eastern Plateau, Azaïs and Chambard also identified about fifteen inscribed stelae in Heyssa, Lafto, Čällänqo and Bate. Only two of them bear a date: one from 666 AH (1267/68 CE) and the second 675 AH (1276 CE); the others are also attributed, by stylistic comparison, to the period from the end of the eleventh to the end of the thirteenth century.³²

Finally, in the village of Harlaa situated about 15km southeast of Dire Dawa, at the east of the last mention locus, four stelae have been identified.³³ One is precisely dated to 1259-1260 CE, the others one could be attributed to the end of the twelfth or beginning of the thirteenth century. The village of Harlaa also has numerous ruins, attributed by local tradition to a legendary population the "Harla," to whom all the archeological remains of the area are attributed.³⁴ The recent archeological excavations conducted by Timothy Insoll, with notably pit tests in a mosque, in the settlement area, and in jewellers' workshops, have confirmed, with radiocarbon datings, a main occupation dated between the mid-twelfth and mid-thirteenth centuries. Evidence for both long-distance (Red Sea and western Indian Ocean) and regional trade have been found, with imported ceramics (even from China), glass, coins, beads, shells, and some fish bones.³⁵ Some aspects of architecture show technological transfer from abroad, notably the selective use of coralline limestone in the *mihrab* of the excavated mosque and in the mausoleum complex to demarcate individual tombs. The excavation of Harlaa is ongoing.³⁶

In the same period that witnessed this multiplication of permanent Muslim settlements south of the Central Plateau and along the Eastern Plateau, the port of Zayla' was developing on the Gulf of Aden. As François-Xavier Fauvelle and Bertrand Hirsch have shown,³⁷ contrary to a generally accepted opinion,³⁸ Zayla' seems to have acquired a real dominant position only in the thirteenth century. The first mention of Zayla' is in al-Ya'qūbī's *Kitān al-buldān* at the end of the ninth century. It was then a small independent port, little Islamized if at all, exporting products (leather, incense, amber, tortoise shells and maybe also slaves) that could be obtained in the vicinity and did not involve trade networks with inland regions. It has long been maintained that in the tenth and eleventh centuries Zayla' was under the control of the Christian kingdom,³⁹ relying in particular on the texts of al-Mas'ūdī (in *The Meadows of Gold*, 956) and Ibn Ḥawqal

³² Paul Ravaisse, "Stèles et inscriptions arabes du Harar," in *Cinq années de recherches archéologiques en Éthiopie*, 283-309; Madeleine Schneider, "Notes au sujet de deux stèles funéraires en arabe de Baté (Harar)," *Le Muséon* 118, 3-4 (2005): 333-354.

³³ Madeleine Schneider, "Stèles funéraires de la région de Harar et Dahlak (Éthiopie)," *Revue des études islamiques* 2 (1969): 339-343; Frédéric Bauden, "Inscriptions arabes d'Éthiopie," *Annales Islamologiques* 45 (2011): 286-293.

³⁴ Amélie Chekroun et al., "Les Harla: archéologie et mémoire des géants d'Éthiopie. Proposition de séquence historique pour les sites du Čärčär," in *Espaces musulmans de la Corne de l'Afrique au Moyen Âge. Études d'archéologie et d'histoire*, ed. François-Xavier Fauvelle-Aymar and Bertrand Hirsch (Paris and Addis Ababa, 2011), 75-98.

³⁵ Timothy Insoll et al., "Archaeological Survey and Excavations, Harlaa, Dire Dawa, Ethiopia, January-February 2017. A Preliminary Fieldwork Report," *Nyame Akuma* 87 (2017) : 32-38. See also François-Xavier Fauvelle and Romain Mensan, "Moules de coulée en pierre trouvés à Harlaa," in *Espaces musulmans de la Corne*, 99-102.

³⁶ See the website of the ERC project "Becoming Muslim" led by Timothy Insoll:

<http://www.becomingmuslim.co.uk>

³⁷ François-Xavier Fauvelle-Aymar et al., "Le port de Zeyla et son arrière-pays au Moyen Âge. Investigations archéologiques et retour aux sources écrites," in *Espaces musulmans de la Corne*, 50-71.

³⁸ For example by Timothy Insoll, *The Archaeology of Islam in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Cambridge, 2003), 58-60.

³⁹ Carlo Conti Rossini, *Storia d'Etiochia. Parte prima: Dalle origini all'avvento della dinastia salomonide* (Bergamo, 1928), 67; Tadesse Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia (1270-1527)* (Oxford, 1972), 38; Trimmingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, 51-52 ; Cuoq, *Islam en Ethiopie*, 55.

A. Chekroun & B. Hirsch, “The Sultanates of Medieval Ethiopia” in S. Kelly (éd.), *Companion to Medieval Ethiopia and Eritrea*, Boston, Brill, 2020, p. 86-112. **PREPRINT**

(977-978) mentioning the presence of Muslims tributary to the Christian rulers. However, there is no explicit mention of Zaylaʿ among these Arab authors, but of Dahlak or more widely of all “al-Ḥabaša.” Zaylaʿ then disappears from the Arab sources in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Commentators have long identified Zaylaʿ, most probably wrongly, with the port of “Zālīg” mentioned by al-Idrīsī in 1154 in the *Nuzhat al-mushtāq fiʾkhtirāq al-āfāq* (or *Tabula Rogeriana*, “Book of Roger,” in Latin).⁴⁰ The port of Zaylaʿ appears to be really Islamized in Arab texts of the early thirteenth century, such as the *Muʿgam al-buldān* of Yāqūt al-Rūmī (d. 1229) or that of Ibn Saʿīd (1214-1286) quoted by Abū al-Fidāʿ (1273-1331) in his *Taqwīn al-buldān*.

In the second half of the thirteenth century, Zaylaʿ appears in the Arabic literature as an important stopping place for Muslim pilgrims en route to the holy places in Arabia and as a site of export for slaves from inland regions. Ibn al-Muḡāwir (d. 1291) describes the two coasts facing each other like a mirror, the *barr al-ʿArab* (“Arab coast”) facing the *barr al-ʿAḡam* (“coast of non-Arabs”) and Zaylaʿ is then undoubtedly the main port of this *barr al-ʿAḡam*.⁴¹ Yemeni sources mention the circulation not only of merchants, but also of scholars, pilgrims, mercenaries, diplomats or slaves, women and men, between Yemen and the Ethiopian sultanates, via the port of Zaylaʿ.

The presence of Muslim communities (maybe not a sultanate) in the Šawah region and of others, further south and east, by the 1260s-1270s at the latest, as well as the development of Zaylaʿ as a Muslim-controlled port from the early thirteenth century, point to a new orientation of settlement and trade, east-west from Šawah to a point on the coast (Zaylaʿ) much further south than Massawa and the Dahlak Islands. It was in this context, in the second half of the thirteenth century, that a new power, the sultanate of Awfāt (Ifāt in Gəʿəz) ruled by the Walasmaʿ dynasty, arose, took control of Šawah, and became the dominant Islamic power in Ethiopia for the next 150 years.

Second Period: Late Thirteenth- Early Sixteenth Century

Relations Between Muslim Territories and the Christian Kingdom

From the late thirteenth to the early sixteenth century, we have many more written sources, including the *Taʿrīḥ al-Walasmaʿ*, the annals in Arabic of the Walasmaʿ dynasty to 1520;⁴² Christian Ethiopian chronicles mentioning the Islamic polities;⁴³ and important accounts

⁴⁰ Fauvelle-Aymar et al., “Le port de Zeyla,” 58-60.

⁴¹ Ibn al-Muḡāwir, *A Traveller in Thirteenth Century Arabia. Ibn al-Mujāwir Taʿrīḥ al-Mustabṣir* (London, 2007).

⁴² Enrico Cerulli, “Documenti arabi per la storia dell’Etiopia,” *Memorie della Reale Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei* 4th ser., 4 (1931): 39-96, at 42-50. Probably written in the early sixteenth century, this text was also identified and translated by Philipp Paulitschke at the end of the nineteenth century, perhaps from another manuscript: Philipp Paulitschke, *Harar. Forschungsreise nach den Somäl – und Galla – Ländern Ost Afrikas* (Leipzig: Brokhaus, 1888), 503-506. The Cerulli manuscripts of the Vatican contain several versions of this text. An edition of these different versions is being prepared by Damien Labadie and Amélie Chekroun.

⁴³ Beside the chronicles of the reigns of Zārʿa Yaʿqob (1434-1468) and Bāʿədä Maryam (1468-1478), the most important one is the account in Gəʿəz of the military campaigns led by King ʿAmdä Šəyon (1314-1344) against the Muslim communities of the east in 1332. This very complex text requires further study. It is not contemporary with the events and seems to be a later compilation, probably of the fifteenth century. Cf. the comments of Paolo Marrassini, ed. and trans., *Lo scettro e la croce. La campagna di ʿAmda Seyon I contro l’Ifat (1332)* (Naples, 1993), 93; Manfred Kropp, ed. and trans., *Der siegreiche Feldzug des Königs Amda Seyon gegen die Muslime in Adal im*

by Muslim Egyptian writers, notably the *Masālik al-abṣār fi mamālik al-amṣār* (“Routes toward Insight into the Capital Empires”) of Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-ʿUmarī,⁴⁴ composed in the 1330s on the basis of testimony from several Ethiopian informants,⁴⁵ and the *Kitāb al-ilmām bi-ahbār man bi-arḍ al-Ḥabaša min mulūk al-Islām* of al-Maqrīzī, completed in 1438, which describes the political situation of Awfāt at the turn of the fifteenth century⁴⁶—but also, and importantly, a growing body of archeological evidence that fleshes out and revises the written testimony in significant ways. Several archeological sites have recently been identified in the territory of the sultanate of Awfāt and are dated to the fourteenth century.⁴⁷ These sites are witness to the period of domination of the sultanate of Awfāt. Some archeological data have also been identified along the route between Zaylaʿ and Ifāt, near the present-day Somaliland-Ethiopia border,⁴⁸ and in the Harar and Čärčär⁴⁹ region. Due to lack of excavations, these data cannot yet be connected to the different sultanates of that time with the notable exception of the city of Harar, where Timothy Insoll is currently conducting pit tests and is able to date the beginning of the occupation of the city in the sixteenth century.⁵⁰ All told, it is now possible for the first time to give an archeological context to some of the sultanates of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. These archeological studies of these sites are still in its early phases. The potential for new discoveries is prodigious and should enable in future great advances in understanding the history of this second period of the Islamic Middle Ages in the region.

As noted above, Wālī ʿAsmaʿ took control of Muslim communities of Šawah in the later 1280s with the likely support of the Christian king, at that time Yəkunno Amlak. The sultanate of Awfāt that he thereby established, under the authority of his descendants (known after him as the Walasmaʿ dynasty), became a tributary state, under the suzerainty of the Christian kings. But it was not the only one. Al-ʿUmarī, writing a few decades later, listed six other “Muslim kingdoms” in Ethiopia: Dawāro, ʿArābabni, Hadiyya, Šarḥā, Bāli and Dāra. He specifies that the whole area is called in Egypt and Syria “the country of Zaylaʿ” which “is however only one of

Jahre 1332 N. Chr. (Louvain, 1994), XVIII. There is also an English translation of the work: George Wynn Brereton Huntingford, trans., *The Glorious Victories of ʿĀmda Seyon King of Ethiopia* (Oxford, 1965).

⁴⁴ Ibn Faḍl Allah al-ʿUmarī, *Masālik el Absār fi mamālik el amṣār. I: L’Afrique moins l’Egypte*, trans. Maurice Gaudetroy-Demombynes (Paris, 1927).

⁴⁵ Muth, “A globe-trotter,” 126.

⁴⁶ It has never been properly studied – in fact, there is no edition of the *Kitāb al-Ilmām* taking into account all known manuscripts (Muth, “A globe-trotter”, 123-131) and no translation of this text, except the one in Latin by F. T. Rinck from 1790 and the unpublished English translation of the Rinck translation (by G. W. B. Huntingford, *Maqrizi: The Book of the true knowledge of the History of the Muslim kings in Abyssinia*, 1955). Only two copies exist of Huntingford’s translation, one at the British Library, the other one at the library of the Institute for Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa University.

⁴⁷ Bertrand Poissonnier et al., “Les mosquées médiévales de Gozé et Fäqi Däbbis (Ifāt),” in *Espaces musulmans de la Corne*, 103-139; François-Xavier Fauvelle-Aymar et al., “A Topographic Survey and Some Soundings at Nora, an Ancient Muslim Town of Ethiopia,” *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 39, 1-2 (2006): 1-11; Fauvelle, Hirsch, and Chekroun, “Le sultanat de l’Awfāt.”

⁴⁸ A. T. Curle, “The Ruined Towns of Somaliland,” *Antiquity. A Quarterly Review of Archaeology* 9 (1937): 315-327; Fauvelle et al., “Le port de Zeyla.”

⁴⁹ The sites identified by Azaïs and Chambard (*Cinq années de recherches*) in the Čärčär in the 1920s have recently been revisited: see Chekroun et al., “Les Harla;” Amélie Chekroun, “Dakar, capitale du sultanat éthiopien du Barr Saʿd ad-dīn (1415-1520),” *Cahiers d’études africaines* 219 (2015): 569-586.

⁵⁰ Timothy Insoll, “First Footsteps in the Archaeology of Harar, Ethiopia,” *Journal of Islamic Archaeology* 4, 2 (2017): 189-215.

their cities on the sea whose name has extended to the whole."⁵¹ The "seven Muslim kingdoms" were all independent of each other; each paid "a fixed tribute which they bring every year" to the Christian king and "none of them has its own authority unless it is invested by the ruler of 'Amḥara [...] because it is he who has the supreme authority over them and they are before him only lieutenants."⁵² The Gə'əz account of the wars conducted in 1332 by 'Amdä Şəyon would seem to confirm this for Hadiyya, in mentioning a tribute levied upon it already in 1316/17, and for Awfāt, the Walasma' sultans being vassals of the Christian kings even before 'Amdä Şəyon's reign. The Christian king could depose a sultan and install another one as governor if he wanted. The author of this account explains that one of the reasons for the war between 'Amdä Şəyon and the eastern Muslim territories was the refusal of the ruler of Hadiyya to pay tribute to the king.⁵³ It is difficult to say whether the state of Christian-Islamic relations presented in this text reflects in all respects the conditions of 1332 or rather the fifteenth century, when the text seems to have been written, but the general congruence with al-'Umarī's contemporary report does paint a picture of the dependence of the main Islamic powers to the Christian state. This is further confirmed by the *Kitāb al-Ilmām* of al-Maqrīzī, in the second part of the booklet untitled "The condition of Muslim affairs in the war against the Christians of Abyssinia," which details the dependence of the sultans of Awfāt on the authority of the Christian king during the second half of the fourteenth century. While the first part is largely from al-'Umarī's book, the second and main section describes precisely the political situation of the sultanate of Awfāt in the later fourteenth and early fifteenth century, in particular its highly conflictual relations with the Christian kingdom. For this section al-Maqrīzī used oral and written traditions gathered from Ethiopians or travelers to Ethiopia present in Cairo or Mecca in the 1430s, such as Šihāb al-dīn Aḥmad b. 'Abdl khāliq al-Mağāšī, a Maghreb traveler who stayed in the capital city of Awfāt and whom al-Maqrīzī met in Mecca. In this part of the work the Walasma' dynasty is again presented, in the period before the reign of Ḥaqq al-Dīn (r. 1376-1386), as under the domination of the Christian king. According to al-Maqrīzī, the Christian king held some members of the Walasma' dynasty as prisoners, granted his "patronage," appointed the new sultans, offered military aid to the sultans when necessary and protected them, in exchange for which they were constrained to "obey his orders." Thus, when Ḥaqq al-Dīn rebelled against his uncle the sultan 'Alī, the Christian king arrived with an "army of 30,000 men" and participated directly in the war to put down the rebellion.

According to al-Maqrīzī, Ḥaqq al-Dīn's rebellion was motivated by a desire to free the dynasty from Christian tutelage and gain political independence.⁵⁴ Ḥaqq al-Dīn was killed before totally liberating "his kingdom," but his brother and successor Sa'd al-Dīn continued his policy, leading a "continual war on the infidels of Amḥara."⁵⁵ Sa'd al-Dīn fought the Christian king probably until 1415, when after a retreat perhaps as far as Zayla', he too was killed, by King Yəşhaq.⁵⁶ Al-Maqrīzī thus points to a fissure within the Walasma' dynasty, between those who continued to accept Christian overlordship (the sultan 'Alī and his successors) and the two brothers who rejected it. Such a fissure is confirmed in *Ta'rīḥ al-Walasma'*. In this text, which

⁵¹ Al-'Umarī, *Masālik el Absār*, 5.

⁵² Ibid., 2 and 19.

⁵³ See Marrassini, ed. and trans., *Lo scettro e la croce*, 58-61; Huntingford, trans., *Glorious Victories*, 19-23 and 58.

⁵⁴ Huntingford, trans., *Maqrizi*, 14b; Fauvelle, Hirsch, and Chekroun, "Le sultanat de l'Awfāt."

⁵⁵ Huntingford, trans., *Maqrizi*, 15.

⁵⁶ One of the islands facing the port of Zayla' still bears the name of "Saad Dīn", on which a monument is considered the tomb of Sa'd al-Dīn. See Fauvelle-Aymar et al., "Le port de Zeyla," 35-37 and 66-68.

lists all the ruling members of the Walasma^c family, the break appears where the genealogy reaches the reign of Ḥaqq al-Dīn: he is the first for whom a precise date of reign is indicated, and the first of whom it is said that he led a jihad and died a martyr.⁵⁷ This double break, in the way the reign is recorded and in its ruler’s policy against the Christians, is central to understanding both this text and the history of the dynasty. It also indicates a change in the transmission of memory from Ḥaqq al-Dīn’s time.

The territory of Awfāt was thereafter absorbed into the Christian state. According to al-Maqrīzī, the Christians destroyed its mosques to build churches and appointed Christian governors, who adopted the name Walasma^c (in Gəʿəz, *wäläšma*) as a title, as attested in the chronicle of King Bāʿədä Maryam (r. 1468-1478).⁵⁸ The integration into the Christian kingdom of the various Islamic territories in the south (Däwaro, Bali, Fätägar, Ifät, Hadiyya) following the collapse of the sultanate of Awfāt is unknown. The Christian documentation makes clear that they were under Christian control from the middle of the fifteenth century at the latest, and probably a few decades earlier. The kings founded royal residences in Fätägar and Ifät: for example, Dawit II had a royal residence at Təḥq⁵⁹ and Ləbnä Dəngəl had one of his at Badaqe⁶⁰. Many royal churches were also built on these territories, to spatially mark the presence of the Christian power. *Čewa* garrisons were deployed there, notably in Däwaro and Bali, as noted in the chronicles of kings Zäʿra Yaʿəqob and Bāʿədä Maryam.⁶¹ Finally those chronicles also mention the appointment of Christian governors for Bali, Däwaro, Fätägar and Gänz, which is confirmed a century later in the *Futūḥ al-Ḥabaša* and the *Mäšḥafä Səddät*. In 1443, in a letter addressed to the Mamluk sultan, Zäʿra Yaʿəqob stressed the fact that a great number of Muslims were living in his kingdom, that their cities and trade were under his protection, and that their “sultans” obeyed him.⁶²

Hadiyya seems to have been the only former Muslim territory to retain a slight autonomy: although its governor was appointed and under the authority of the king, he was Muslim and seems to have been the descendant of the dynasty that reigned there before the fifteenth century. During his stay at the court of Ləbnä Dəngəl in the 1520s, Francisco Alvares witnessed the arrival of the “queen” of Hadiyya who had come to seek help from the king regarding dynastic problems within her territory. The *Futūḥ al-Ḥabaša* confirms this particular position of Hadiyya and mentions, like Alvares, that “the governor of Hädäyā, who was a Muslim, [...] used to pay the

⁵⁷ Cerulli, “Documenti arabi,” 142-143.

⁵⁸ Jules Perruchon, ed. and trans., *Les chroniques de Zarʿa Yaʿəqob et de Baʿeda Märyäm, rois d’Éthiopie de 1434 à 1478* (Paris, 1893), 111-112. The title “Walasma^c/Wäläšma” remained attached to this geographical area and was used by both Christian and Muslim leaders until the beginning of the twentieth century: see for example Ahmed Hassen Omer, “Islam, commerce et politique dans l’Ifat (Éthiopie centrale) au XIX^e siècle: l’émergence d’une ville carrefour, Aleyyu Amba” (Ph.D diss., Université de Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, 2007).

⁵⁹ Marie Laure Derat, “Fätägar,” in *EAE* 2 (2005), 504-505.

⁶⁰ The royal city of Badaqī has not yet precisely located, but was probably not far from the today’s town of Däbrä Zäyt. See Lanfranco Ricci, “Resti di antico edificio in Ginbi (Scioa),” *Annales d’Éthiopie* 10 (1976): 177-210, at 195 and 201 n. 6; Osbert Guy Stanhope Crawford, *Ethiopian Itineraries circa 1400-1524* (Cambridge, 1958), 53-54; Marie-Laure Derat, *Le domaine des rois éthiopiens, 1270-1527 : espace, pouvoir, et monachisme* (Paris, 2003), 46; Deresse Ayenachew, “Le kätäma: la cour et le camp royale en Éthiopie (XIV^e-XVI^e siècle). Espace et pouvoir” (Ph.D diss., Université de Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne, 2009), 352-353.

⁶¹ Perruchon, *Chroniques de Zarʿa Yaʿəqob et de Baʿeda Märyäm*, 45, 159, and *passim*.

⁶² Julien Loiseau, “Abyssinia at al-Azhar: Ethiopian students in Fifteenth Century Cairo,” *Journal of Northeastern African Studies* (forthcoming in 2019).

poll-tax to the king, and in the same way, every year, he would give him one of their daughters to be baptized a Christian by him."⁶³

After the death of Sa'd al-Dīn, his family took refuge in Yemen, at the court of the Rasūlid sultan Aḥmad b. al-Ašraf Ismā'īl (r. 1400-1424). Shortly thereafter the sultan "provided them with supplies and six horsemen," and the older son of Sa'd al-Dīn, Ṣabr al-Dīn (r. 1415-1421/22), came back to Ethiopia, to a place called al-Sayāra,⁶⁴ where the soldiers who had served under his father joined him. They settled at the eastern limits of the territory controlled by the sultanate (by now, perhaps more properly the Christian province) of Awfāt, where they established a new sultanate, called the Barr Sa'd al-Dīn ("Land of Sa'd al-Dīn").⁶⁵ In some Arabic sources, the area in which they settled is called 'Adal.⁶⁶ We may therefore presume a linkage, tighter or looser, between this area and the site of the Muslim community of 'Adal that Wālī 'Asma' is reported to have attacked in 1288, whose exact location and extent, however, remain unknown. Adding to the terminological confusion is the fact that Christian Ethiopian sources employ the name 'Adāl for the area and the sultanate through the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.⁶⁷ It seems clear, in any case, that the Barr Sa'd al-Dīn, with its capital at Dakar,⁶⁸ controlled an area more extensive than that of the thirteenth-century community (or perhaps polity) of 'Adāl. Sa'd al-Dīn's descendants imposed their power over many other formerly independent Islamic territories, both sedentary and nomadic, including Hūbat, Zayla', the Hārla territory, and part of the vast and complex territory of the Somali. The sources do not describe the sultanate's installation, which makes it difficult to trace either the sultans' strategies or the reaction of local chiefs to this dynasty coming from Awfāt by way of Yemen, imposing taxes and controlling the trade route from the coast.

In the 1520s, Francisco Alvares's impression was that Sa'd al-Dīn's descendants, in reaction to the defeat of their ancestor, conducted a policy of peaceful alliance with the Christian kings.⁶⁹ This idea is repeated by many authors who consider that from the second half of the fifteenth century, the Walasma' pursued a peaceful policy towards neighboring Christians, privileging the security of trade routes crossing their territory.⁷⁰ Others, however, evoke a perpetual war between the Barr Sa'd al-Dīn and the Christian kingdom.⁷¹ In all probability the

⁶³ Šihāb ad-Dīn, *The Conquest of Abyssinia*, 307; Beckingham-Huntingford, *Prester John*, 1:191-194, 2: 427-436.

⁶⁴ Cerulli, "Documenti arabi," 46; Huntingford, trans., *Maqrizi*, 18-19.

⁶⁵ At the time of the Emirate of Harar (1647-1887), the former state was still referred to as "Barr Sa'd ad-Dīn" in official documents written by the Harari *diwan* (Wagner, "Three Arabic documents," 218). This term appears only once in Christian sources (Conzelman, ed., *Chronique de Galāwdéwos*, 146).

⁶⁶ Philipp Paulitschke, *Die geographische Erforschung der Adāl-Länder und Harār's in Ost-Africa* (Leipzig, 1884), 1 n. 2; Braukämper, *Islamic History and Culture*, 29.

⁶⁷ See among many: Perruchon, ed. and trans., *Zar'a Ya'eqôb et de Ba'eda Mâryâm, passim*; Conzelman, ed., *Chronique de Galāwdéwos*, 147; René Basset, *Études sur l'histoire d'Éthiopie* (Paris, 1882), 104; Carlo Conti Rossini, ed. and trans., *Vitae sanctorum indigenarum I: Gadla Marqorewos seu Acta Sancti Mercuri* (Paris, 1904), 38; Crawford, *Ethiopian Itineraries*, 172-173.

⁶⁸ Chekroun, "Dakar," 569-586.

⁶⁹ Beckingham-Huntingford, *Prester John*, 2: 410-416. See also Andreu Martínez d'Alòs-Moner, "Francisco Alvarez," in *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History*, vol. 7, *Central and Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa, and South America (1500-1600)*, ed. David Thomas and John Chesworth (Leiden, 2015), 781-790.

⁷⁰ Ewald Wagner, "The Genealogy of the Later Walashma' Sultans of Adal and Harar," in *Proceedings of the Eleventh International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, ed. Bahru Zewde, Richard Pankhurst, and Taddese Beyene (Addis Ababa, 1994), 135-146; Robert Ferry, "Quelques hypothèses sur les origines des conquêtes musulmanes en Abyssinie au XVI^e siècle," *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* 2-5 (1961): 24-36 at 31.

⁷¹ For example Cuoq, *Islam en Éthiopie*, 219.

situation lies somewhere between these two positions. Actually the situation has never been properly studied, no study having been done specifically on the fifteenth century. The overviews by Cuoq, Trimmingham, and Braukämper just put the point of view of the different sources end to end, without comparing them: for example Cuoq proposes both hypotheses (perpetual war vs. peaceful politics) without ever questioning the impossibility of their coexistence.

It is true that most of the documentation about the fifteenth century mentions conflicts between the Walasma'/Sa'd al-Dīn sultanate and the Christian power. The description of the situation in the 1420s-1430s by al-Maqrīzī, for instance, only mentions the fights between Sa'd al-Dīn's sons, Šabr al-Dīn (r. 1415-1422), Maṣūr (r. 1422-1424), Ğamāl al-Dīn (r. 1424-1433) and Badlāy (r. 1433-1445), and the Christian power, especially King Yəṣṣḥaq (r. 1414-1430). The chronicles of Kings Zār'a Ya'əqob (1434-1468) and Bā'ədā Maryam (1468-1478) repeatedly mention raids ordered by the Christian king against the Barr Sa'd al-Dīn, and record that the Walasma' sultan even sent an embassy to Bā'ədā Maryam asking him to stop these incursions, in exchange for the payment of a tribute.⁷² Here is explicitly mentioned a tribute paid to the Christian power. Did the system of suzerainty established in the fourteenth century extend in the fifteenth century over this new sultanate? It is impossible for now to be affirmative, no other source mentioning it. But the *Futūḥ al-Ḥabaša* says rather that Christian domination extended only over ancient territories like Ifāt and into borderlands, not within the sultanate itself. The work is also very critical of Muslims who paid tribute to the Christian power: "In the time of Sa'd al-Dīn, and in the time of those who governed Hārar after him, and even up to the time of Garād Abūn, the infidels made incursions into the country of the Muslims and laid it waste many times, so that some of the Muslim towns even paid them the *ḥarāğ*. This was the situation until the imam Aḥmad ruled. He prevented the infidels from doing this, and conquered their country."⁷³ Both Christian and Muslim frontier raids continued regularly until the conquest of Christian Ethiopia starting in 1531.

One of the most famous leaders of these raids, on the Muslim side, was Emir Maḥfūz. For those who subscribe to a view of the Barr Sa'd al-Dīn as pursuing peace with the Christian kingdom, culminating in an alliance between the early sixteenth-century sultan Muḥammad and the Christian regent Əleni, the emir or "Imam Maḥfūz" represents the emergence of an "opposition" or "religious" party.⁷⁴ His annual expeditions against Christian territories, by this interpretation, were conducted against the advice of the reigning dynasty; his successors, continuing his policy, relegated the sultans to the mere role of extras. Imām Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm, one of Maḥfūz's heirs (he married Maḥfūz's daughter Dalwanbarah), then led this anti-Christian effort to its climax by attempting to impose Islam on the entire Christian kingdom. As mentioned above, the idea of a totally peaceful policy towards the Christian kingdom is highly unlikely, as is the idea of an "opposition party" against this policy.⁷⁵ Actually, all the sources that mention Maḥfūz (Alvares, Sāršā Dəngəl's chronicle, Pedro Paez's *History of Ethiopia*, the *Futūḥ al-Ḥabaša*⁷⁶) agree that Maḥfūz was a leader of the sultanate's army, under the orders of the sultan Muḥammad. The *Futūḥ al-Ḥabaša* however confirms that there were internal struggles for

⁷² Perruchon, ed. and trans., *Chroniques de Zar'a Ya'eqob et de Ba'eda Maryam*, 131.

⁷³ Šihāb ad-Dīn, *Conquest of Abyssinia*, 22.

⁷⁴ See for example Cuoq, *Islam en Éthiopie*, 165; Trimmingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, 83.

⁷⁵ See Chekroun, *Historiographie, guerre, et société*.

⁷⁶ Beckingham-Huntingford, *Prester John*, 2: 410-515; Kropp, *Die Geschichte*, 4; Pedro Paez, *Pedro Paez's History of Ethiopia, 1622*, ed. Isabel Boavida, Hervé Pennec and Manuel João Ramos (Farnham, 2011), 477; Šihāb ad-Dīn, *Conquest of Abyssinia*, 50.

A. Chekroun & B. Hirsch, "The Sultanates of Medieval Ethiopia" in S. Kelly (éd.), *Companion to Medieval Ethiopia and Eritrea*, Boston, Brill, 2020, p. 86-112. **PREPRINT**

power in the Barr Sa'd al-Dīn at the end of the fifteenth century, with a very rapid succession of sovereigns, legitimate or not; these culminate in the 1520s with the emergence of Imam Aḥmad, who ends up killing the legitimate sultan Abū Bakr.

While the sources focus on the conflict between the sultans of the Barr Sa'd al-Dīn and the Christian king, diplomatic and economic relations also appear. We know for example that the embassies of Christian kings to Cairo (to the patriarch of Alexandria and to the Mamluk court) could be accompanied by representatives of Islamic Ethiopian powers or by Ethiopian Muslim traders.⁷⁷ The diplomatic relations between Christian and Muslim Ethiopian polities were manifested by matrimonial alliances or diplomatic messengers from one court to another⁷⁸.

Organization of the Islamic Territories

Except for Awfāt, the exact location of the other six Islamic "kingdoms" of the fourteenth century has been the subject of much speculation. Ulrich Braukämper collected in the 1970s all attested information on them and found it to be inconclusive regarding their geographical placement.⁷⁹ But the archeological evidence, noted above, of Islamic settlements south and east of Šāwa already in the late thirteenth century may well correlate with these polities described by al-'Umarī a few decades later.

The sultanate of Awfāt is the best documented by both texts and archeology and is the best studied. The dynasty of the Walasma' sultans who reigned over Awfāt is mentioned many times in the written sources. But above all, five ruined cities (today called Asbāri, Nora, Māsal, Rassa Guba, and Beri-Ifat) have been identified in its former territory by a team led by François-Xavier Fauvelle and Bertrand Hirsch and have been firmly dated by radiocarbon analysis and by funerary inscriptions to the fourteenth century.⁸⁰ These cities are located a few kilometers from each other, at an average altitude of 1500 meters, which presupposes an intense agricultural activity in their immediate environment and therefore populations of sedentary peasants. Al-'Umarī reports the cultivation in Awfāt of cereals (wheat, sorghum, teff), typical of the highlands, accompanied by the cultivation of qat and the presence of fruit trees, such as lemon or banana,⁸¹ probably in lower and warmer areas, near streams. He also mentions the importance of breeding.⁸² Today it is impossible to match these archeological sites with the "mother cities" (*mudun 'ummaḥāt*) of Awfāt mentioned by al-'Umarī, which seem to refer to a series of cities or regions making up this sultanate (Baqulzar, Kalḡūra, Šimī, Šawā, 'Adal, Ğamā/Ğabā, Lāw), some of which (K'w'algora, Bəq'w'al Zār, Šāwa) are also mentioned in the Gə'əz account of 'Amdā Šeyon's wars.⁸³

⁷⁷ See Constantin Marinescu, *La politique orientale d'Alfonse V d'Aragon, roi de Naples (1416-1458)* (Barcelona: Institut d'Estudis Catalans, 1994), 18; Alfonso Cerone, "La politica orientale di Alfonso di Aragona," *Archivio storico per le province napoletane* 27 (1902): 3-93, at 71-72; Loiseau, "Abyssinia at al-Azhar".

⁷⁸ Basset, *Études*, 106; Perruchon, ed. and trans., *Chroniques de Zar'a Ya'eqôb et Ba'eda Mâryâm*, 131.

⁷⁹ Braukämper, *Islamic History and Culture*, 12-105.

⁸⁰ Fauvelle, Hirsch and Chekroun, "Le sultanat de l'Awfāt." See also Bauden, "Inscriptions arabes d'Éthiopie;" François-Xavier Fauvelle-Aymar et al., "Reconnaissances de trois villes musulmanes de l'époque médiévale dans l'Ifat," *Annales d'Éthiopie* 22 (2006): 133-178.

⁸¹ Al-'Umarī, *Masālik el Absār*, 9-10.

⁸² See Thomas Guindeuil, "Alimentation, cuisine et ordre social dans le royaume d'Éthiopie" (Ph.D diss., Université de Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne, 2012).

⁸³ Huntingford, trans., *Glorious Victories*, 56.

The archeological sites are the remnants of real cities, sometimes protected by defensive works, with stone buildings and an urban organization in neighborhoods with streets, set within terraced landscapes that witness agricultural practices. The inventory and excavation of several mosques (each city possessed a main mosque and neighborhood mosques, and some had oratories in the area) corroborate al-‘Umarī’s text: “There are, in these seven kingdoms, cathedral mosques, ordinary mosques and oratories, where the *hoṭba*, the Friday prayer and the assembly prayer are performed; the population observes exactly the religious law.”⁸⁴

Mosque on the citadel of Beri, in the capital city of Awfāt, 14th c. Photo: French Archaeological Mission, 2009

According to al-‘Umarī, most Ethiopian Muslims practiced Hanafī Islam, but Awfāt’s rulers practiced Shāfi‘ism. This is confirmed by a funerary inscription identified in the cemetery adjoining the main mosque at Beri-Ifat, which was most probably the capital city of the sultanate (it is called Wafāt in the texts). According to the inscription’s initial statement, it is the tomb of a “sheikh of the Walasma” of Shāfi‘ite school (*al-šāfi‘ī*).⁸⁵ Though a complete record of this inscription has yet to be made, it is the first epigraphic evidence that confirms the Arab authors, and the importance of this *madhhab* at the Walasma’ court. It is also confirmed by the presence of an important Ethiopian community (*tā’ifa*) of students and/or Sufīs (the Zayālī‘a) at the very famous and important Sunni Shāfi‘ī school of al-Azhar in Cairo in the fifteenth century.⁸⁶ The Arabic documentation also mentions a number of Sufīs living at the Islamic Ethiopian courts. One example is ‘Alī b. ‘Umar aš-Šādālī, a Sufī Yemeni of the Šādiliyya, who died in Muḥā (Mocha), in the Tihāma region of the Arabian Peninsula, in 1424-1425 CE. According to the biographical sketches devoted to him a few decades later by several Yemeni authors,⁸⁷ he had traveled, following the ancient practice of the “journey in search of science” (*rihla fī talab al-‘ilm*), to the Hijaz, Syria-Palestine, and Cairo, before settling at the court of Sa’d ad-Dīn, the Walasma’ sultan of Awfāt. He stayed at the court of the last sultan of Awfāt long enough to marry Sa’d ad-Dīn’s sister and have three sons. He ends, on an unknown date, by returning to Mocha with his wife and his sons. Al-‘Umarī nuances, however, the importance of the scholarly elite of the sultanate, composed of cadis and jurists, stating that “none of them shines in knowledge.”⁸⁸

As for the political organization of the “seven Muslim kingdoms” of the fourteenth century, we know almost nothing. A little more information is available for the Barr Sa’d al-Dīn, thanks to ‘Arab Faqīh’s *Futūḥ al-Ḥabaša*. An emir was appointed by the sultan to head each territory, with the prerogative of levying the taxes (*ḥarāğ* and *zakāt*) on the population. ‘Arab Faqīh mentions a conflict in the 1520s over the *zakāt* (the alms tax, one of the five pillars of Islam), which is supposed to be distributed among eight categories of people listed in the Quran. But “the sultan, the emirs and the other rulers who governed the land of Sa’d al-Dīn took the alms tax from the Muslims and [...] disposed of it for their own profit, instead of giving it to the

⁸⁴ Al-‘Umarī, *Masālik el Absār*, 3.

⁸⁵ Fauvelle, Hirsch and Chekroun, “Le sultanat de l’Awfāt.”

⁸⁶ See Loiseau, “Abyssinia at al-Azhar.”

⁸⁷ See Baba, “Notes on Migration,” 78; Gori, “Lo Yemen e l’Islam,” 201-218; Alessandro Gori, “Una famiglia santa tra Africa orientale e Yemen: Gli Zaylā’ī nelle “Ṭabaqāt” di Aḥmad b. Aḥmad b. ‘Abd al-Laṭīf al Šarḡī,” *Rivista degli studi orientali* 72, 1-4 (1999): 41-60.

⁸⁸ For a fuller discussion of Islamic religious-intellectual culture, see the essay of Alessandro Gori in this volume.

poor and the wretched and those who really deserved it," and such "has been the custom of [their] ancestors from the time of Sa'd al-Dīn."⁸⁹ Arab Faqīh also writes that there was a clear division between the sultan's prerogatives concerning taxes and those of the emirs: while the sultan derived his income from the taxes (*ḥarāḡ*) levied on the population, the emirs had the right to gather an army to conduct raids in infidel territory, in order to collect loot.⁹⁰

Throughout the "Islamic later Middle Ages" (from the thirteenth to the mid-sixteenth century), these Muslim territories had a central role in long-distance trade. This was true even after their integration in the Christian kingdom, and especially so for the main trade cities.

Al-'Umarī noted in the fourteenth century that the sultan of Awfāt was respected by other Muslim rulers and dominated long-distance trade, particularly because of his geographical position. Awfāt being "the closest to the Egyptian territory and the shores that face Yemen" and "its king reigning over Zayla', the port where the merchants who go to this kingdom approach... the import is more considerable," especially with "silk and linen fabrics imported from Egypt, Yemen and Iraq."⁹¹ In the sixteenth century, two sources emanating from Europeans but using, among others, information of Ethiopian origin are to be taken into account because they show the decisive commercial role of the Islamic communities and cities. Francisco Alvares' account of his stay in Ethiopia (1520-1526) is valuable because he describes many places on a route through the highlands from Təgray to Bārara in Šäwa (where King Ləbnä Dəngəl's camp was located), including large towns with major commercial activity animated by Muslim communities settled within the Christian kingdom. One example is the town of "Manadeley," which already appears in the form Manḥad(e)bē in the chronicle of King Zār'a Ya'əqob,⁹² and was probably located in Angot:

This town is one of about 1000 inhabitants, all Moors tributary to the Prester John. At one end, as if apart, there live twenty or thirty Christians, who live here with their wives, and the Christians receive dues like toll charges. (...) This town of Manadeley is a town of very great trade, like a great city or seaport. Here they find every kind of merchandise that there is in the world, and merchants of all nations, also all the languages of the Moors, from Giada, from Morocco, Fez, Bugia, Tunis, Turks, Roumes from Greece, Moors of India, Ormuz and Cairo....⁹³

The Venetian Alessandro Zorzi collected an itinerary from an Ethiopian monk named "Antonio" (Ἐntonəs) in 1523. This route, on which goods as well as travelers of course passed, went from Bārara to Zayla'. Ἐntonəs (via Zorzi) mentioned the city of "Gendevelu," 65 days' walk from Zayla', in the region of Ifāt, at the time controlled by the Christian kingdom:

This Gendevelu is a great mercantile city, and it is of the Presta Davit, where the said caravans of camels unload their merchandise in warehouses; and it is the merchants ships of Combaia that bring all the spices except ginger, which is found in this land of the Presta. (...) The currency is Hungarian and

⁸⁹ Šihāb ad-Dīn, *Conquest of Abyssinia*, 101-105.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 17-18.

⁹¹ Al-'Umarī, *Masālik el Absār*, 5

⁹² Perruchon, ed. and trans., *Chroniques de Zar'a Ya'eqob et de Ba'eda Māryām*, 65-66.

⁹³ Beckingham-Huntingford, *Prester John*, 1: 186-187.

Venetian ducats, and the silver coins of the Moors, and by that route various things are brought from the whole of India.⁹⁴

The first mention of this place is in the chronicle of King Bā’ədā Maryam.⁹⁵ This commercial city, populated mainly by Muslims, submitted to Imam Aḥmad during his first campaigns, and its Christian population was eliminated.⁹⁶ The large commercial city of “Gendevelu” is probably among the cities inventoried in this part of Ifāt, perhaps the archeological site of Asbāri. However, for the moment, few imported materials from trade with countries bordering the Red Sea or the Indian Ocean have been found here; the ceramics collected during the excavations were mostly produced locally.

The *Futūḥ al-Ḥabaša*, for its part, mentions commercial exchanges and the presence of Christian traders in the Barr Sa’d al-Dīn: “The King of Abyssinia dispatched traders into the country of the Muslims carrying gold, *wars* [i.e. leguminous plant from the Yemen], ivory, civet cats and slaves – a vast quantity of wealth that belonged to the king. They sold their merchandise in the country of the Muslims and crossed the Sea to aš-Šiḥr and ‘Aden and then they turned back and returned, seeking their own country and the presence of the king.”⁹⁷ Thus, Christians also participated in long-distance trade. Vital for the economy of the region, this trade led to struggles for control of the areas of breakage between highlands and lowlands. But it also required peace and diplomatic agreements between Christian and Islamic powers, to ensure the safety of caravans and their passage across the neighboring territory.

The Islamic territories seem marked by the poverty of coining. Al-‘Umarī notes that the Muslim political elite did not mint their own coins, but used *kāmīlī* (silver) dirhams minted in Egypt,⁹⁸ as mention in the description of “Gendevelu” by Zorzi. It is confirmed by the discovery in Ifāt at the end of the nineteenth century of a “treasure (now lost) of silver coins,” *kāmīlī* dirhams minted by the Mamluk sultans of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries according to Conti Rossini.⁹⁹ The *Nūr al-ma ‘ārif* (“Light of Knowledge”), a set of notes detailing the conditions of trade in Mecca and Abyssinia, collected at the end of the thirteenth century on the order of a Rasūlid sultan, confirms the use of silver dirhams, but points out that for current exchange, a much lower value money was used, “something called *ḥaras*, consisting of fragments (*kusārāt*) of poor quality silver, of broken (*ḥilqa*) rings, bracelets or other that served as [dirham] *kāmīlī*,”¹⁰⁰ and in the more remote regions of the trade routes, an iron money, the *ḥakūna*, small bundles of iron rods. Some *ḥakūna* have been found in the excavation of Nora, dated to the fourteenth century. But, as observed already by al-‘Umarī, barter “for example in cows, sheep or textiles”¹⁰¹ remained the most common medium of exchange in the rest of the region.

⁹⁴ Crawford, *Ethiopian Itineraries*, 173.

⁹⁵ Perruchon, ed. and trans., *Chroniques de Zar’a Ya’eqōb et de Ba’eda Māryām*, 151-152.

⁹⁶ Šihāb ad-Dīn, *Conquest of Abyssinia*, 36-39.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 42-43.

⁹⁸ Al-‘Umarī, *Masālik el Absār*, 14.

⁹⁹ Carlo Conti Rossini, “Rapport sur le progrès des études éthiopiennes, depuis le dernier congrès (1894-1897),” in *Actes du 11^e congrès international des orientalistes* (Paris, 1897), 27-66, at 44.

¹⁰⁰ Muḥammad Gāzīm, ed., *Nūr al-ma ‘ārif fī nuḥum wa-qawānīn wa-a ḥāf al-Yaman fī al- ‘ahd al-muḥaffarī al-wārif*. (Ṣan‘ā’ [Sanaa, Yemen], 2003), 360 and 364.

¹⁰¹ Al-‘Umarī, *Masālik el Absār*, 18 and 26.

Conclusion

The phases of political and military conflict between the Islamic states and the Christian kingdom should not obscure the deep interconnectedness of the states themselves and of their populations. Indeed, recent research has illuminated the chronological and spatial parallelism in the development of the region's Christian and Islamic polities. From the tenth to the twelfth century eastern Təgray appears to be a critical region, where Ethiopian Islamic settlements first took root and where Christian communities retrenched and revitalized, perhaps in part in response to this new presence, even if the details of this process remain obscure.¹⁰² In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, both Christian and Islamic settlements extended southward and developed into notable polities: that of the Zag^we kingdom and that of Islamic Šawah. At the end of the thirteenth century, the overthrow of the Zag^we and the new dynasty's centering of the Christian kingdom in Amhara occurred just before the founding of the Walasma' sultanate of Awfāt, which we can now confidently locate adjacent to the Christian kingdom. This contiguity, and the likely role of the new Christian ruler in facilitating the Walasma' family's installation in Ifāt, facilitated the tributary relationship accepted by the Walasma' thereafter. From the fourteenth century forward we might note the presence of vibrant Muslim communities within the Christian kingdom, as well as the presence, in the major trade cities of Ifāt, of Christian officials collecting taxes on the passing caravans: these point to an economic symbiosis (but one undergirded by political will) between these two spheres, in which the long-distance trade routes and major trading entrepôts were nevertheless markedly Islamic. It was also often Muslims who guided the embassies sent by the Christian kings, especially because of their knowledge of the Arabic language and the need to go through Egypt. Finally, future research would fill out clues to other aspects of similarity and symbiosis between the Christian and Islamic societies of medieval Ethiopia-Eritrea.¹⁰³ And, the ongoing historical and epigraphic and archaeological researches will allow in the future to take another look at the history of the Islamic communities which succeed each other through the Middle Ages in Ethiopia, notably in their material circumstances of its urban centers, the multiple mosques and street layout and irrigation.

¹⁰² See the essay by Marie-Laure Derat in this volume.

¹⁰³ For example shared farming practices, shared languages-- al-'Umarī (ibid., 7) specified that the Muslims of Ethiopia spoke "Arabic and Abyssinian" -- and perhaps also common forms of power organization.