Saho Islamic poetry and other literary genres in Ajami script

Axmadsacad M. Cumar
*University of Gloucestershire*

Giorgio Banti
*University of Naples “L’Orientale”*

Moreno Vergari
*Ethnorêma*

Manuscripts &c. in the Horn of Africa
*Asien-Afrika-Institut, Hamburg*

17-19 July 2014
Saho is an East Cushitic language spoken in Eritrea (south-east of Asmara and Massawa down to the Afar depression), and in northern Ethiopia. Its most closely related language is Afar.

Source: Encyclopaedia Aethiopica, vol. IV: 469b
The Saho in Eritrea and Ethiopia

ca. 191,000 in Eritrea
ca. 33,000 in Ethiopia

(Éthnologue, 2014)
Religions of the Eritrean Saho

- Orthodox Christians: 5%
- Moslems: 95%

Legend:
- Blue: Orthodox Christians
- Red: Moslems
Religions of the Ethiopian Saho

- Orthodox: 56%
- Catholics: 41%
- Moslems: 3%
The official Saho orthographies in Eritrea and Ethiopia

An Eritrean Saho school book in Latin orthography

An Ethiopian Saho school book in “Geez” orthography
The Muslim history in the Horn of Africa and Eritrea

Early 7th century: first arrivals of followers of Mohammed at the Axum court.

Early 8th century: Moslems under the Umayyad Caliphate occupied the Dahlak Islands.

12th and 13th century: the Dahlak Islands became the seat of an independent sultanate.

1557: Ottoman occupation of Massawa.

Beginning of the 19th cent.: renewed missionary activity by new Sufi orders, e.g., the Khatmiyya Mirghaniyya founded by Muḥammad cUthmān al-Mīrghanī.

The *Mawlidu ’I-Nabī – al-Asrār al-rabbāniyya*
by Muḥammad ʿUthmān al-Mīrghanī al-Khātim (1793-1852)
Founder of the Khatmiyya Mirghaniyya Sufi order

Used on the Qohayto Plateau during the *mawlid* and other religious ceremonies.
Known Ajami writing traditions in the Horn

**LANGUAGES:**

- Harari (Ethiosemitic);
- Amharic (Ethiosemitic);
- Argobba (Ethiosemitic);
- Tigrinya (Ethiosemitic);
- Gurage (Ethiosemitic).

- Somali (East Cushitic);
- Oromo (East Cushitic);
- Afar (East Cushitic);
- Saho (East Cushitic);
- Alaaba (East Cushitic);
- Beja (East Cushitic).
When did Ajami Saho begin?

The oldest known mss. with Ajami texts in a language from the HoA and certain dates are in Harari, from the first years of the 18th century, but some Harari Ajami texts are likely to be at least from the 16th or 17th century.

It is not known when the Ajami Saho writing tradition began, because all the identified witnesses are not earlier than the last century.
Sources for Ajami Soho (I)

i.) Writings in Arabic with Soho names and words:


- Muḥammad ẓUṭmān Abū Bakr (b. 1945):

- various authors:
Sources for Ajami Saho (II)

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

- e.g., *shekh* Soliiman Ismaaciil Maxammad in Irhaafalo (south-central Saho speaking area; met by these authors in 2010).

iii.) Songs by modern Saho singers written in Ajami, (whereas other contemporary Saho singer write their texts in *fidel* or Latin script):

- e.g., Cumar Hadbar (born in a southern Saho speaking area; data collected in London in 2014).
The clan names *Gacaso* and *Dhasamo* from p. 2 of an unpublished typewritten ms. by Ibrāhīm al-Muḥtār (probably an early version of his *al-Fatāwā al-Minifirāwiyya*). The colophon on p. 5 states that it was finished in 1930 in the town of Addi Keih.
The same clan names *Dhasamo* and *Gacaso* from a list of Saho Minifire clans published in Muḥammad ʿUṭmān’s *Taʾrīḥ Iritriyā* (1994).
The same Minifire clan names *Gacaso* and *Dhasamo* from a list of Saho clans and subclans recently published on www.allsaho.com.

(Notice that word-initial *dh* is represented as *dāl* with *tanwīn fatha*, rather than as plain *rāʾ* or *dāl*).
Sheekh Soliiman Ismaacil Maxammad

Interview: Irhaafalo (Eritrea), 27-28 January 2010

Original recording on cassette: 1979
Transcription

Allāhumma ṣallâ ʿalâ Muḥammadin
Addada mā kāna wa-mā yakūnu.

Translation

‘Oh God, may you bless Mohammed!
He told everything that has been and that will be’.
First stanza

Saho ajami + Arabic refrain

Transcription

Yi Rabbi yol raxmat Ku raxma waasica Sugto lem sorhah inni nabseh weeca / Yi tacizzibe ged Kok xino marhiica ✡ [Ar.] įAddada mā kāna wa-mā yakūnu
First stanza

Transcription and translation

Yi Rabbi yol raxmat, Ku raxma waasica
‘My Lord, be merciful with me, Your mercy is huge’

Sugto lem sorhah, inni nabseh weeca
‘I don’t know what awaits me, and I cry for myself’

Yi tacizzibe ged, Kok xino marhiica
‘If You punish me, I can’t rebel against You’.
Second stanza

Saho ajami

Transcription

※ Yi nabsi yiqhfile yimlike zunuube  Ishe mayaarhige mara yacizzibe  /  Yekkeleh mayane kafan yinqirribe  ※
Second stanza

Transcription and translation

Yi nabsi yiqhfile, yimlike zunuube
‘My soul was heedless, sin prevailed’

Ishe mayaarhige, mara yacizzibe
‘It ignores itself, it harms other people’

Yekkeleh mayane, kafan yinqirribe
‘It hasn’t realized that the grave is ready’.
Cumri nok bakiteh mango xazan lino  Qafla ni raddeh mango / zunuub lino  Rabbi raxiim kinnih Kayyad raja lino ✹
Third stanza

Transcription and translation

*Cumri nok bakiteh, mango xazan lino*
‘Since our live has come to end, we have a great sorrow’

*Qafla ni raddeh, mango zuuuub lino*
‘Since heedlessness has fallen upon us, we have many sins’

*Rabbi raxiim kinnih, Kayyad raja lino*
‘Since the Lord is merciful, in Him we have hope’.
Fourth stanza

Saho Ajami

Ni sacul tillayte naba dhin dhineeni  Akah saana nane
tenko  /  mablo wayne  Akah yaniinikka wala ware
wayne ★
Fourth stanza

Transcription and translation

*Ni sacul tillayte, naba dhin dhineeni*
‘Our siblings have passed away, they have slept a great sleep’

*Akah saana nane, tenko mablo wayne*
‘We miss them, because we could not see them’

*Akah yaniinikkah, wala ware wayne*
‘We don’t even know, how they are doing’.
Cumar Axmad Cabdalla
“Hadbar”

Interview: London, April 2014
Text of the song Yi mara ‘My people’, from his new album A & S
‘Grown up in Xadish and Irhaafalo
I drank (water) in Argen and Fathar
I count stars during the (whole) night
It is my people who make me sleepless’
Second stanza

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

‘We are not people with no cultural heritage
Our culture has lost those who look after it
Even though we have skilled people.
We should distinguish between day and night’.
Third stanza

Ni ardi daada kee Samhara
Sinbaarho baddi kamfara
Labhattiino sin azara
Anu farham sin samara

‘Our land is Highland and Samhar
Your country is the sea shore
Bravery is your heredity
What I want is your harmony’.
Conclusion (I)

• The known Saho Ajami texts are by authors from the south-central and southern Saho speaking areas, and also shekh Ibrāhīm al-Muḥtār, author of the 1930 ms., was from one of those two areas. The major phonemic differences between their C inventories and written Arabic is the occurrence of $g$ and retroflex $dh$ [$d$] (that is realized as a retroflex flap, $rh$ [ɾ] in some environments).

• These sounds are represented, respectively, as:

  i.) $qāf$ in all contexts, and

  ii.) word initially as $rā$’ by some authors (or as $dāl$ by others), and word internally always as $rā$. $Dāl$ with $tanwīn fatḥa$ in the website is probably an individual innovation.

• No evidence of how ejective [$s’$] is represented, nor of northern Saho sounds such as [$č$] and [$č’$].
Conclusion (II)

• The documents are both vocalized (*shekh* Soliiman’s one) and not (*Cumar Hadbar’s*).
• Word divisions are quite inconsistent even in the same author, e.g., Cumar Hadbar writes the conjunction *kee* ‘and’ certainly as a suffix twice and once as a separate word. And *shekh* Soliiman spells *lino* ‘we have’ in several different ways, both as a suffix and as a separate words.
• On the other hand, prefixed disyllabic possessives such as *sin* ‘your (pl.)’ and *inni* ‘ones own’ are always spelt as separate words, whereas monosyllabic possessives and object pronouns such as *yi* ‘my, me’, *ku* ‘your (sg.), you (sg.)’ and *ni* ‘our, us’ are generally spelt as prefixes.
Conclusion (II)

- There is some variation in the spelling of long and short vowels:
  
i.) long vowels are generally spelt *plene*;

ii.) short vowels are also sometimes written *plene*,
    but inconsistently; e.g., *lino* ‘we have’ is spelt by
    *shekh* Soliiman in the 3rd stanza twice as لنو and
    once as لينو, disregarding vowel diacritics;

iii.) final vowels are always spelt *plene* by Cumar
     Hadbar (-*i* and -*e* always as *yā’*); instead *shekh*
     Soliiman, who uses vowel diacritics, generally
     writes them *plene* only at the end of a half verse,
     but not elsewhere (-*i* and -*e* are represented both
     by *yā’* or *hā’* when written *plene*).
Thank you!

Gaab yoh ishoo!

قاب يه إشو