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Amélie Chekroun, Vanessa Pedrotti

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Special issue/*Numéro spécial*

New insights into the history of Harar

*Nouveaux éclairages sur l'histoire
de Harar*

Introduction to the special issue

This special issue of the *Annales d'Éthiopie* is the proceedings of a workshop scheduled for April 2020 at the Institute for Ethiopian Studies of Addis Ababa University. This workshop was unfortunately postponed due to the global pandemic. Currently, there is a great deal of academic research in and around the city of Harar, and this increased interest motivated the idea of the original workshop. Over the last ten years, there has been a profound renewal of research on Harar from philological, archaeological, historical, and anthropological points of view. Over the past five years, no less than six Ethiopian and international researchers in diverse fields have devoted their PhD thesis to a part of the city's history and all studies bring new and innovative elements to our understanding of the history of Harar. In addition to these recent academic works, there are also studies by more established researchers who are just as innovative and who challenge the fixed narrative of the 20th century, explored below. The proposed participants in the April 2020 postponed workshop, in alphabetic order, were Dr. Muna Abubaker, Dr. Nureddin Aman, Mr. Nebil Bekri, Dr. Amélie Chekroun, Pr. Alessandro Gori, Dr. Ahmed Hassan Omer, Pr. Timothy Insoll, Mrs. Héloïse Mercier, Dr. Sana Mirza, Dr. Vanessa Pedrotti, Dr. Thomas Osmond, Dr. Lindsay Randall, Mr. Ahmed Zakaria.¹ Several of them were unfortunately unable to participate in this publication.

In the 20th century, a substantial amount of academic literature was published on the history of the city. This is evidenced by Ewald Wagner's 2003 publication, *Harar: annotierte Bibliographie zum Schrifttum über die Stadt und den Islam in Südostäthiopien*, which presents an exhaustive annotated bibliography on Harar inclusive of all disciplines. However, although it has been the subject of numerous writings, including some historiographical "pet subjects" (such as the figure of the poet Arthur Rimbaud amongst the French community in Ethiopia), the history of the city seems to have been fixed upon an unavoidable official narrative. This narrative was constructed by both

* Institut de recherches et d'études sur les mondes arabes et musulmans, Aix-en-Provence. Contact: amelie.chekroun@cnrs.fr. ** Institut des mondes africains, Aix-en-Provence. Contact: vanessa.pedrotti@hotmail.fr.

¹ Even if the workshop has been postponed, we would like to warmly thank all those researchers for their enthusiasm in this project, as well as Dr. Takele Merid, head of the Institute for Ethiopian Studies, for having accepted to host it in his institution, and Dr. Ahmed Hassan Omer, former head of the IES, and Dr. Marie Bridonneau, director of the French Center for Ethiopian Studies, for their support.

Western orientalist and by Harari scholars as well as by local and international political authorities (such as the Harari People's National Regional State and UNESCO) throughout the 20th century. From the Western perspective, the first and foremost contribution was from Enrico Cerulli who in the 1930s identified and studied the first, and until very recently, only historical texts about Harar in Arabic. The contributions, backgrounds, and positions of the Harari scholars who also augmented these works are only just beginning to be studied. This prevailing history focuses mainly upon a few dates, a few cultural features, and a few texts composed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (such as the *Faṭḥ madīnat Harar*). The dates upon which it focuses are as follows: the mid-16th century construction of the walls surrounding Harar, the 1647 foundation of the Emirat of Harar by 'Alī b. Dā'ūd, the 1875-1885 Egyptian occupation of the city, and finally the pre-1887 brief restoration of the Emirate after the Egyptian departure and before the conquest of the city and its integration into Ethiopia by Menelik's troops. Nevertheless, the history of Harar is essentially based on oral tradition for the period occurring before the 19th century, and nothing is really known about the social, political, economic organization of the city and the area from the 16th century to the middle of the 20th century due to a lack of documentation. Moreover, these narratives date the foundation of the city sometimes to the 16th but also often to the 13th or even the 10th centuries. Another characteristic feature of this historical discourse is a classification that often opposes the "civilized" population of Harar, known as Harari or Adari, to the "barbaric" population living outside the city walls, the Oromo, pejoratively referred to as "Galla." Moreover, Harar is considered, likely with just cause, to be the heart of Islam in the Horn of Africa due to its importance for Qur'anic training, production of religious manuscripts, and its number of holy places. Still, there have not been any considerable studies on the ancient periods to substantiate this claim of Harar's Islamic centrality.

The Harari culture is very evident in the city, especially in terms of architecture and craftsmanship when compared to the Oromo or Somali cultures. Indeed, since 1991 and the institutional recognition of Ethiopian "nationalities," Harari culture has received special attention to highlight its particularity. The importance of past conservation in the city is illustrated by the registration of the old city on the World Heritage Sites' list by UNESCO in 2006. In 2010, the geographer Dr. Pauline Bosredon completed a PhD thesis about the world heritage listing of the old towns of Harar and of Alep in Syria, entitled *Habiter et aménager les centres anciens: les reconfigurations du rapport des acteurs à la vieille ville par le classement au patrimoine mondial, une comparaison entre Harar en Ethiopie et Alep en Syrie* (Bosredon, 2010; see also 2008). For the proposed 2020 workshop, the Heritage Directorate Director of Harar, Nebil Bekri, was to give a presentation titled "An Assessment of Conservation and Management practice of World Heritage Site. Harar City." Additionally, in

her PhD thesis in anthropology, *Tolerance in the City of Peace: History and Belonging in Harar (Gêy), Ethiopia*, defended at the University of Edinburgh in 2022, Dr. Lindsay Randall breaks away from the anthropological themes traditionally studied by anthropologists who resided in Harar before her. She questions the 2006 UNESCO Peace Prize and the 2003 UNESCO moniker of “The City of Peace” and “examines how notions of history and heritage emerge and are contested within Harari discourses of identity and belonging and how these understandings blend with the physical city of Harar to underpin Harari religiosity and kinship” (Randall, 2022).

The time is no longer ripe for idealizing the past or for fixing heritage discourses. As this dossier shows, access to new sources has not only led to the emergence of new issues but has also made it possible to rethink existing sources. Most significantly, the analysis of new Arabic manuscripts and archives from the 19th-20th century has generated this renewal of the documentary corpus.

1. New insights into the Arabic manuscripts

Knowledge about the tradition of Islamic manuscripts in the Horn of Ethiopia, and in Harar in particular, is scarce. Harar, as a major center of Islamic learning in the Horn of Africa, holds a central place in the production of Arabic manuscripts in the region (see for example Banti, 2005; Osmond, 2012). In recent years, studies and approaches to these manuscripts have multiplied, and this has allowed for an in-depth renewal of the documentary corpus. The philological renewal of Islamic manuscript studies is mainly marked by the project “Islam in the Horn of Africa: A Comparative Literary Approach,” which was led by Pr. Alessandro Gori (European Research Council, Advanced Grant n° 322849 for the period 2013-2018, <http://www.islhornafr.eu>). As a specialist of Islamic literary traditions in the Horn of Africa, Pr. Alessandro Gori, along with his team, made the first extensive cataloguing of Ethiopian Islamic manuscripts – mostly from Harar. The catalogue of the Arabic manuscripts, which is housed in the Institute of Ethiopian Studies, lists more than 300 codex (Gori, 2014). In 2015, the publication of a catalogue of about 500 Arabic manuscripts of the Abdullahi Sharif Museum in Harar was announced (see <https://cfee.hypotheses.org/677>). The masterpiece of the Islhornafr project is the XML-encoded relational database (<https://islhornafr.tors.ku.dk/>), which contains not only some of the manuscripts of these two Ethiopian institutions, but also those of many others in Ethiopia, in Europe and the USA. As Pr. Gori notes, “the research into this newly available material will certainly increase our knowledge of Islam in Ethiopia in general, and of the manuscript

tradition in particular”² (Gori, 2016: 157). Four of the articles published in this special issue confirm Gori’s assertion. Their authors have dedicated or are dedicating their PhD theses to the history of Harar through the study of Arabic manuscripts. Their work opens new fields of research and new perspectives on how to study the history of the city. They also show the contemporary dynamism around these questions.

Dr. Sana Mirza defended her PhD thesis, which specializes in Islamic art, in 2021 from the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University. Her dissertation, titled *An African Scriptorium? The Qur’an of Harar and their Globalizing Milieu*, explores a corpus of Qur’an manuscripts produced between the 17th and 19th centuries in the city of Harar and their Red Sea and Indian Ocean milieu. Her contribution in the present volume provides access to a number of her PhD results, such as the aesthetic connections and exchanges in the Red Sea and their role in the formation of a regional Red Sea style of manuscripts. Her work marks a turning point in the study of Arabic manuscripts from the Horn of Africa. Art history and codicological analysis of Harari Islamic manuscripts in a wider regional context, which were previously almost non-existent, emerge within Dr. Sana Mirza’s article in all their richness and potential. We hope that her dissertation will soon be fully published and accessible.

In her analysis of the divorce cases in the Harari qadis registers between 1827 and 1871 A.D., Dr. Muna Abubeker also emphasizes how this precious material increases our knowledge, not only on religious issues or manuscript traditions, but also on societal aspects that until now could not be discussed. The 19th century qadis registers are incredibly precious. They provide information about divorces, but also marriages, inheritances, land transactions, and all legal cases presented to the qadi who was in charge of law enforcement in Harar when the city was under the Emir’s control (see Dr. Muna’s philological PhD dissertation *Text Edition and Translation of a 19th century Court (Diwan) Manuscript of Harar*, completed in 2017 at Addis Ababa University). These registers make it possible to address questions of legal history, organization of society and family, questions of succession, authority, etc. For the first time, by studying the different types of divorces that appear in these registers, Dr. Muna’s article also addresses the place of women in the 19th century’s Harari society.

By identifying new manuscript copies of historical Arabic texts in European libraries (Paris, Rome, Berlin) and at the Institute of Ethiopian Studies library at Addis Ababa University, Héloïse Mercier succeeded in surpassing the work of Enrico Cerulli, which had dominated the study of historical texts about Harar for nearly a century. In a series of articles published in the 1930s, the

² In the framework of the ERC project, Dr. Anne Regourd published the first papyrological remarks on Harari and Islamic Ethiopian Manuscripts (Regourd, 2018a & 2018b).

Italian scholar edited, translated, and analyzed several short texts in Arabic that dealt with the history of Harar (Cerulli, 1931, 1936 & 1942). In her contribution, which is based on her MA thesis defended in 2020 at Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne University, Héroïse Mercier analyzes the *Ta'riḫ al-mulūk* and its rewritings. She attempts to understand the reasons behind the transfer of power from Harar to the Awsa Oasis at the end of the 16th century. The identification of those late 16th century texts complicates Cerulli's discourse.

Amongst the Arabic manuscripts being rediscovered and that allow us to see the history of the city in a new light, we must mention the historical texts written in the 20th century by Ethiopian scholars, which hold an important place in the way we view the history of the city today. In the framework of her PhD thesis about the writing and rewriting of Harar's history in the 19th and 20th century, Héroïse Mercier received a field grant from the CFEF in 2021 and studied some Arabic Manuscripts at the Institute for Ethiopian Studies library. Her fieldnote in this volume presents her first remarks on the mid-20th century *Jadwal ash-Shāsh wa ash-Shāmī*, which is an annotated list of the rulers of Harar since the Middle Ages. She expands upon its position in the historiography of Harar by demonstrating that, whereas previous lists only began in the 17th century, the *Jadwal* enforced a "metanarrative" that gave the city a linear, exhaustive, and over-ten-centuries-long past.

We must also mention the PhD thesis, *Manuscripts of Oromo History recounted by Shaykh Abū-Baker 'Othmān: Text edition, analysis and Annotated translation* by Dr. Nuraddin Aman, which was defended in 2020 at Addis Ababa University, Department of Linguistics and Philology. He edited and translated two historiographical texts written in Arabic in the middle of the 20th century by Shaykh Abū Baker 'Othmān, the Oromo Muslim intellectual from Hararghe. His work is based on many historical documents and traditions and demonstrates the historiographical position of a 20th century Oromo author on the history of Harar and its region.

The identification and/or study of new Arabic manuscripts from Harar, regardless of their origin of production, also leads to rethinking and reconsidering existing sources or data. The history of the city is most often linked to a very distant past. For example, in its website on world heritage sites, UNESCO notes that "the walls surrounding this sacred Muslim city were built between the 13th and 16th centuries. Harar Jugol, said to be the fourth holiest city of Islam, numbers 82 mosques, three of which date from the 10th century, and 102 shrines" (<https://whc.unesco.org/fr/list/1189/>). The Millennium of the Harar, which was celebrated in July 2007, is another example (Bridonneau, Duroyaume & Bosredon, 2012: 167). In her article, Dr. Amélie Chekroun analyses the few mentions of Harar in the documentation of the 16th century. She shows that, building from the archaeological data and interpretation proposed by Pr. Timothy Insoll in 2017, Harar did not become an urban,

economic, and religious center before the early 16th century when the city became the new capital of the Barr Sa'd ad-Dīn sultanate. Some of this data has already been analyzed in her 2013 PhD thesis about the Barr Sa'd ad-Dīn and the war waged by the armies of this sultanate, which were led by Imām Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm against the Christian kingdom in the years 1530-1540. In general, the study of manuscripts and sources, as well as the archaeological data obtained during several surveys in the old city by Pr. Insoll, go against the oral tradition and the discourses repeated in many academic publications of the 20th century that avow Harar's very ancient past and its centrality as the main religious and political center of the eastern Horn of Africa. Future research should bring profound change to our understanding of the history of the walled city of Harar before it was integrated into Ethiopia at the end of the 19th century.

2. New insights into the 19th and 20th centuries archives of Harar

One of the current dynamics in research on Harar also concerns the history of the city since its integration into Ethiopia after its Egyptian occupation from 1875 to 1885 and its conquest by Menelik in 1887. Over the past fifteen years, researchers have also been rediscovering the numerous and rich archives produced about Harar by foreign institutions at the end of the 19th and the 20th centuries. In addition, we hope that the future opening of the Ethiopian imperial archives of the Gebi in Addis Ababa will bring much more to add to our understanding of the history of the region.

The study of Harari society from the end of the 19th century to the present day is a field that is still little explored, but the current historical and anthropological research shows its potential. This is evidenced by Dr. Avishai Ben Dror's book, *Emirate, Egyptian, Ethiopian: colonial experiences in late nineteenth-century Harar* (2018), which highlights the little-known period of the Egyptian occupation of Harar (1875-1885). In his book, which was developed from his PhD thesis, he paves the way for new approaches to Harari history by highlighting the importance of colonial and missionary archives (Egyptian, French, English, Italian) and the importance of bringing them into dialogue. Dr. Ahmed Hassan Omer contributes similarly in his own book, *Aleyyu Amba: l'Ifat et ses réseaux politiques, religieux et commerciaux au XIX^e siècle* (2020), which was based on his 2007 PhD thesis from the University Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne. His research focuses on Ifat and the trade city of Aleyyu Amba. However, thanks to its economic and strategic importance in regional and international trade, Harar has a prominent place in his work. The numerous sources and archives he used show the value and potential of these archives, which are still little studied.

The fact that the history of Harar at the turn of the 20th century is still largely unwritten and the utility of little-explored archives (colonial, diplomatic,

missionary, etc.) is also demonstrated by Dr. Pedrotti in her contribution to this special issue. She describes, through examination of the French archives, the circumstances surrounding the establishment of the Ras Māk^wännən Hospital and the St. Anthony Leprosarium in the first years of 20th century. More broadly, her 2022 PhD thesis from Aix-Marseille University, *La léproserie St-Antoine à Harar : au croisement de l'histoire missionnaire, médicale et politique de l'Éthiopie (1901-1936)*, shows that the leprosarium, founded by the French Capuchins in 1901, is not simply an isolated and autonomous proselytized institution. On the contrary, it developed in relation to several other social, medical, and political formations within and outside Ethiopia. In addition to serving the interests of its personnel, it appears to have been both a tool for French influence in Ethiopia as well as for the Ethiopian state's policy of 'modernity'. To reveal this, Dr. Vanessa Pedrotti compares French missionary and diplomatic sources. Besides, she analyses more than fifty accounts by European travelers. This work is based on the literary production, both medical and pastoral, published in newspapers between the years 1850 and 1936.

Overall, the archives of the French Capuchin mission based in Harar from 1881 to the end of the 20th century are today divided in two main locations. The first one remains in Harar at the head office of the diocese of Harar behind the Great Mosque, which is in the heart of the walled city. Pr. Shiferaw Bekele and Dr. Abba Daniel Assefa, with the support of the French Center for Ethiopian Studies, carried out an evaluation mission of the collection in December 2020. As the fieldnote written by Pr. Shiferaw (<https://cfec.hypotheses.org/>) shows, this collection is well preserved and organized, but largely unexplored. Most of the documents are in French, but they cover a multitude of subjects concerning the history of the city over nearly a century. As an example, he documents that in Folder 3c 1-12, there are annual reports of each mission station from 1899 to 1935 and that Series F are day-to-day notebooks of each station. Those archives are very precious, and provide not only information about the mission, but also about life and organization of the villages around Harar from the late 19th to the early 20th century. Most of the rest³ of the French Capuchin mission's archives are now in Rome at the library of the Collegio Internazionale San Lorenzo Da Brindisi (cf. Chekroun, 2011), under the number 2R "Vicariato Apostolico dei Galla." They were transferred to Rome in 1977 in a common move to gather all the archives produced within the Capuchin missions over the world in one place so that their preservation and accessibility could be ensured. Before arriving in Rome, they were kept in the OFM Cap Provincial

³ Some archives could be found at the Bibliothèque franciscaine des Capucins, in Paris (France), numbers 2P, 1R-2R and G13.

Archives in Toulouse.⁴ These archives are quite precious. For example, in 2R11-2R16 are the personal diaries of Mgr. Taurin Cahagne, which he wrote between 1866 and 1891; in 2R121/2c, the correspondence of Mgr. Cahagne with Ras Makonnen between 1888 and 1892 and in 2R 121/2d with Menelik between 1891 and 1895; Mgr. Jarosseau's very abundant correspondence with the missionaries between 1900 and 1941 (2R140-2R179) and with Ras Tafari between 1910 and 1936 (2R190-2R201); etc. Researchers working on the history of Harar and its region should give special attention to these archives, mainly in French.

Historians and philologists are not the only ones to deal with literary corpus. Thomas Osmond, in his contribution, "Mawlūd Tradition, Reformist Dynamics and State Policies in East Ethiopia," takes an anthropological look at the Mawlūd/Mawlid manuscripts, which organize the celebrations of the Prophet Muḥammad in Harar by the Harari and also amongst Harar's Oromo neighbours. He reveals the heterogeneous nature of these ceremonial practices by showing that they draw on several theological and political legacies. The survey he conducted in the 2010s in Harar and the surrounding Oromiya Eastern Hararghe Zone allowed him to observe the uses of these texts in local and national identity debates. This led him to question the current Harari/Oromo cleavage often depicted within the Federation of Ethiopian "nationalities." His article echoes one he wrote in 2014 where he challenges the regional history of Harar that pitted the "civilized" Harari city dwellers against the "barbaric" Oromo peasants. Rather than just highlighting oppositions, it demonstrates, through a diachronic study of Harar's political history, more complex relationships of competition and cooperation between the Harari elites and the Oromo peasants of eastern Hararghe (Osmond, 2014).

The history of Harar is now a potent academic topic. By highlighting the discoveries, sources, and analyses of nearly fifteen researchers working on Harar using different disciplines (history, archaeology, philology, anthropology, geography, etc.), this issue provides an overview of the history of the city and its inhabitants. But it also opens up new perspectives. There are significant research opportunities for scholars interested in the history of Harar. In addition to the collection of the Arabic manuscripts, the French Capuchin mission's archives, or the European administrative archives, many other materials deserve to be explored, such as the Ethiopians archives that are kept at the Gebi in Addis Ababa. Moreover, like the written sources, the oral sources, which are just as rich, allow us to consider the history of the city from innovative angles, such as health, politics, urbanism, or religion. Henceforth,

⁴ The same is also true about the archives of the Somalia and Aden mission, which were also brought to Rome in 1977 and are now kept there under the number 1R "Sezione Somalia e Aden, già nell'Archivio OFMCap. Di Toulouse, a dal 1977 nell'Archivio Generale OFM Cap. di Roma."

it is no longer a question of thinking of Harar as an immutable hegemonic center, but rather of bringing to light the multiple imbrications that occur there and that are anchored in logics which are not only local but also national and transnational. The advances that future research will provide from this documentation will not only allow us to consider the history of Harar in a new light but will also contribute more generally to the history of regional Islam as well as to the place of this region within the Horn of Africa and the dynamics of the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea. This special issue brings local history into a broader historiographic context alongside other research on the Horn of Africa that is increasingly focusing upon historical connections and exchanges and ends the consideration of this region as a place dislocated from and inactive with the rest of the world.

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