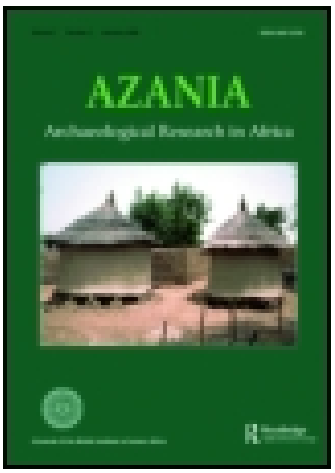
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The Process of Becoming: Gabra Oromo Transition Rites (Jilla)

Aneesa Kassam

The Gabra are a division of the Oromo[1] living on both sides of the Kenya-Ethiopia border. According to the 1979 census, there are some thirty-thousand Gabra in Kenya. They are composed of five phratries — the Gaara, Algana, Sharbana, Galbo and Odola. In their own traditions[2] Oromo conceive themselves as consisting of the Booran, who stand for the first-born sons of Horo, the mythical ancestor of the Oromo people, and of the Gabra (or Gabaro), who represent his younger sons. This conceptual division is particularly evident in the rituals they perform.

In September 1986, the Gabra celebrated one of the most important ritual ceremonies in Oromo culture: the rites of passage *(jilla)* from political elderhood to religious elderhood. These rites have never been fully witnessed by an outsider, and the author, who has been working amongst the Gabra since 1980, was therefore most fortunate to be able to partially attend them. Her description of the culmination rites which took place at the foot of Mount Foroole on the Kenya-Ethiopia border (pl. I) capture however only one moment in a diachronic process, history in its making so to speak. But it should be noted that the event would later mark a period of time and would form one link in the temporal chain connecting the past, the present and the future in the oral traditions and time-computation systems of the Oromo.[3] Moreover, the event should not be seen as an isolated element, but comparatively, as one feature of a whole dramatic action enacted at approximately the same time by other peoples between the Kenyan and Ethiopian highlands, the complement to which was performed by the Booran Oromo of Marsabit in July 1987.

It should also be noted that the events recounted here could have been described in a number of different ways. The author has chosen to reconstruct them in a more or less chronological fashion, very often as they unfolded before her own eyes.

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1. Commonly called Galla in the older ethnographic and historical literature.
   In this article Gabra and Booran Oromo terms are generally transcribed according to the system of notation devised by Gragg (1982). However, for typographical convenience, ñ and š are written *ny* and *sh* respectively. Moreover, since Gragg's dictionary is based on Western Oromo, whose pronunciation differs from the Gabra-Booran dialect in several respects, the notation has been modified where appropriate.
2. Recorded by Mr Gemetchu Megerssa, an Oromo from western Ethiopia, with whom the author has been collaborating closely since 1985. Many of the insights in the present study have been provided by him.
3. In the absence of an 'emic' account of this system of recording, see Tablino, 1980, for how previous *jilla* forge some of these links; and Robinson, 1985, for the cyclical nature of events in Oromo historiography.

Tablino (1986), on the other hand, regroups the different episodes by opposing those centred around the active warrior grades to those depicting the celebrations performed for the ritual elder grades, but showing at the same time how the whole community participated in the rites. This is logically very Oromo, and an important factor to remember. For while highly significant changes were taking place in two segments of the society, everyday life continued. A child was born and his birth was rejoiced; a dead father was remembered; a young man proved his right to marry and to father a son by celebrating his kill; marriage negotiations were begun; house parts renewed; and stock rites performed since, being a *soorio* month for sacrifice, it was an auspicious time for all these ceremonies as well as those of the *Jilla.* Another, and perhaps the best way, according to Megerssa, would have been to link the different rites by the *ardaa jillaa* or 'ritual grounds' thereby showing how the very character of these sites determined and structured the events. The author did not, however, have the necessary data to do this. She is also aware that behind the events witnessed there is another dimension, to which as a non-Oromo she remains culturally blind. She realises that conceptually the Gabra were playing their role in the Oromo scheme, and that to give a full and accurate picture, it would have been necessary to compare the events portrayed to those performed by the Booran. This account therefore provides only her personal observation of this great feast without burdening it with undue scholarly comment and interpretation.

The very apt expression 'the process of becoming' for the acquisition of new status in the Gabra generation-set structure was first used by Fr P. Tablino (1985, p. 3). He wrote 'in philosophical terms, one would say there is more becoming than being.'

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In the propitious month of *yakaa* (September-October) of their Friday *(gumaata)* year (1986), the five Gabra Oromo phratries performed one of the most important rites *(Jilla)* in the age of a man: the transition ceremony from political elderhood to religious elderhood *(d'abbeelaa).* The rite, in some respects, is the equivalent of the Booran *gadamoojii* ceremony (cf. Legesse, 1973; Baxter, 1978). The word *jilla* is generally used to designate any ceremonial event like birth, naming of a child, marriage, etc. The term has the connotation of 'being inhibited from doing something; being conditioned not to do something again'. (See Gragg's dictionary, though it is not entirely unambiguous on this definition.) As Megerssa explains it, a *jilla* is a 'stage in life through which one will never again pass'. This idea of an initiation or *rite de passage* is clearly brought out by the actual events when the participants leave camp and are not allowed 'to look back', or when they traverse a narrow column marking territorial passage from one stage of life to another. Tablino (1986, p. 1) uses the expression *jilla galaanaa* (sic), 'the ceremony of going home', giving the idea of pilgrimage. Torry (1973, p. 363) describes it as a 'long pilgrimage which the prospective ritual and political elders make to the shrines of the mythical founders and heroes of their phratries'. The Gabra normally use the word *jilla* by itself to designate the pilgrimage. In this article, to differentiate the event from other rites of passage, the word *Jilla* is written in its capitalised form.

In the Gabra ritual scheme, the Gaara phratry takes precedence in the celebration of these rites, which are blessed by the Supreme *Qaalluu* or spiritual leader of the Boorana, the Abba *Muuda,* or 'Father of Anointment', who gives

representatives of the phratry myrrh *(qumbii)* as a token of his blessing (Torry, 1973, pp. 45-57). None of the other phratries may perform the rites until the Gaara have done so, which they do in the *kamiisa* or Thursday year in Melbana, east of Megga. The Algana go to El Gobsa, to the west of Megga, the Sharbana to Naqayo, and the Odola hold their ceremony near Torbbi in Kenya. In 1986 the Odola were at a place called D'addac Elele, a few kilometres north-west of Waldai on the Marsabit-Moyale road.[4] The culmination ceremonies of the Galbo took place beneath the eastern flank of Mount Foroole, on the Kenya-Ethiopia border (pl. I), the most sacred site of the phratry and the last stage of its trek, which had begun many months earlier.[5] The following is an account of the Galbo ceremony, based on the author's non-participant observation, field interviews and the observation of informant participants.[6]

The *Jilla* is composed of a number of events which take place over a period of several months some time after the completion of the *koollomtte* ceremony, which is outlined below. The *Jilla* rituals themselves consist of ten or more stages which are described later in this article.

The author was present at the latter stage (at Mount Foroole). Her data for the preceding events was given to her in 1982 by a young Galbo field assistant, Godana Mamo Elema, who attended part of the last *Jilla,* held in 1972. Fathers Tablino and Venturino witnessed the *koollomtte* ceremony (Tablino, 1985).

Before elaborating on these, it is necessary to explain the framework in which they are set. This is essential for understanding the underlying themes common to all Oromo: the complementary opposites of war and peace, of political elderhood and religious elderhood, of virility and piety, etc, which are often explicitly and simultaneously expressed. The following sections therefore describe briefly the generation-set system of the Galbo, their politico-religious grades and their clan structure.

Galbo generation-set structure (luba)

According to informants, the Galbo system of six generation sets *(luba)* is a modification from a former structure of three sets akin to that of the Gaara phratry. Although the received expression 'generation-set structure' is used here to describe how all the male members of Gabra society are divided into named sets from the time of their circumcision until their retirement from the politico-religious institution known as the *luba* system, it is done with reservations. For, as G. Megerssa reminds, the Gabra *luba* system should not be seen in isolation, but in relation to the Boorana *gada* system, which is its ritual counterpart on the

4. Part of the Odola *Jilla* was witnessed in 1972 by Fr Venturino. See Tablino, 1980, pp. 56-61 for a description of the rites. Tablino's book also describes the Gabra system of time-computation, and explains how they name years according to the days of the week.

5. A brief visit was paid to the Odola *yaa'a* or assembly by Dr D. Stiles and the author in 1986, where they noted that there were *two* sacred enclosures *(nabo)* as for the Galbo, but, as Fr Venturino reported, that of the religious elders contained a house made in the traditional Gabra style. During her fieldwork in northern Kenya the author was also given a description of the Gaara *Jilla,* but it is not possible to include a comparison between the different versions of the *Jilla* here.

6. The author is very grateful to Fathers P. Tablino and B. Venturino who made it possible for her to accompany them from 14 September to 20 September 1986. Her participation was made possible by a grant from the IDRC/Ford Foundation. Some of the data used in compiling these notes was also collected with the support of the IDRC/Ford Foundation who funded her fieldwork between 1980-1982. She is also grateful to the British Institute in Eastern Africa for a grant to help with oral and transcription work. Prof G. Schlee attended most of the ceremonies and intends to publish a fuller and more comprehensive account of the whole *Jilla* including comparative data from the other phratries.

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conceptual level. The *luba* system would then appear to correspond to the Boorana *haariyaa* system of age-sets, as the names of the Gabra sets would also seem to indicate. What complicates matters, however, is the fact that the *luba* system opposes fathers and sons as in other systems based on generation, and the *luba* grades can be equated to some of the *gada* grades (although the Gabra have three grades, as opposed to Booran who have ten). Moreover, entry into the *luba* system is determined by circumcision, like the *c'in haariyaa* age-set system of the Booran. Rather than try to explain these intricate problems, the author suggests they be left to be sorted out by a new generation of Oromo anthropologists working from within their own culture to give ethnographers a view from the inside. But for the purposes of those readers not familiar with Oromo ethnography, 'the set or class is the group of people who share the same status and perform their rites of passage together' and 'the grades are the stages of development through which the groups pass' (Legesse, 1973, p. 51). The grades are hierarchically ordered, transition from one grade to the next being determined by rites of passage. Amongst the Booran Oromo these transitions take place every eight years, and there are ten grades. This span of eighty years constitutes the life cycle of a man and is divided into two halves of forty years, this period of time constituting one generation. A child therefore enters the cycle at a distance of five grades from that of his father and thus belongs to a new generation. Ideally, then, the child should be born and enter the system when his father is forty years old. As will be seen, the Gabra *(luba)* system is different, as explained in the writings of Torry (1973, 1978) and Tablino (1980, 1985, 1986). The *Jilla,* which should ideally be performed every eight years as amongst the Boorana, is very often postponed, thus delaying entry into the grades. The *Jilla* was celebrated in 1909, 1923, 1951, 1972 and 1986 for most of the Gabra phratries (the Gaara celebrating theirs one year before the others), thus at intervals of fourteen, twenty-eight and twenty-one years (Tablino, 1985). As Baxter put it (1978, p. 181): '*luuba* is a difficult word. Bahrey associates it with circumcision and Tutschek gives it as "the sexual parts of man," penis, though it is not a current colloquialism with that meaning. . . .' Legesse (1973, p. 90) observed, 'the word "to circumcise" is *lubomu.* This word is etymologically related to *luba* or "*gada* class." To circumcise is "to make *luba.*" This suggests that the formation of a *gada* class was associated with the circumcision of its members. . . At the beginning of the seventeenth century, Bahrey defined *luba* as "those who are circumcised together." It is possible that in the days of Bahrey, circumcision was the act by which the class became a corporate group. . . .' More likely, according to Megerssa, the word *luba* is derived from *lubooma,* 'killing'.

In the Galbo phratry the present structure is composed of two series of three (according to Tablino) or six *luba* or generation-sets, in which fathers and sons belong to different sets. The names of these sets, which rotate, are Waagur, Gurjaab, Afata, Waakor, Manguba, Dambala. There are three grades: *kommica,* those waiting to take political power; *yuuba,* those wielding political power, known collectively as the *nam luba* or 'circumcised men'; and *d'abbeelaa,* those exercising religious power. Beyond the system are the retired elders, *jaarsa mata buufate* or *jaarsa lootaa,* and those awaiting entry into the system, known as *ilmaan musso* or *yargaga* (see figure).

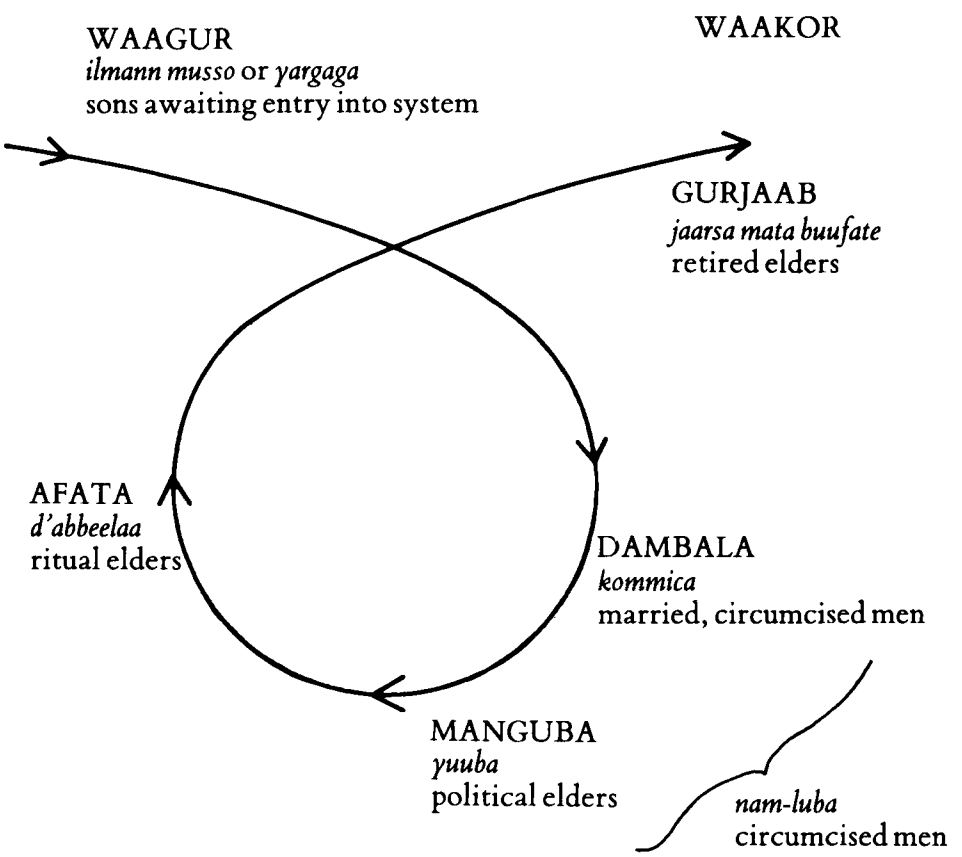
In the *soorio* or propitious months for sacrifice following the investiture of the religious elders *(d'abbeelaa),* an out-going elder officially 'puts down' his insignia of office, the stiff white turban known as *hiitu* or *duubo,* and thus completes his

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life-cycle, and becomes *jaarsa mata buufate,* literally, 'elder who has put down his head'. At this ceremony, a camel is sacrificed and a new generation-set, of those awaiting entry into the system, is constituted and officially named. The ceremony is known as *gurbo yargaga.* Until this time, the young men are not allowed to slaughter or skin an animal offered in sacrifice. The ceremony marks their entry into the ranks of those permitted to do so (Tablino, pers. comm.). This corresponds well with the definition of *luba* given by G. Megerssa above. In the Galbo system, all the circumcised sons of a man qualify for entry into the new *luba,* circumcision being the defining criteria for the formation of a *luba.* Any of his sons not circumcised at this date will enter the following *luba.*

To qualify for entry into the grades of *kommica, yuuba* and *d'abbeelaa,* a man must be married. If he is not, he becomes *gata,* literally 'one who is thrown away' and cannot go through the life-cycle with other members of his own group, but must await the formation of the following one. The grades are sanctioned by the *Jilla* rituals and a pre-initiation ceremony called *koollomtte,* described below, so that the political and religious elder grades are constituted simultaneously — in contrast to the Boorana procedure where these two events are celebrated separately.

The Gälbo generation set system *(luba)*



(This figure has been formulated with help of Dr D. Stiles. For the original version, see author's Paris thesis of 1984.)

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Politico-religious grades: functions and symbols

Although a generation-set is constituted and named at the *gurbo yargaga* ceremony, it has no official existence until its leadership structure is determined. This transition, as in the handing over of power in the *luba* sets, is not an abrupt one, but is gradual, a 'process of becoming'. Thus, although the group takes shape at the *koollomtte* ceremony, it does not coalesce until the *Jilla,* when two types of officials, the *hayyuu,* judicial elders, and their assistants, the *jaalaba,* are appointed. Each one of the grades is represented by two *hayyuu* selected from the phratry as a whole and several *jaalaba,* who are elected to represent clans. The number of *jaalaba* elected may thus vary. Their term of office is for life, but their real political power is wielded only in the *yuuba* grade, equivalent to the Booran *raaba* grade of warriors. This is evidenced by the smearing of blood on the forearm, chest and forehead of the four *hayyuu* of the *kommica* and *yuuba* grades. The *hayyuu* are judicial authorities or executors of the law *(seera)* and like their assistants, the *jaalaba,* are elected leaders, chosen on merit. Their election is often a subject of conflict, as occurred on this occasion. To qualify as a *hayyuu,* a man must be a proven leader, an articulate spokesman and, above all, free of any scar or physical deformity, except for wounds legitimately acquired in battle, for in the Oromo concept of the person, such bodily defects denote a moral flaw or blemish in character. In the past, to prove leadership, the new *hayyuu* was expected to lead an expedition and return with the triumphant spoils of war, the genitals of slain enemies or the booty of captured herds; hence they are 'killers'. The *hayyuu's* insignia of office is the *bokkuu,* often described as a sceptre, but actually a stick made from the ritual *ejerssa* wood (Olive tree, *Olea africana*), and the object of a special expedition during the course of the ceremonials (see below). Like the *qaalluu* or spiritual elder and the *jaalaba,* he also carries the *liic'o,* a whip made from a rhino's tail. All the circumcised men carry the aggressive symbol of the spear, in contrast to the *d'abbeelaa,* who carry only wooden sticks *(hororo).* They also wear *med'd'ic'c'a* skin wristlets obtained from sacrificial stock. Religious elders tie these to their ritual sticks *(mat't'* or *ullee d'abbeelaa).*

Although all men are subject to the law of *Waaqa,* the Supreme Deity of the Oromo, the *hayyuu* and *jaalaba* belong to the secular domain of phratry affairs, to the male, virile world of the clash of arms, symbolised by the *magalata,* or sacred horn, which is kept by one member of the *yuuba* grade, who is its custodian, whilst the *d'abbeelaa* and the *qaalluu* represent the spiritual order, and belong to the female realm of peace. The keeper of the sacred drum *(abba dibbee),* or 'father of the drum', is a religious elder. This elder's ritual status is signified, as we have already seen, by the *hiitu* or *duubo,* a stiff white turban which is prepared and tied on in utmost secrecy for some initiands in the sacred enclosure *(nabo),* others in the privacy of their own homes by the chief *qaalluu* or his representative, one of the minor *qaalluu.* Before this propitious day — the most important one in the life of a man, which is like a spiritual rebirth — there is a complete shedding of the old life. The initiand changes his clothes, shoes and ornaments, and even his name, shaves his hair, and learns a new code of behaviour and speech, as shown in the various ceremonies described below. But once again, the process is a gradual one. Since the *koollomtte,* pre-initiation ceremony, the *d'abbeelaa* initiands were described as being 'pregnant with office' *(gadaa rimeeti)* and would move slowly from the period of gestation to full elderhood during the course of the rituals.

Although the *qaalluu* also goes through the cycle of the *luba,* following the same pattern as his peer-group, his office is a sacred one, usually of mythical origin, one created by God, not man. He acquires his title at birth and he exercises the highest spiritual authority in the phratry and is the mediator of *finna,* prosperity and well-being in the relationship between God and man. Like the religious elders, who acquire some of this potency *(gaarumma),* his power lies in the Word: he has the ability to curse or bless, and his blessing is made effective by chewing *qumbii,* myrrh, and spraying his interlocutors with his saliva. The Gabra *qaalluu* are modelled on the Boorana ones, but are lesser ones compared to the Supreme or High *Qaalluu* of the Boorana. Like the Boorana ones, they become *qaalluu* under miraculous or unusual circumstances and are very often linked to spitting cobras *(buutii).* Their insignia of office is the traditional red, black and white striped headdress *(ruufaa).* The sacred drum *(dibbee)* is also associated with them and is said to be the *waela qaalluu* 'companion of the *qaalluu'.* It has been suggested that the name *qaalluu* is derived from the verb *qalu* 'sacrifice', for he sacrifices on behalf of the whole community. He is moreover associated with tobacco and coffee, which are ritual substances, and with anointment, all elements pointing to a shamanistic tradition.[7] At the *Jilla* the *qaalluu* is the most important figure (pl. II), responsible for applying *shiila* (kaolin) on the foreheads of all the *nam luba* or 'circumcised men', for reiterating the laws of the phratry, for investing, with other members of his clan, the political officials, and for officiating at the turban-tying ceremony.

Galbo clan structure (see chart)

The Galbo phratry is composed of a number of clans *(balbala,* literally 'doorway'), which belong to two moieties *(gossa,* literally 'kin') Jiblo and Lossa, representing symbolically the right- and left-hand side of the social body. Clans are sub-divided into *mana* ('houses') and *warra* ('family'). According to one Galbo myth of origin, the ancestor or founding member of the phratry was 'found' with a python *(jawwee)* at the top of Mount Foroole, and it is this mythical event which is commemorated at the *Jilla* by the Barawa (or Barra) clans. Each of the other clans also has its own myths of origin, tracing its links back to the Waata hunter-gatherers (C'ako clan), Booran (Buroota clan), Somali (Galayole), Rendille (Usmalo), Samburu (Gallai), El Molo (Irille clan), and Turkana (the phratry as a whole). This constitutes a characteristic feature of the formation and transformation processes of the Gabra phratries in general and of 'inter-ethnic clan identity', notionally indicative of the common origin of all these ethnic groups.[8] Each of these clans has a specific role: it may be that of traditional custodian of one of the sacred instruments, for instance the drum, the horn or the fire-sticks. Because of the efficacity of their sacrifices in the past, some clans supply male stock, others female stock *(karsoo nabo).* The *hayyuu* are also selected from certain clans who have a proven ability for leadership and who thus also wield the *boqqu* or 'sceptre' of power. The three *qaalluu* clans (Massa, Gallai and Maduka) are also responsible for applying kaolin and sometimes ochre on the foreheads of the participants and of offering stock for sacrifice at every new moon.

7. See Kassam (forthcoming) for some myths of origin told about the Gabra *qaalluu* and their shamanistic interpretation. See Knutsson (1967) for a good description of the *qaalluu* institution; also Baxter (1954).
8. See Schlee 1985 on clan identities and connections. Oromo historical experts known to the present author have expressed reservations about some of Schlee's interpretations, whose conceptual and historical significance he has, in their view, missed.

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All these functions and responsibilities are discussed and evaluated at phratry level in the *yaa'a* or headquarters before the ceremonies actually take place.

The Galbo clans (based on author's field-notes and Torry, 1973, p. 279)

LOSSA (left-hand)		JIBLO (right-hand)
Gallai	Galayole	Massa
	Man Misingot	Man Guyyo Tala
Koshobe	Man Korom	Man Magado Abba Hiddi
Man Bule Soora	Man Abudo Babo	
Man Hiddi Abu	Man Addaa Maamo	C'ako
Man Jillo Bunaka		
Man Mawa Doba (?)	Barra (Barawa) Diimtu	Irille
	Warr Boru Ummoro	
Usmalo	Warr Quwial	Golole
Man Koroot	Warr Bul-Qabha	Man Shoro
Man C'iraat	Warr Maamo D'eera	Man C'ariye
	Warr Buroota	
Kibibe	Warr Alli Ummoro	
Odollale	Bara Gurraati (?)	
Man Guyyo	Worr Konte	
Man Boru Abudo	Worr Dibi Dido	
Man Sharmu Kurofa		
Saleda		
Maduka		

Transition rites: The koollomtte *ceremony*

The *koollomtte* ceremony which preceded the *Jilla* rituals was celebrated on 25 September, 1985 and was witnessed by Frs P. Tablino and B. Venturino.[9]

The actual meaning of the word *koollomtte* needs investigation. But it may be connected with circumcision and refer to the male sexual organ, indicating that it is ready, or mature, for the operation — an explanation which would fit well with the whole conceptual frame of transition, linked, as we have already seen, to circumcision.

The ceremony took place near Torbbi on the Marsabit-Moyale road in 1985 and near Quyal Hill on the Torbbi-Foroole road in 1977. It should normally be celebrated on the tenth day of the lunar month of *yakaa* (approximately September-October) or of *soomd'eera* (approximately March-April), on propitious days such as Monday *(alsinin)* and Thursday *(kamiisa)*. In 1977, as in 1985, the tenth day of the month fell on a Wednesday *(arba)* which is unpropitious for the Gabra, and so a compromise (an 'escaping' solution, in Fr Tablino's words) was reached by delaying the rites until Wednesday afternoon, which for the Gabra was almost the beginning

9. The latter also witnessed the 1977 celebration, a description of which is given in Tablino (1980, pp. 47–48). Tablino's unpublished description of the 1985 ceremony has been deposited in a number of places, including the British Institute. What follows is the present author's resumé based on this manuscript.

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of the following day, that is Thursday eve, known as *kamiisa diqa,* 'small Thursday'. As in the case of the *Jilla,* preparations for the event had been taking place several weeks before it, with families and stock moving into the ritual grounds in readiness for the roles which they were to play.

As at the *Jilla* grounds, there were two ritual enclosures *(nabo),* one for the ritual elders *(d'abbeelaa)* and one for all the 'circumcised men' *(nam luba).* This ritual enclosure is probably equivalent to the Boorana *galma,* or ritual house. Here, two parallel sets of ceremonies and sacrifices took place, those performed by the ritual elders emphasising peace, rain and prosperity, with the immolation of female stock (ewe, cow, dam camel), in contrast to those performed by the warrior and political grades emphasising blood, regeneration through the sacrifice of male stock (goat and lamb; young bull; male camel). The songs and dances of the elders and warriors likewise reflected these underlying complementary oppositions, reinforced by the drum/horn and stick/spear symbolisms already noted.

Transition rites: The Jilla *rituals*

The *Jilla* pilgrimage and transition rites took place in the months of *fur(a)mma* (August) and *yakaa* (September), 1986. They began with the new moon in August and ended on Tuesday 23 September. In actual fact, the celebrations had been scheduled for the propitious months of *soomd'eer-qara* and *soomd'eer-eegee* roughly March/April — also *soorio* or months 'good' for sacrifice — but owing to internal political differences (G. Schlee, pers. comm.), the ceremony was delayed until the next auspicious months. In some respects, the events replicate those performed at the *koollomtte,* but whereas the pre-initiation ones take place in the space of one day and in one place, those of the *jilla* are drawn out over a space of several consecutive weeks and cover many different ritual grounds.

As in the *koollomtte* ceremonies, preparations for the event began many months earlier, with discussions about the new phratry officials, the contributions of sacrificial stock, duties to be performed, route to be followed, and designation of the new custodians of the sacred instruments.[10]

The karsoo wal argaa *sacrifice (first day of new moon)*

In 1972, before the actual *Jilla* began, the Galbo political and ritual headquarters *(yaa'a)* was between Bubbisa and Torbbi. It was there that the discussions and arrangements had taken place. The participants, their families and stock had slowly been moving to the surrounding area during this time. Before leaving their settlement sites, everyone in the same nomadic village had passed through the camel enclosure without looking back. On the first day of the new moon, all the participants met at Torbbi, where the two ritual enclosures were built. When these enclosures were ready, containers *(gorfa)* of camel milk were brought by senior members of the clan and lined up inside the enclosure of the initiands, at the northern (Jiblo moiety) entrance. The sacred drum was also brought out and placed in front of the line of containers. The out-going and in-coming ritual elders *(d'abbeelaa)* sat on their stools facing the containers. All the adult men then presented the initiands with four twigs, two of *shiishaa (Baleria acanthoides)* and two of *mad'eera*

10. The first part of the ceremony and the following description is based on the account provided to me by Godana Mamo Elema in 1983, based on his observation of the 1972 ceremony. I witnessed the latter part with Fr Tablino, Fr Venturino, Dr D. Stiles and Prof. G. Schlee in 1986.

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(Cordia sinensis), saying as they did so *o maara gaalaa* 'oh, food of the camel' to which the ritual elders responded with blessings. These two trees are considered excellent camel fodder *(marra gaalaa).* The *d'abbeelaa* elders blessed the men. At this time, a childless woman may also present these elders with tobacco and ask for their blessing and they respond by saying *ilm d'ungad'd'a* 'may you kiss a son'. After these blessings, the whole day for young and old alike was spent in complete permissivity, singing and dancing, speaking and acting at will, flouting all the social rules, including violating the accepted joking relationships and relaxing the usual forms of respect. The theme of the songs and dances centred around the camels.

Just before sunset, the milk in the containers was poured into that of the founder member of each clan and it was blessed by the elders. Then two ewes, one for each moiety, were brought to the senior moiety entrance of the initiands' enclosure by the contributors of the animals. They were followed by all the male members of their clans present. The owners of the animals then sacrificed them in the usual way as at each *soorio* (literally, 'feast'), by pouring milk onto the back of the animal, passing the *hororo,* their marriage sticks, across the backbone of the animal and slitting the throat of the victim, lying on its right side, with a knife, so the blood poured onto the ground. All the men present then dipped their fingers into the blood and smeared their foreheads. On this occasion, a blood/mud pack was made and was taken back to all the clansmen not present. The meat was then given to the women to roast and the young men made wristlets from the skin of the victim, which were distributed to all the male participants, including children. Whilst this was being done, the men sang and danced the series of songs/dances *(sirba,* there being only one word for these two activities in Oromo) called *arra.* When the meat was ready, it was distributed to all the participants according to certain rules of sharing the parts. On this day, the milk in the containers was drunk by each person, but a little of the milk was left and the skin which formed on it was rubbed on the breast of each man's personal camel *(alaala),* then the remaining milk was given to the animal to drink. Everyone then returned to their own home, whether inside the ceremonial encampment or outside it.

This first *soorio,* or sacrifice, was poetically termed *karsoo wal argaa,* 'the sheep of seeing one another again'. It was a formal demonstration of the unity and solidarity of the phratry and of all the participants in the *Jilla,* a renewing of the bonds linking all the members and a re-establishment of the social order, marking thus a new beginning.

Korbeessa *ceremony*

On the sixth day of the month, a male goat *(korbeessa)* was sacrificed in a special ceremony involving this time only the warrior and political grades. The men left very early in the morning and, as they would do on other occasions during the course of the *Jilla* ceremonies, they went out of the ceremonial encampment through the northernmost camel enclosure, and did not look back. They made their way to the home of the contributor of the animal, situated outside the encampment. All the men were carrying their spears, and those who had killed a trophy animal were wearing the *baal-gudda,* a long white ostrich feather in their headbands. The sacred horn was also taken and blown all the way. On their way, the men collected four twigs of *Cordia.* On reaching their destination, all went into the settlement through the small-stock enclosure, whilst the herd-owner stood at the gateway. He

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had the right to refuse entry to anyone known to have sinned against the moral order by making a virgin girl pregnant, a very serious offence in Oromo. Four of the men then seized the goat and brought it to the front of the house of its owner. The men then put three sticks of *Cordia* into the roof of the house but kept one, holding it against their spears. The goat was immolated and everyone smeared blood on the upper right arm, forehead and chest of the political elder of their sets and then put blood onto their own foreheads. The most senior political elder then went around the house of the host four times — four is usually a number of peace in Oromo — singing an *arra* song. All the men present then followed, after which the whole day was spent singing and dancing. According to Godana, no one may rest, and if one wishes to do so, he must hide; nor may one put down his spear. As usual, the meat was roasted and shared, skin wristlets distributed, those not present getting them later, and the men returned at sunset in a group to their respective homes.

During the course of this first month, many other sacrifices, involing both male and female stock, were made by the participants on the propitious days. Although details were not supplied about these sacrifices, one might speculate that they were very much like the ones made at the *koollomtte* rituals. Each type of livestock sacrificed stands for the group which is responsible for its immolation, there being identification between sacrificed and sacrificer.

The beginning of the trek

After this first month, on the first propitious day of the new moon for moving, the participants began the trek towards Mount Foroole. Before arriving there, they made camp at the small mountain of Ele Boor. After this, all the participants went around the western side of the mountain, keeping well clear of its flanks, and settled at a point to the north-west of it.[11] On arrival, the day was spent discussing the details of the coming events.

The goolii *rites of passage*

The word *goolii* means 'turbulence' or 'chaos', and compares with many other Oromo rites of passage, generally known as *huluuqo,* representing salvation from imminent disaster. In this men, women, children and livestock pass under an archway festooned with creepers *(gaalle)* symbolising the removal of calamity. The *Jilla* participants also passed through a passage of plants, and thus symbolically crossed the threshold into a new era of time. This rite of passage is known as *goolii baasa* 'to remove or lift (the state of) chaos'.

Godana described the passage as being made of two parallel rows of vegetation with four upright columns in each row. It was constructed by the religious elders on the eastern side of the mountain.

On the day that the ceremony was performed, the present and future religious elders left very early in the morning, accompanied by two unmarried girls, taking with them the sacred horn and drum and leading a ewe. The party then made the final preparations for the rite of passage by placing the two girls holding a ceremonial turban or headdress between them at the entrance to the passage next to the ewe. The horn was then blown loudly and the drum was beaten. At this signal, the men and women, both dressed in the traditional fashion, the men in

11. In 1986 the Galbo went to a hill called Mataa-Lama, on the Ethiopian side of the border, where Schlee first joined them. The name of the 1972 settlement was unfortunately not recorded.

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embroidered shorts, the women in leather dresses, arrived. The women, carrying their children strapped on their backs and leading the pack camel laden with their household goods, were the first to pass through the fence or hedge, accompanied by loud drumming and horn blowing. Each woman put a handful of grass into the column as she passed through. The men then followed in order of clan seniority, followed by the small stock, the cattle, and lastly the camels. Nothing accidentally dropped in the passage could be retrieved and on no condition whatsoever was anyone allowed to look back or return the same day. Anybody wishing to leave the ritual grounds would have to return via the eastern side of the mountain. Camp was then made on the eastern side of Mount Foroole.

The karsoo foroole *ceremony (Thursday, 11/Friday, 12 September)*

That evening, four young circumcised men, the leader of whom was a special *qaalluu* from the Barawa clan — the ancestor of which is supposed to have originated from the mountain with the sacred python *(jawwee)* — climbed up to a high projecting rock on top of the mountain carrying a ewe. On reaching the rock, itself called *nabo,* 'sacred enclosure', the men sacrificed the ewe and roasted all the meat except the fatty part of the intestine known as *moora,* which was left as an offering to the mythical python ancestor. When the men had partaken of this feast, they left the Barawa *qaalluu* alone to await the visit of the python figuratively known as *karsoo teena,* 'our sheep'. It is said that he never fails to come, eats the offering, and rolls in the red earth, then departs. The *qaalluu Foroole* then gathered up earth (ochre?) from the spot which would be taken down and used to anoint other members of the warrior and political grades during the following days. The party returned the following evening and announced to the whole phratry that their ancestral python was alive and well. The next evening, a male goat was sacrificed, and there was singing and dancing and sharing of the meat outside the house of the *Abba Foroole,* the leader of the expedition.[12]

The Galbo swear by Foroole and this python.

The naanneessaa *ceremony (Friday, 12 September)*

Naanneessaa means to 'make a circle around a centre'. The ceremony was held on the day following the Mount Foroole ascent, which for the Gabra was the same day, so that whilst the young men were enacting their ritual on the mountain, the community as a whole was also enacting theirs down below. The site, which we visited a few days after our arrival at Foroole, is situated at the foot of the hill of Kiti, about forty-five minutes' walk from the ceremonial encampment. The day before this celebration took place, the young men had gone to the site and made a large ritual enclosure with branches of the tree *sigirso (Acacia refisciens,* ssp. *misera)* primarily, with additional branches from another Acacia species called *waangaya (Acacia nubica).* According to Fr Tablino's observations, the enclosure measured approximately 90 by 300 m and had fourteen entrances, one for each of the major clans *(miilo).* Inside the enclosure there were kraals for the young camels *(moona orgore),* and on either side of it were five sets of hearth-stones, and three stone rings, representing the three active *luba* sets. It is said that the stones had been placed there

12. It was at this point that our party arrived. This account is of course based entirely on hearsay, as nobody but the four men involved witnessed the events. The author is also aware that this ceremony is the enactment of a myth, of whose exact symbols and interpretation she is uncertain.

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by the ancestors of the Galbo, and each clan knew which one belonged to it. At the far end of the ritual enclosure there was a bush screen constructed under a *Commiphora* tree *(ammeesa)* where libations of milk were made to a member of the Warr Barawa clan (known as the people of Foroole), Godana Boru. Everybody, with the exception of the young unmarried girls, had attended the ceremony, the women in traditional dress as the day before. On arrival, a small screen had been made around each set of hearth-stones *(sunsuma)* and fire had been lit over which coffee was roasted and put into wooden containers onto which hot milk was poured. The mixture was drunk and the coffee beans chewed. Six ewes were then sacrificed, and the meat prepared, whilst the men sang and danced the *arra* songs. Later, the camels were milked and each man, accompanied by his sons, took one container to Godana Boru of the *Warra* Foroole clan who was seated under the *Commiphora* tree. He took a sip of the milk. The container was then passed from father to son, and each one tasted the milk. Finally, the father poured the rest of the milk onto the head of Godana Boru. In the afternoon, the meat was shared between all the participants, and in the evening, when the shadow of Mount Foroole fell onto the site, everybody returned to camp, leaving the enclosure in the order of clan seniority in which they had gone in, accompanied by the camels, which had also spent the entire day inside the enclosure without being taken out to graze.

The day had once again been a renewal of the links with the past and with the ancestors, each represented in stone, an imperishable manifestation of their continued existence beyond death.

The moggaati *ceremony (Saturday, 13 September [evening] — Sunday, 14 September)*

The word *moggaati* is derived from the verb *mogaasum* — 'to identify, specify, associate', thus 'to give a name to'. At birth, each child is given a name according to the most significant factor associated with his or her birth: time, place, event, circumstance, etc. However, each child should also receive a day or *ayyaana* name, for in the Gabra time-system, from each name for the day of the week, are derived two sets of names, one male and one female. A collective naming ceremony *(moggaati)* is generally performed for all the children in a family when their mother has reached menopause. This ceremony was reiterated by the initiands. No Gabra is considered an adult if he has not received this 'day' name. An adult who dies without having received it cannot be given the proper funeral rites. According to Tablino (1985, p. 5), the ceremony can also be called the *moora* (fatty intestine of stock) ceremony.

The ceremony began in the late evening. Each future religious elder sacrificed castrated stock, sheep, camel or ox, in the presence of, if possible, his elder sister (so Godana reported). The hide of the slaughtered animal would become the sleeping mat of the new religious elder and from it his new shoes *(gaangee)* would be made. The whole night was then spent dancing and singing *(arra)*, each within his own family circle, and as usual the meat was roasted and shared, and the skin wristlets distributed. The initiands put the *moora* around their necks, as is done in the birth ceremony of a male child, and assumed or re-affirmed their new names in a process of shedding and renewal which was to continue until the donning of the turban of office.

This is as far as Godana Mamo's description of the 1972 *Jilla* goes, as he had to leave the ceremonial grounds to return to school in Maikona. He stressed that he could not take the shortest way back to Maikona, since it was necessary to avoid the route taken at the beginning of the pilgrimage.

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The handing-over of the sacred drum (dibbee) *and the sacred horn* (magalata) *(Monday, 15 September)*

The following day was a *soorio* day, at which members of the Lossa moiety performed the *soorio balbalaa* ('sacrifice at the doorway'), followed by the coffee *(bunna qalaa)* ritual, when coffee beans are fried in butter and shared by the elders, who pray for rain, peace and prosperity. *Soorio* (literally 'feast') is usually performed on three consecutive days, one day being reserved for the Lossa moiety, another for the Jiblo moiety, while on the third day, known as *oid'eer,* both moieties may sacrifice if they wish or if they have been prevented on the previous days for some reason. The *soorio* months are especially propitious for many types of activities, some of which have been described here. At the Odola *yaa'a* we also noticed that new house poles had been made and dyed. A son was born in the *qaalluu* family (Massa) in the night, and the birth was celebrated.

At around midday, a group of men accompanied by their male children came to the eastermost camel enclosure, where the home of the out-going custodian of the horn was situated, and stood facing one another at the entrance. Milk was brought. The two groups of elders prayed. A male and female sheep were led out of the gateway and the group moved to the next camel enclosure, that of the new custodian of the horn, Diba Ali Roba, a member of the Manguba *luba.* The horn was blown and the group entered the enclosure and carried it into the home of its new keeper.

Shortly after this, the same ceremony was performed for the drum, which was taken all around the outer perimeter of the encampment from its former custodian's house to that of the new one, Galgalo Shonka, of the Massa *qaalluu* clan, a *d'abbeelaa* initiand of the Afata generation-set.

According to oral tradition, the drum was first fashioned by a *qaalluu* of the Massa clan in Melbana in southern Ethiopia. For this reason, a member of this clan is its perpetual guardian, and he must be a religious elder. The drum is made out of wood and covered with camel skin. It is taken out only for very specific occasions during the *Jilla* ceremonials, and at every new moon *(baatii),* when female stock are sacrificed for it, at every *soorio* ritual in the encampment, and whenever the encampment moves. It is a symbol of peaceful authority, a material proof of the phratry's life and welfare, and the 'voice' of the phratry. The five Gabra phratries are in fact known as *dibbee shanan,* the 'five drums', although it is said that the Odola 'lost' theirs to the Rendille. It is also said that the first drum was given to the Gabra by their elders, the Boorana *(Qaalluu),* and that this drum belonging to the Algana phratry is made of iron like that of the Boorana, whilst all the others are made of wood.

The horn, on the other hand, is linked to the opposite moiety, the Lossa, and its custodian is a member of the *yuuba* grade of active warriors. It is made of ivory and covered with skin. It is blown on the same occasions that the drum is beaten, and is also brought out at all functions and ceremonies performed by the young warrior political grades. Smaller, more profane versions of the horn, made out of oryx horn also exist and are used to summon people to a meeting or a ritual and blown during dancing at the ceremonial encampment.

Both these handing-over ceremonies were accompanied by much fanfare, with the blowing of the horn and the beating of the drum.

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No ceremony was performed for the sacred firesticks *(ucuuma)* on this occasion. Their present custodian is Elema Lola, now a ritual elder of the Usmalo clan. He had taken over custodianship of the sticks from a member of his clan before the *Jilla* rituals had begun, and was responsible for lighting and maintaining a fire in the enclosure of the ritual elders. Moreover, whenever the encampment moves, a new fire is lit and all the hearths obtain theirs from the central one in the ritual enclosure.

Fire is another manifestation of life, a symbol of existence, as amongst all Oromo.

The lallaba *'proclamation' ceremonies (Monday, 15 September [afternoon] and Tuesday, 16 September)*

Later in the afternoon, all the men from the *yuuba* (Manguba) and *kommica* (Dambala) warrior and political grades assembled outside their own ritual enclosure to have themselves anointed with *shiila,* a white chalkish substance, probably kaolin, by a *qaalluu* of their sets in preparation for the nomination ceremony *(lallaba)* which was to be held outside the precincts of the encampment to appoint the new political leaders, the *hayyuu* and *jaalaba.* However, as they were doing this, placing their spears outside the entrance — for the ritual enclosure is a place of peace and no weapon should be taken inside (the same is true for the house) — dissension was already rife amongst the various factions about the choice of one of the assistant judiciary officers or *jaalaba.* The man in question was accused of being unworthy of office because of offences committed against the members of his family. The discussions went on for some time and appeared heated, but then it was finally decided that the problem should be resolved at the meeting place. All the men then left, stalking out through the northernmost camel enclosure directly beneath the mountain. Konchoro Mamo, our guide to the *naanneessaa* site, carried, as a member of the Massa *qaalluu* clan, a giraffe skin 'shield' *(wante)* bent to enclose the tooth of an elephant, said to have been inherited from the ancestors of the clan.[13]

After leaving the *yaa'a* encampment, the men went to a place called Irg-d'aal, the site of which was marked by a large *d'addaca (Acacia tortilis)* tree, which appears in Gabra to be connected to all the rites of passage, and played here a role equivalent to the *dambii* in Boorana (cf. Megerssa and Kassam, 1987, pp. 17-22). The male goat to be sacrificed was carried all the way to the spot. On arrival, libations of milk were made by the Massa *qaalluu* clan and by the contributor of the sacrificial animal for the Jiblo moiety at the tree, and tobacco and four coffee beans were placed beneath it. (The following day, this was repeated by the Lossa moiety.) The goat was then sacrificed and its blood poured into the shield. The animal was skinned, skin wristlets prepared for the nomination ceremony, and the meat roasted. When the wristletss were ready, they were used to tie together four twigs of a tree called *d'irri (Acalypha fructiosa).* There was one set of these sticks (called *harc'ummee*) for each of the minor officials, *jaalaba,* to be appointed. When all the preparations were ready, the ceremony began. The Massa *qaalluu* family stood facing the tree. They had *qumbii,* myrrh, in their mouths, and the large yellow fruits of a poisonous variety of *Solanum (hiddi looni)* between their lips. Each appointee then stood in front of the *Qaalluu* and his family, members of which were the first to be appointed. If he was becoming a *jaalaba,* he was given a set of sticks and the *Qaalluu* pronounced his

13. The following description of the events by Konchoro Mamo was given to Schlee (who kindly allowed me to attend the interview).

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appointment with the following words: *(ebbeluun), jaalaba gaara si tolca, Waaqa d'agayi, Lafa d'agayi:* '(Name of person), I proclaim you a *jaalaba.* May you be wise and dignified. Let *Waaqa* witness it, let the Earth witness it.'[14] If the appointee was becoming a *hayyuu,* the title was substituted in the proclamation, and he was presented with a *liic'o* or whip of authority made by members of the *qaalluu* clan, who also wrapped the *ruufaa* around his head. All these insignia were sprayed with a fine cloud of saliva, like drizzling rain, by the *Qaalluu.* Fifty-five men from all over Gabraland were proclaimed *jaalaba,* and a set of sticks was given to their representatives to be taken back to them if they were not all present.[15]

After this, the meat was shared, each person getting only one small piece, and all the bones of the victim were burned until they were reduced to ashes. These were added to the dried blood in the shield. Members of the Massa *qaalluu* clan then applied this mixture to their own foreheads, then to that of all the participants.

The group then returned to camp together, faces and eyes turned towards the ground, chanting *wo-wo-wo,* and the horn was blown all the way back. When they arrived at the encampment, all its inmates, already averted to the group's return, went into their houses, to avoid looking at or being looked at by its members, who were still considered to be in a ritually dangerous state. The men then entered the camp the same way in which they had gone out, where a container of milk had been prepared for them. Each one wet his lips without drinking the milk and entered the ritual enclosure. Here water was brought to them and they washed the blood off their faces. This marked their re-entry into normal society.

The next morning the sticks placed at the entrance of the ritual enclosure, and the *Solanum* fruits lying on the ground inside the inner wall, could still be seen.

The following day, the men performed another ceremony, in some ways very similar to that of the nomination ceremony, except that the sacrificial animal was a young calf *(jibica matooma)* given by the keeper of the drum, Galgalo Shonka. Being a Christian, he took the opportunity to instruct the participants before they left by holding a prayer meeting. The young men soon tired of this sermon. The *qaalluu* then interrupted the meeting by summoning the group's departure. He had with him the same shield used the day before and an axe *(d'akaraa).* But before they left, the *qaalluu* sat on a stool and smeared kaolin on the foreheads of the young men. All of them were carrying *Acalypha* sticks next to their spears. They assembled at the entrance to the camel enclosure, where the *qaalluu* joined them. Konchoro Mamo led the calf to the group and then the *qaalluu* prayed. All the men then left, followed by Konchoro Mamo and some of the other young men, leading the calf.

According to Konchoro Mamo, the group went to another spot, close to that of the previous day, similarly marked by an *Acacia tortilis* tree. Here, libation ceremonies were once again performed, and coffee and tobacco placed as on the previous day. The calf was sacrificed by the son of Galgalo Shonka. As before blood was poured into the shield, the meat and wristlets prepared. However, this time, the tongue of the animal was roasted separately and, when the meat was ready, the *qaalluu* held it in his hand and all the participants took a small bite. They were now deemed to always speak the truth. The remaining part of the tongue was cut into

14. The word *qaara* is a difficult one to translate. Like *ayyaana,* it means 'luck', but also, 'grace, dignity, ability to command respect, to make wise decisions' and much more (G. Megerssa, pers. comm.).

15. According to Tablino (1986, p. 10), the six *hayyuu* of the Galbo are at present: for the *Dambala,* Galgalo Diba Galgalo (C'ako clan) and Mamo Boru Dambala (Odolale clan), both appointed in 1986; for the *Manguba,* Mamo Dido (Golole clan) and Tuye Hurri (Koshobe clan), appointed 1972; for the *Afata* Elema Kotobo (C'ako) and Abudo Mamo (Odolale), appointed in 1951.

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small cubes, pierced with a thorn from the tree, and distributed to all the young men. Pieces were kept for those not present. We were told that this dried meat would later be encased into one of their beads in a special ceremony and worn around their necks, but we did not receive any further details.

After this, all the participants sat under the tree and were instructed by the *qaalluu* in the new laws *(seera)* which they would henceforth have to respect as a group. Amongst these were laws governing the proper behaviour towards the phratry officials, especially the judicial elders *(hayyuu),* and one's neighbours; laws governing the house and abandoned settlements *(ona);* those regarding domestic animals, in particular the camel; and the behaviour of man in nature, to cite only a few examples.

After these eternal laws had been reiterated, the men once again had blood applied on their foreheads, and they returned to camp in the same way as the day before.

The Melbana bokkuu *expedition (Wednesday, 17 September - Friday, 19 September)*

The next day, a seven-man expedition set off from Foroole to fashion a new *bokkuu* or sceptre of power for the two new judicial elders from a special olive tree at the sacred site of Melbana. They returned in the early hours of Friday morning, having made a long and arduous journey, bearing the new symbols of authority. The installation ceremony of the new political elders took place later on the same morning. Once again it was in a parallel and direct relationship to the activities of the ritual elders, who were then in seclusion inside their own ritual enclosure, as described below.[16]

The ceremony began at about 10.30 a.m., when all the men of the warrior and political grades — about 150 men by Fr Tablino's estimate — assembled at the entrance to the camel enclosure of the donor of the *korbeessa magalata* — the goat to be sacrificed for the sacred horn — Elema Jillo, of the Golole clan. They then moved to the enclosure of the donor of the *korm bokkuu* or ram of the sacred sceptre, Molu Mamo Jillo, of the C'ako clan. All the men had painted their faces white and were carrying their olive sacrifice sticks, a branch of *Baleria* and their spears. Some of them were wearing ostrich feathers. At each entrance, the men, led by the *qaalluu,* who was holding his small son in his arms, prayed together, and then the animals were led out through the enclosures to the other side, accompanied by the blowing of the horn. The men re-assembled at their own ritual enclosure, and all entered, leaving their spears outside. All the men squatted as the prayers were said. Then the young men came out and stood in front of the outer wall of the enclosure whilst seven of the officials, amongst them the *hayyuu* and the *qaalluu,* remained inside in front of the fire. Then the *Qaalluu,* Abudo Guyyo, put incense on the fire and called out *Waaqa urgeessi* — 'let *Waaqa* be blessed by this good smell' — and all the men responded, *Urgeess Waaqa.* The words were repeated seven times — a number connected to *jilla,* to ceremonies — by each of the men inside. The *Qaalluu* then said, *Luba urgeessi,* 'let the *luba* be blessed by this good smell', and again in unison, the men responded seven times, *Urgeess luba.*

After this *urgeessa* ceremony, all the men assembled at the Jiblo entrance of the enclosure, where the two animals were sacrificed in the usual way, with the four judicial elders of the Manguba and Dambala generation-sets standing together facing the animals. The *qaalluu* and then all the other men anointed the four officials

16. The chronological account of the events is interrupted here to show some of these parallelisms.

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with blood from the sacrifice, dipping a handful of grass into the pool of blood and smearing it on their foreheads, chests and upper right arm, saying as they did so, *buli* 'live long!' and applying it also to their own foreheads. The sacred horn was blown several times and then there was much dancing and singing of the *arra* type for some time.

Later in the afternoon the men returned to their ritual enclosure, where they discussed matters pertaining to their generation-sets, and were anointed with ochre (from the Foroole expedition?) and sang again inside the enclosure where they were given also the skin wristlets which had been prepared all afternoon for them by the sons of Elema Lola, the keeper of the firesticks.

So, as Tablino also remarks (1986, p. 11), when the new *d'abbeelaa* elders returned to their own ritual enclosure in the evening to pray, the *nam luba* were also praying inside theirs.

The shaving and seclusion ceremony of the d'abbeelaa *initiands (Thursday, 18 September-Friday, 19 September)*

The day, being *oid'eera,* was a propitious one for many ceremonies, which took place almost simultaneously.

The day began with immolation of small stock and the coffee ritual. Then two operations were performed on camels, that of castrating (of an animal destined as a pack camel) and branding.

During this time, the family of Guyyo Ade, who had died about thirty-five years previously, visited his grave-site to perform a *d'ibaayuu* or libation ceremony of coffee, tobacco and *magaaddo* salt, and to sacrifice a young sheep *(elemo).* At this occasion, the stones from the burial mound are removed and a ring made around the grave, at which the eight *soodu* stones representing the dead man's living children are placed. The party returned in the late afternoon.

Before this, in the afternoon, the *korbeessa qala* ceremony for a young man who has killed an important trophy animal was performed by a member of the clan of the *Warr Qaalluu,* attended by a group of his age-mates and officiated by the *qaalluu.* The men formed a party and went a little way out of the family encampment. The young 'killer' was wearing the long white ostrich feather in his headband. Here they rehearsed the song of victory *(geerarssa nyeenc'a)* for sometone who has slain a lion.[17] The young man then approached the family camp, singing the song, but stopping outside the entrance, where he stood whilst the women of his family joyfully came out and put their beaded necklaces around his neck. A male goat was then sacrificed, but it was immolated with a spear, not a knife. After this, all the men went into one of the houses, where they sang *gooba* songs of war and battle late into the night, with many of them getting very excitable and going into a trance.

In the meantime, the religious elders were quietly preparing themselves for their own very important day of seclusion in their enclosure. They had been fashioning their new sticks for a number of days, and spent the morning completing them. The sticks, made from *Cordia* wood, had been especially obtained by them the month before *(furr(a)ma,* approximately August) from Laga Urbura. They also prepared their own sandals, and the blacksmith *(tumtuu),* a Konso, was also busy the whole day making them new bracelets. They would also wear the *qiliinto* (dark blue) beads equivalent to the *umu gurraati* ones of the Boorana (cf. Kassam and Megerssa, 1986) which have special ritual significance in Oromo.

17. See Tablino, 1980, p. 137, for the text of this song or, more precisely, recitation, as there is no dancing.

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In the afternoon, at about 3.30 p.m., the shaving ceremony was initiated outside the house of the keeper of the drum, Galgalo Shonka, where he was the first one to be shaved. The hair was gathered and put into the camel enclosure. Coffee beans were then prepared and Galgalo Shonka was joined by twelve other initiands. They all sat on stools outside his house. The coffee cup was passed around and each person dipped his finger into the butter, anointed his face, forearms and chest with it and chewed the whole beans. The keeper of the drum then anointed the backs of all the men and blessed them with words, which seemed to be *horamati* 'be prosperous'. They then prayed together in the traditional fashion, arms extended. The tobacco pouch was then passed around. The group then dispersed and each initiand returned to his own home, to be shaved. The mothers of the future religious elders were also shaved.

In the meantime, some of the young men were helping to reinforce the ritual enclosure of the religious elders with branches. Inside it, on the back wall, was a *mat't'aarri,* religious elder's stick, on which several skin wristlets, probably representing all the sacrifices the initiands had performed up to that time, were hanging. Later in the evening, before sunset, a small rounded trough, the size and shape of the top of a Gabra wooden stool as Tablino (1986, p. 7) describes it, was made out of a white chalky soil mixed with milk provided by the keeper of the firesticks, into which other substances are added. This is called a *naanniga,* the same word used to designate a drinking trough for domestic stock at well-sites. In the night, the *baddo* cloth, traditionally obtained from the Konso, of which the turbans of the religious elders are made, would be dipped into it to stiffen them. Into the folds, several natural products, like incense and burrs, would be put. There was also a small fire at the other side of the enclosure, opposite the stick.

At sunset, all the initiands went into their enclosure. For the Gabra, it was already Friday, the beginning of the new day, which is dedicated to the *d'abbeelaa* elders. They were accompanied by some of the out-going *d'abbeelaa* who would instruct them about procedure during the night and teach them their new code of behaviour and the songs *(dikkira)* which as ritual elders they would henceforth have to sing every Friday and on all ceremonial occasions.[18]

The turban was tied on in the early hours of the morning by the *qaalluu* for about twenty-five *d'abbeelaa* (according to Tablino, 1986, p. 7). Some, like my host, Wato Rera, returned to the privacy of their own homes to begin their seclusion there. The rest of the elders remained in their enclosure. Representatives of the *qaalluu* performed the ceremony for those not in the ceremonial encampment, as at another encampment near Kiti Hill. By this time, the entrance of the enclosure was firmly shut with a skin hanging.

In the morning, the wives of the religious elders, wearing their traditional leather dresses and accompanied by their eldest sons, brought containers of fried coffee beans to the Lossa entrance of the enclosure for their husbands and handed them to an intermediary at the doorway, as the elders themselves were not allowed to speak or see anyone besides their fellow elders for four days, the period of their seclusion. This intermediary in turn passed them the old shoes, turban and clothes of their husbands, which the wives then handed over to their sons, who, significantly, put on their father's former headdress *(surree).* Inside, the elders were singing the *dikirra* songs.

Later during the day the elders left their enclosure as a group, and spent the day

18. See Tablino, 1980, pp. 142–48, for a selection of these religious songs or hymns of praise.

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outside the encampment, returning discretely at sunset, for they too were in a ritually dangerous state and it is believed that a mere glance from them could kill.[19]

The end of seclusion: the harka d'iqacaa *purification ceremonies (Monday, 22 September)*

The newly initiated religious elders stayed in seclusion in the *nabo,* or in the inner part of their houses *(d'iinqaa),* for four nights, going out during the day to perform their natural functions.

On the fourth morning (Monday) they came out of seclusion and performed a purification ceremony in the *nabo,* in which they ritually washed their hands in a mixture of water, milk, coffee beans and incense, to which some camel droppings and certain plants had been added. After this collective hand-washing ceremony *(harka d'iqacaa)* the new elders returned to their own homes, where they once again washed their hands. According to Tablino, 'hand-washing is a common ritual for ending seclusion and starting a normal life in a new state' (1986, p. 7). Before entering their houses, however, they broke their silence by repeating thrice *fada,* to which their families responded thrice *fadalle,* thus making their re-entry into the life of the community (Tablino, 1986, p. 7). This re-entry was also marked by the sacrifice of a ewe *(karsoo harka d'iqacaa)* performed at the doorway in the normal way.

After this final ceremony, the participants slowly left the sacred site of Foroole and moved back to their various nomadic camps. The *yaa'a* assembly with its official custodians also left the ritual grounds to follow its own itinerary, and thus the pilgrimage gradually came to an end.

19. Our party left the ceremonial encampment on Saturday 20 September in the morning. Data for the following ceremony was obtained from Tablino (1986, p. 7) and partly based on the author's fieldnotes.

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Aneesa Kassam is Senior Lecturer in the Department of Literature/French at the University of Nairobi where she teaches oral literature. She has a doctoral degree in ethno-linguistics from the University of Paris III (Sorbonne Nouvelle).

The author dedicates this article to her late assistant, Godana Mamo Elema from the Galbo phratry, who was tragically killed in a car accident on the Marsabit-Isiolo road in December 1983.

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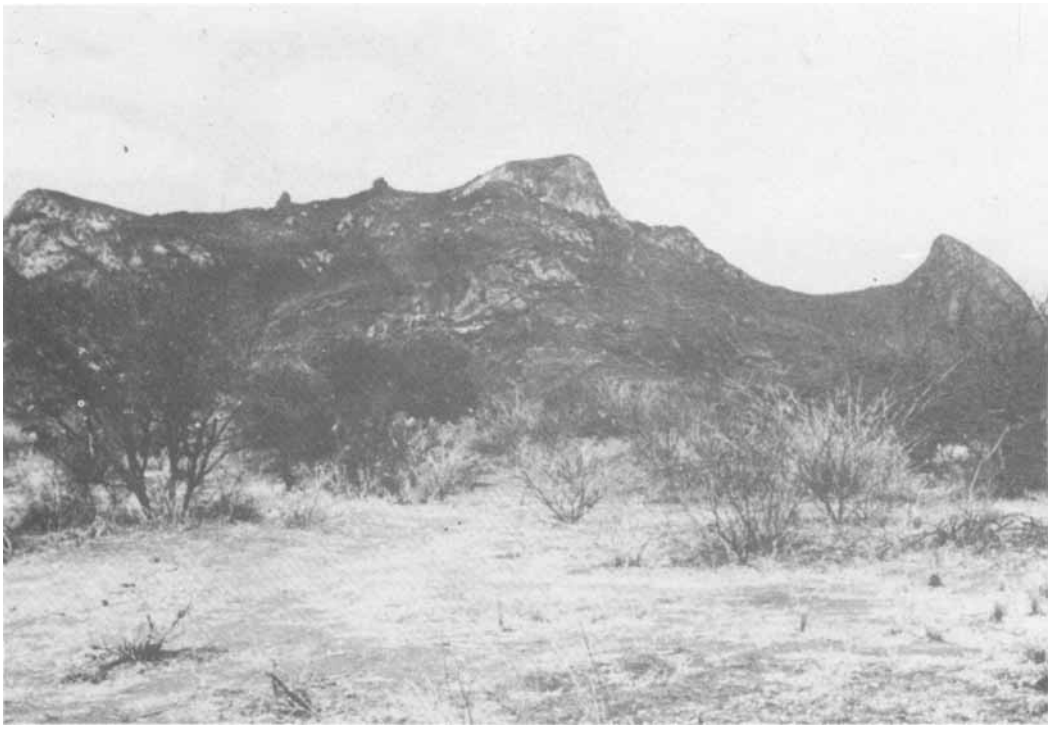


Plate I
The sacred mountain of Foroole.



Plate II
The qaalluu *reading entrails. He is carrying the* liic'o *'whip' and wearing the* ruufaa *chequered turban.*

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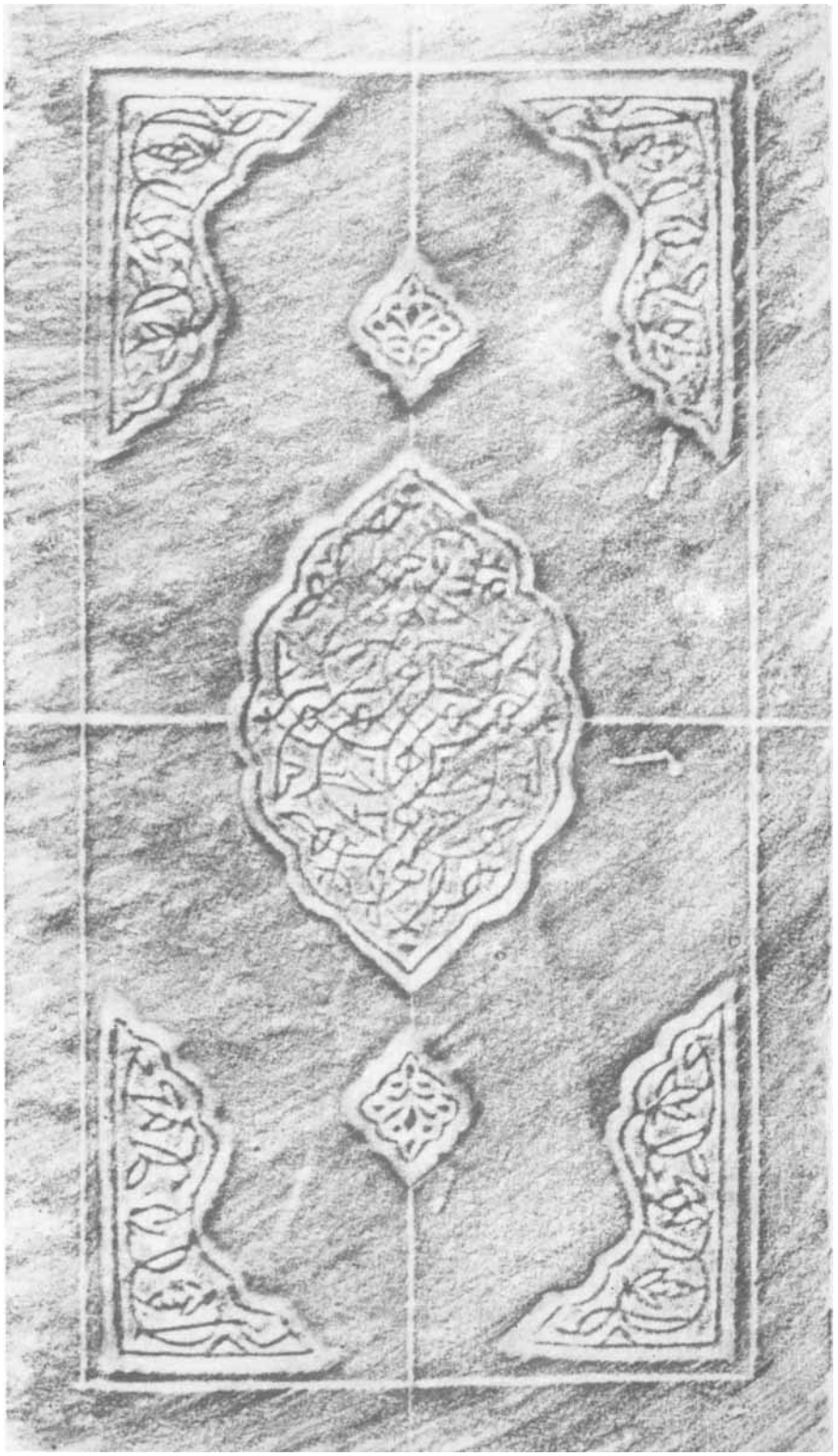


Plate I
Cover of a nineteenth-century Harari Qur'an, *I.E.S. 260.*

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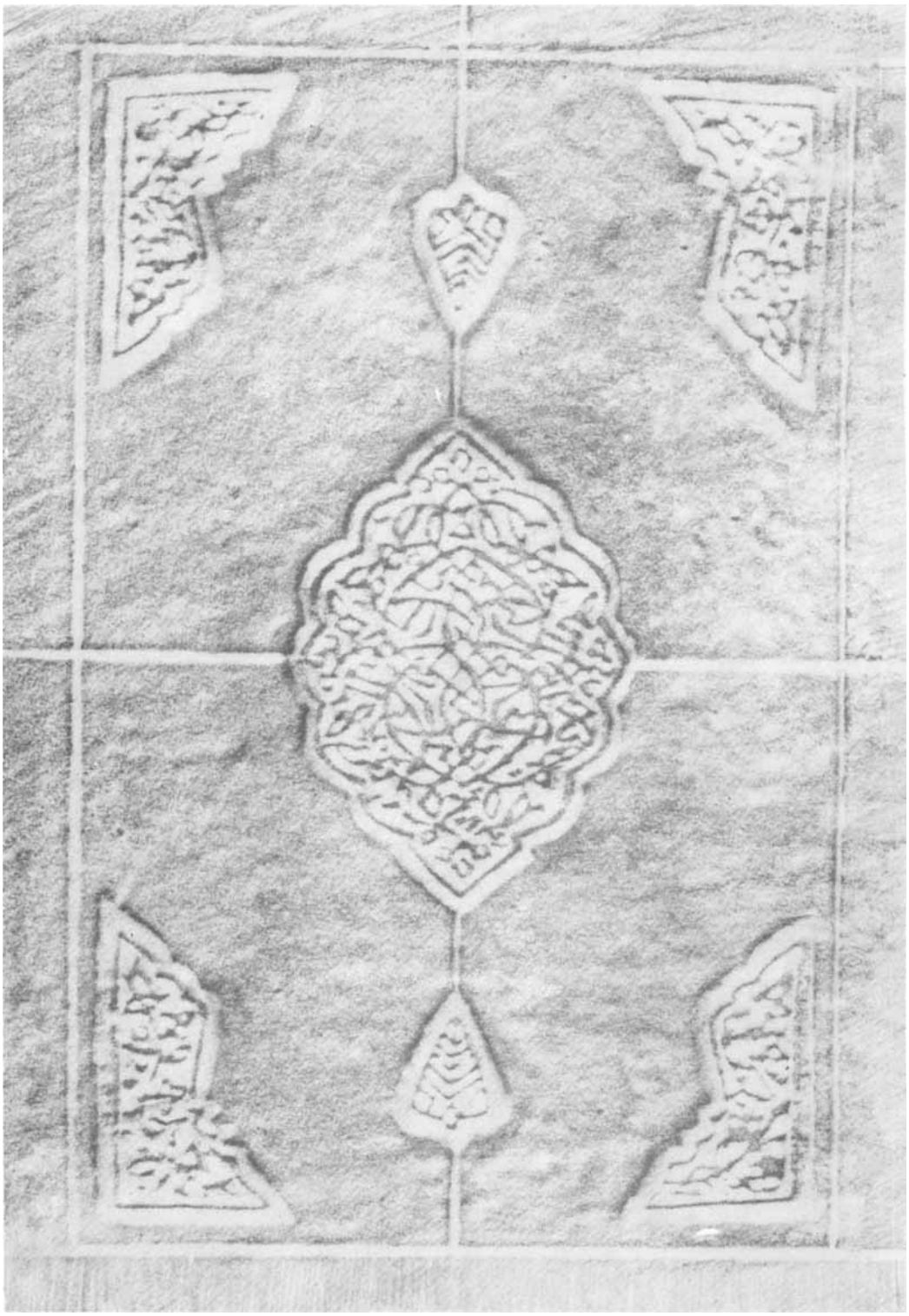


Plate II
Cover of a nineteenth-century Harari religious commentary, I.E.S. 267.

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Plate III
Central motif on a Harari binding of 1797-8, I.E.S., 1852.

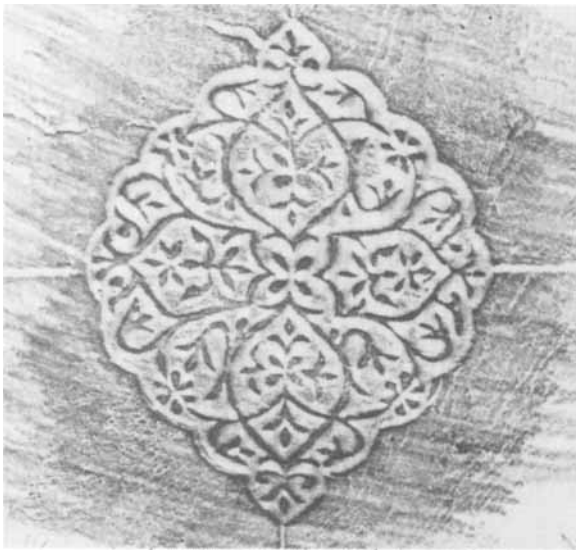


Plate IV
Central motif on a Harari binding of 1824-5 in the Harari Cultural Museum.



Plate V
Harari binding press at the Harari Cultural Museum.

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