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Amélie Chekroun*

Harar as the capital city of the Barr Saʿd ad-Dīn (first half of the 16th century): from its emergence to its fortification

Abstract
This article traces the history of the city of Harar prior to the mid-16th century until the end of the Barr Saʿd ad-Dīn Sultanate. The research for this article is based on the few mentions of the city that exist in the medieval literature and on recent archaeological data. It shows that, contrary to what has been proposed by oral traditions since the late 19th century and by the archaeological data and interpretation proposed by Insoll in 2017, Harar did not become an urban, economic, and religious center until the early 16th century when the city became the new capital of Barr Saʿd ad-Dīn. Until then and since the establishment of the sultanate in the early 15th century, the sultans' power was centered in Dakar. The reasons for relocating the capital of the sultanate in 1520 are not known, but instability in the sultanate in years prior may shed light on why Harar emerged as the new heart of the sultanate. Finally, this article provides further evidence for the construction of the city walls in the mid-16th century by Emir Nūr. Sources from this period tend to show that this fortification of the city was part of a general policy followed by the sultanate as they tried to defend themselves against attacks from the newly arrived Oromo populations in the region.

Keywords: Harar, History, Barr Saʿd ad-Dīn, Written sources, Archaeology

Résumé
Cet article tente de retracer l'histoire de la ville de Harar avant le milieu du xvie siècle et la fin du sultanat du Barr Saʿd ad-Dīn. L'étude s'appuie sur les rares mentions de la ville dans la documentation médiévale et sur les données archéologiques récentes. Elle montre que, contrairement

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à ce que proposent les traditions orales depuis la fin du XIXe siècle, Harar ne devient un centre urbain, économique et religieux qu'à partir du début du XVIe siècle, lorsque la ville devient la nouvelle capitale du Barr Saʿd ad-Dīn, comme l'avançait Insoll à partir des données archéologiques en 2017. Jusqu'alors, depuis la fondation du sultanat au début du XVe siècle, le siège du pouvoir des sultans se trouvait à Dakar. Les raisons du changement de capitale en 1520 ne sont pas connues, mais la situation instable au sein du sultanat au cours des années précédentes peut être une piste pour expliquer l'émergence de Harar comme nouveau cœur du sultanat. Enfin, cet article recontextualise la construction des murailles de la ville (*jugal*) au milieu du XVIe siècle par l'émir Nūr : les sources de l'époque tendent à montrer que cette fortification de la ville s'inscrit dans une politique générale du sultanat qui tente de se défendre contre les attaques des nouvelles populations oromo de la région.

Mots-clés : Harar, histoire, Barr Saʿd ad-Dīn, sources écrites, archéologie

Introduction

Today, the old city of Harar, which is encompassed by a wall (*jugal* in Harari), is introduced to tourists as the fourth holiest city of Islam. This is in part due to the presence of a hundred mosques and as many shrines within a perimeter of 1.6 km^2 (https://whc.unesco.org/fr/list/1189/; Mohamud, Bianchini & Maimone, 2006: 5-6; Santelli, 2008). According to historical sources, the old town of Harar dates from the end of the medieval period (15th-16th centuries), but current oral tradition dates the establishment of Harar from the 13th or even as early as the 9th century (Mercier, 2022b). European travelers who visited Harar between the mid-19th and early 20th centuries often recorded the oral traditions that described the founding of the city, and these are linked to Emir Nūr, the Emir who initiated the construction of the city wall in the mid-16th century. In 1854, during his journey in Harar, Richard Burton recorded that the city, in its contemporary form, is credited to Emir Nūr "who reigned 316 years ago" (in 1538 AD) and that before him, "during the reign of Muhammad Gragne, the 'left-handed' Attila of Adel," there was a "mere mass of Bedouin villages" that were perhaps founded by Arabs in the 7th century (Burton, 1855: 144; Burton, 1856: 309-310).[1] Some fifty years later, during his priesthood in

[1] Burton explains that the "province of Hadiyah," whose capital was Harar, was part of the "Zaylaʿ empire," founded by "Arab invaders" who, in the 7th century, conquered and colonized the lowlands between the Red Sea and the Highlands (Burton, 1856: 305). It is unclear whether the traditions Burton noted during his stay also trace the origins of Harar to the 7th century, even if Braukämper says so (2003: 36).

Harar, the French Capuchin Azaïs learned that it was Nūr "who, assisted by the famous chiefs Ahu Abādir and Ahu ʿAlī, undertook the construction of the ramparts, the immense work of which was not to be completed until about 1580" (Azaïs & Chambard, 1931: 4). In the current oral tradition, Emir Nūr remains strongly associated with the construction of the wall surrounding the city of Harar and with the shape of the city of Harar as it exists today.

However, since the end of the 19th century, oral tradition has evolved to date the foundation of Harar to a much earlier period. The figure of Abādir emerged and replaced that of Emir Nūr, and the shrine dedicated to Abādir is often referenced as the heart of the city's foundation. With this shift of focus from Nūr to Abādir, oral traditions began to consider that the city was founded as early as the 12th and 13th centuries, and sometimes even as early as the 10th century. The book *Fatḥ madīnat Harar* ("The conquest of the town of Harar") is deeply associated with the tracing of the city's foundation from the 13th century and with the emergence of Abādir as a prominent figure in the city's founding. This Arabic text is a legendary history of Harar in the 13th century, and contains anachronisms, such as the presence of Portuguese and Italians. The *Fatḥ madīnat Harar* tells of the arrival of Abādir ʿUmar ar-Riḍā in Harar in 1216 from Mecca. Upon his arrival, he is accompanied by 405 companions, who include figures of the Islamic tradition, such as the 10th century Iranian Muslim mystic Bāyazīd al-Biṣṭāmī. The exact date the book was authored is unknown, and its content is controversial. The editor and translator of the English version, Ewald Wagner (1978), posits that the author of this text "wanted to show that Harar's supremacy over the surrounding tribes had old and religious origins" (Wagner, 2005a). It is fairly obvious that at least the popular and well-known version of this text is more contemporary because, for instance, the text concludes with a prophecy made by Abādir about the Italian conquest of Ethiopia. One of the few arguments that claim to confirm the age of the *Fatḥ madīnat Harar* and the antiquity of the city can be found within the historiography and in some lists of emirs in the region. Here, Emirs of Harar are listed as early as the late 9th century and some lists even include Abādir himself a listed Emir. Still, these lists are more contemporary compositions (see Mercier, 2022b) that merge disparate information, such as oral traditions and textual sources, and link dynasties that are quite distinct from one another. Indeed, some of these lists consider the rulers of the 14th century Awfāt Sultanate to be part of the same family as the Emirs of Harar who descended from ʿAlī b. Dāʿūd in the 17th-19th centuries. Moreover, the *Fatḥ madīnat Harar* would not have become popular in Harar before the early 20th century when the city began to lose its autonomy after its integration to Ethiopia by Menelik from 1887 onwards. According to Thomas Osmond, "its production is probably part of the religious proselytizing impelled from

1875 onwards by the Egyptian-Ottoman administration" of the city (Osmond, 2014: 8).

We only know a fraction of the history of Harar before the city became more open to foreigners and outsiders during the Egyptian occupation. Before the 19th century, less than twenty textual fragments are available to aid in tracing nearly three centuries of history (Cerulli, 1971: 135-206; Wagner, 1974a; Tedeschi, 1974). Today, the history of the city is entirely dependent on the oral tradition, which transformed and crystallized since the second half of the 19th century. Héloïse Mercier's ongoing PhD thesis on the history and writing of the region's history between the 17th and 19th centuries should, however, add much to our understanding (cf. Mercier, 2022a). This article focuses on the period before the upheavals of the second half of the 16th century, and it tries to free itself from the pervasive mythologies present within current oral tradition. First, it demonstrates that the historical sources confirm the archaeological data and interpretation proposed by Insoll (2017: 210) in that Harar did not become an important urban center until it became the capital of the Barr Saʿd ad-Dīn Sultanate in the early 16th century. Second, this article attempts to identify the reasons why the sultans decided to change their capital in 1520 after almost a century of existence of the Barr Saʿd ad-Dīn. Finally, it recontextualizes the construction of Harar's city wall by Emir Nūr as an undertaking unique to Harar as all of the main cities of the sultanate were repeatedly attacked and all were also equipped with similar city walls.

1. Harar, the new capital of the Barr Saʿd ad-Dīn

Although some oral traditions, as well as 19th century texts, consider that the foundation of Harar dates to the central Middle Ages (before the 13th century), the first mention of the toponym "Harar" in medieval documentation does not appear before the 15th century. This mention is within the story of King ʿAmda Ṣeyon's wars against the Muslim communities in the south and east of the Christian kingdom. This Christian text, written in Geʿez, recounts the conflicts between the Christian king (r. 1314-1344) and the Islamic states of Ethiopia in the year between 1332 and 1333. It is considered one of the first historical texts composed in Ethiopia. Commentators on the text agree that it was written after the events it recounts, and most likely during the 15th century (cf. Kropp, 1983-1984 and 1994: xviii; Marrassini, 1993; Derat, 2002: 99-100 and 2013: 122). In a paper published in 2020, Bertrand Hirsch goes further and convincingly demonstrates that this text, which is of a profoundly epic nature, describes not the wars beginning in the 14th century, but the conflicts between King Dawit (r. 1380-1412) and then King Yesḥäq (r. 1413-1430), against the rulers of the sultanate of Awfāt in the first half of the 15th century (Hirsch, 2020). This long conflict eventually led to the collapse of the sultanate whose territory was ultimately integrated into the Christian kingdom. This

conflict also engendered a profound reorganization of the eastern Horn of Africa Muslim territories (today eastern Ethiopia and northern Somaliland) as well as the foundation of a new sultanate called Barr Saʿd ad-Dīn in the 1410s and 1420s by a branch of the Walasmaʿ dynasty who ruled Awfāt since the end of the 13th century (Chekroun, 2020).

The story of King ʿAmda Ṣeyon's wars mentions several clashes with the Muslim communities before and after the collapse of the sultanate of Awfāt. Many Muslim communities, cities, and territories are mentioned on several occasions within this story, and these mentions reveal the main and dominant territories of the time. Harar is not one of them. The toponym "Ḥarar" appears only once and this is within the very long list of members of a Muslim coalition led by a man named *qāzi* (i.e. *qāḍī*, jurist) Sāleḥ. Ḥarar is also not listed as one of the main territories of this coalition, such those that provided "a king" like Adal, Ḥarlā, or Hubat. It is one of about 200 territories that provided a governor. Some provided 1, others 8, 12, or even 1,000. Ḥarar provided this coalition with "3 governors (*mäkʷännən*)" (Marrassini, 1993: 105-106). The small number of *mäkʷännən* provided by Ḥarar suggests that it was a territory of little importance at the time (cf. Cerulli, 1936: 16-17). In comparison, Adal, an Islamic region in eastern Ethiopia, provided 1 king and 99 *mäkʷännən*; Zaylaʿ, the main port on the Red Sea, provided 1 king; and Dakar, the capital of the Barr Saʿd ad-Dīn sultanate at the time, provided 1,000 *mäkʷännən*. Thus, the 15th century, at the earliest, is the first mention in the sources of a place named Ḥarar under Islamic rule.

It is not until the early 16th century that a new mention of the toponym Ḥarar is identified in textual sources. Since the second quarter of the 15th century, the Barr Saʿd ad-Dīn sultans controlled the eastern region of the Horn of Africa, which spanned from the eastern Rift massif to the shores of the Red Sea. Systematically called Barr Saʿd ad-Dīn (the "land of Saʿd ad-Dīn") in Arabic Muslim sources, this sultanate is better known by its Christian designation "Adal," which is incorrect. Adal, since the beginning of the 15th century, is only one of the territories under the Barr Saʿd ad-Dīn sultanate authority (Chekroun & Hirsch, 2020a: 75). Moreover, some Christian authors in Geʿez do not use "Adal" but "Bär Säʿadädin" to refer to the Islamized territory east of the Christian kingdom, and so does the author of the chronicle of the reign of King Galawdéwos in the mid-16th century (Solomon Gebreyes, 2019: 4-5, 27). The center of this sultanate's power was the city of Dakar, which is attested as early as 1422 within the *Kitāb al-Ilmām bi-aḫbār man bi-arḍ al-Ḥabasha min mulūḳ al-islām* ("Book of the Perfect Knowledge on the Histories of the Kings of Islam in the Land of the Ḥabasha") by the Egyptian author Taqīy ad-Dīn Aḥmad al-Maqrīzī (d. 1442). This booklet was completed in Cairo in 1438, and it is devoted to the history of the Ethiopian Muslims from the late 13th to the early 15th centuries (Muth, 2005). It ends with the words: "Sultan Badlāy

resided in the land of Dakar (*bilād D.ḳ.r.*) and his brother Khayr ad-Dīn in the land of Rakala (*bilād R.ḳ.l.a-t*)" (Maqrīzī, 1998: 244). Both Christian and Muslim sources from the 15th and early 16th centuries, such as King Eskender's chronicle (r. 1478-1494) (Perruchon, 1894: 357), agree that Dakar was also the capital for the descendants of Saʿd ad-Dīn. The location of Dakar is not known. The only clue to its location is provided by ʿArab Faqīh, the author of the *Futūḥ al-Ḥabasha*, a mid-16th century Arabic account of the attempted Islamic conquest of the Christian kingdom of Ethiopia by Imām Aḥmad during the 1530s. He implies that Dakar was located a short distance from Harar (ʿArab Faqīh, 2003: 17). Several hypotheses have since been proposed that suggest Dakar was located a few kilometers east of Harar (Cerulli, 1936: 26). I have discussed these hypotheses further in a previous article (Chekroun, 2015).

In 1520, Dakar was abandoned as the capital of the Barr Saʿd ad-Dīn Sultanate in favor of a new city: Harar. According to the *Taʾrīḫ al-Walasmaʿ*, the Arabic Annals of the Walasmaʿ dynasty from its establishment at the end of the 13th century until the year 1520, and the *Taʾrīḫ al-mulūḳ* ("History of the Kings"), a brief Arabic text on the history of the Barr Saʿd ad-Dīn Sultanate in the 16th century, the capital of this sultanate was moved from Dakar to Harar in the month of *shaʿbān* in the year 926 AH (July-August 1520 AD) (Cerulli 1931: 50 and 55). The *Futūḥ al-Ḥabasha* confirms this shift of capital. The author repeatedly recalls that at the time of this war, Harar was the city of the Sultan and of the Imām, that it was from Harar that they ruled the "country," and that Harar was the heart of the sultanate (ʿArab Faqīh, 2003: 16, 17, 22, *s.q.*). It also states that under the *jarād*[2] Abūn, the predecessor of Imām Aḥmad, the city of Harar was already the capital, but that before him the capital was Dakar (ʿArab Faqīh, 2003: 19). This corroborates the two short Arabic texts mentioned above. On the contrary, no Ethiopian Christian text nor Portuguese source mentions the name Harar before the early modern period, whereas the former capital Dakar is named in some Christian texts, even after its desertion by the sultans (cf. Perruchon, 1894; Chekroun, 2015).

Contrary to the numerous oral traditions and texts from the late 19th until the early 20th century, archaeological research and radiocarbon dating by Timothy Insoll indicates that the city is no older than the late 15th century. This confirms the data quoted above from the 15th-16th century written sources. In 2014 and 2018, and for the first time ever, Timothy Insoll conducted archaeological research inside the city wall of Harar. He completed four archaeological test excavations, at Hamburti (the so-called "navel" of the city), at the Emir Nūr shrine, at Shagnila Toya, and at the Emir's Palace. He also excavated six mosques in the city: Aw Abdal, Aw Abadir, Aw Meshad, Din Agobera, Fehkredin, and Jami mosque. He chose to archaeologically

[2] Title of a local chief within the organization of the sultanate.

investigate these mosques as they were recognized by the oral traditions as the earliest of the numerous mosques inside the walled city (Insoll & Zekaria, 2017: 83). As such, Aw Abadir Mosque is believed to date from the 12th or early 13th century and the Aw Abdel Mosque from the end of the 13th century (Zekaria, 1979: 27-28). Din Agobera Mosque was described as being built upon a rock "where the first conversion to Islam took place" in the city (Foucher, 1994: 71). The Jami Mosque is the biggest mosque in the city, and the oral tradition states that it was first built with one tower minaret in 1216. As Enrico Cerulli recalls, an inscription on the wooden minbar inside Jami Mosque is a chronogram of the foundation date of the mosque: 1175 AH (1761-1762 AD) (Cerulli, 1936: 53), and Chiari (2015: 128) estimates its date to 1763-4 AD. This mosque has since undergone many reconstructions and modifications. From the six radiocarbon dates obtained from these six mosques, Insoll argues that they date from "a varied chronology spanning the late 15th and early 20th centuries AD" (Insoll & Zekaria, 2019: 81). According to his analysis and the radiocarbon dates obtained from his test excavations, Insoll concludes that "based on the currently available evidence it appears that Harar was a late, possibly 16th century foundation. […] Harar was not the earliest Islamic urban center in the region" (Insoll, 2017: 210) and "that all the Harari mosques investigated post-date the late 15th century and that the city also dates from this era and was linked with the establishment of Harar as the capital of [the Barr Saʿd ad-Dīn]" (Insoll & Zekaria, 2019: 81).

The sources do not give any details about the shape of the city in this period apart from the fact that the local religious scholars resided there, which suggests the presence of mosques, and that the palace of the sultan was located there. It is possible that the oral tradition noted in the mid-19th century by Burton (1955: 144) that refers to Harar as a "mere mass of Bedouin villages" before the installation of the sultans of the Barr Saʿd ad-Dīn is relatively representative of its historical reality, but it is also conceivable that it was already an important stop along the caravan route. Indeed, the location of this city has often been praised by observers for both its strategic position on the caravan route that linked the shores of the Red Sea to the heart of the Christian kingdom as well as for the richness of its immediate environment and especially its temperate climate. In his invaluable report on the political, economic, and social conditions of Harar following the Egyptian occupation in 1875-1876 (see Ben Dror, 2018: 60-65), the Egyptian officer Muḥammad Moktār remarked that:

> [T]he latitude of this city could lead one to believe that one experiences very strong heat there. However, this is not the case, thanks to its altitude above sea level […];

> the temperature is also very moderate and rather cold than hot; moreover, the gardens and crops that surround it contribute to making the heat weaker by the great development of vegetation. (Moktar, 1876: 361)

In May 1887, the French explorer Jules Borelli noted that, "Harar, by its position, by its commercial importance and the wealth of its campaigns, would become, under a good administration, the most lucrative of the Amhara conquests" (Borelli, 1890: 238). Many other examples could be listed here, but let us content ourselves with the remark of a connoisseur of the city who lived in Harar for many years at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century: the French Capuchin Azaïs who was a missionary, archaeologist, and member of the Catholic mission based in Harar. Azaïs described Harar as, "a gray island, surrounded by a sea of greenery of all shades where nature indulges" (Azaïs & Chambard, 1931: 18). Moreover, as Raphaël Alessandri points out, "the choice of the location of what would become Jugol can be explained, among other things, by the proximity of numerous springs, and by the relief of the hill, an area on which the constructions were developed, and which allowed for easy evacuation of rainwater" (Alessandri, 2004: 55). These qualities could explain the establishment of an early settlement on the site as well as why Harar was chosen as the new capital of the sultanate.

2. A few hints that explain the Dakar-Harar transfer

If geographical, meteorological, and geological conditions demonstrate why Harar was favorable for the establishment of a settlement, how can we explain the decision in 1520 to transfer the sultanate's center of power from Dakar to Harar? The precise reasons are unknown as this relocation of the Sultanate capital is barely documented by historical sources. However, the political and social context of the region and in particular of the Barr Saʿd ad-Dīn sultanate may provide some clues.

The Barr Saʿd ad-Dīn Sultanate was founded in the 1410-1420s by the sons of Sultan Saʿd ad-Dīn. After their father's death in Zaylaʿ in either 1408 or 1409, they crossed the Gulf of Aden and took refuge at the court of the Rasulid sultan in Taizz in Yemen for a few years. With the support of this Yemeni ruler, they eventually returned to the African coast, but not via the port of Zaylaʿ, which had fallen under Christian rule, but via the port of Siyāra, east of Berbera (Chekroun, 2020; Gonzalez-Ruibal et al., 2021: 6-16). They returned and waited "until God gave them the power to take back their country" (Maqrīzī, 1998: 240). After their return, they pursued a long period of reconquest of some former territories of the Awfāt Sultanate from the Christians. The Christians had taken advantage of the collapse of Awfāt and the escape of Saʿd ad-Dīn and his sons to impose their authority. The heart of the Awfāt sultanate, on the eastern escarpment of the Christian highlands,

fell under Christian rule (Fauvelle, Hirsch & Chekroun, 2017). Saʿd ad-Dīn's sons focused on an area much further east, roughly from the eastern high plateau of the Rift Valley to the port of Zaylaʿ. They named this new area after their father, the "land of Saʿd ad-Dīn" or Barr Saʿd ad-Dīn. However, the first decades of this sultanate seemed troubled, though a proper study of this period has yet to be conducted. The second half of the 15th century seems to have been more peaceful, even though both Christian and Muslim border raids still occurred (Chekroun & Hirsch, 2020a).

The 15th century ends with the long reign, from 1488 until about 1515 or 1517, of Sultan Muḥammad b. Aẓhar ad-Dīn b. ʿAlī b. Abū Bakr b. Saʿd ad-Dīn. This reign is primarily documented by ʿArab Faqīh in the *Futūḥ al-Ḥabasha*. Although this text describes later events, ʿArab Faqīh refers many times to what happened "in the time of Sultan Muḥammad" one of the "*mujāhidūn* who ruled over the Barr Saʿd ad-Dīn" (ʿArab Faqīh, 2003: 37-38, 46, etc.). Several expeditions led by Sultan Muḥammad, in person or at his behest, are mentioned, especially during the story of "Simū, son of Wanāj Jān" (ʿArab Faqīh, 2003: 120-122). According to this lengthy micro-narrative, two of the expeditions ordered by Sultan Muḥammad took place in Bāli and Dawāro during the reign of the Christian king Nā'od (r. 1495-1508):

> The sultan Muḥammad b. Azar [ad-Dīn b. ʿAlī][3] b. Abū Bakr b. Saʿd ad-Dīn ruled the country for thirty years during the ninth century. And after Sultan Muḥammad embarked on the *jihad* in the country of *al-Ḥabasha*, there was a clash between the Muslims and the infidels; with the infidels inflicting disaster upon the Muslims, killing a vast number of them. (ʿArab Faqīh, 2003: 8)

The most well documented expedition conducted during the reign of Sultan Muḥammad is the one he led jointly with Emir Maḥfūẓ just before his death. According to several sources, including the account of the Portuguese Francisco Álvarez who was present at the Christian king's court in the 1520s and the chapter devoted to the reign of Lebna Dengel that opens the chronicle of the Christian king Śarḍa Dengel (r. 1563-1597), Maḥfūẓ's head was cut off and was killed in the course of this expedition, his troops were massacred, and the sultan fled (Álvares, 1961: 410-415; Kropp, 1988: 2). According to Álvarez, this battle took place in July 1517, according to Bruce (1790: 322) in July 1516, and according to the Christian chronicles, later quoted by Pedro Paez in his *Historia da Etiopia*, when Lebna Dengel was 20 years old, in 1516-1517 (Paez, 2011: 477). However, Álvarez and Bruce match this event with the burning of the port of Zaylaʿ by Lopo Soarez, which they also date to 1514. In 1552, the Portuguese João de Barres dedicates a full chapter to this burning of Zaylaʿ in his history of Portuguese actions in the east and confirms the role of Lopo

[3] The sources give a different spelling: it is however the same Sultan Muḥammad.

Soarez in this event (De Barres, 1628: 13-14). The proposed date of 1514 by Álvarez is impossible insofar as in 1514, Lopo Soares de Albergaria was in Portugal and did not leave Europe until April 1515 as governor of Portuguese India when he transported on his ship, amongst others, Francisco Álvarez to Ethiopia. And it is indeed in 1517 that Lopo Soarez was in the Red Sea, and thus had the ability to set fire to Zaylaʿ (Ross, 1922: 275-276). Thus, the Christian victory, Maḥfūẓ's death, Sultan Muḥammad's flight, and Zaylaʿ's burning took place in 1517.

Just after his return from this expedition into Christian territory in 1517, Sultan Muḥammad is murdered. The sources describe the then turbulent times, which seemed to contribute to the relocation of the sultanate's capital from Dakar to Harar in 1520. In the *Futūḥ al-Ḥabasha*, ʿArab Faqīh lists no less than five men who ruled between Sultan Muḥammad b. Azar b. Saʿd ad-Dīn and his son Abū Bakr b. Muḥammad b. Azar b. Saʿd ad-Dīn:

> Returning to his country Sultan Muḥammad was murdered by his [son or brother] in-law Muḥammad b. Abū Bakr b. Maḥfūẓ, a prominent person in the country, who ruled the country after him for one year. Then Muḥammad b. Abū Bakr b. Maḥfūẓ was, in his turn, murdered. His killer was Ibrāhīm b. Aḥmad, ruler of the country of Hubat, of the tribe of Balaw, a prominent person in the country who ruled the country after him for three months. Ibrāhīm b. Aḥmad was killed in his turn. His murderer was Wasanī the slave of Garād Maḥfūẓ, a prominent person in the country who ruled the country for three months. He was arrested after this, and his captor was Manṣūr b. Muḥammad who sent him in shackles to Zaylaʿ and he was murdered by one of the slaves of Yāfaʿ in Zaylaʿ. In his stead ruled the emir Manṣūr b. Maḥfūẓ b. Muḥammad b. Garād Adash. Garād Manṣūr waged war against Garād Abūn for five months. After this Garād Abūn came against him, and ruled for seven years. […] After this the sultan Abū Bakr, son of the sultan Muḥammad b. Azar from the stock of Saʿd ad-Dīn, stood up against Garād Abūn. […] They fought against Garād Abūn and waged a bloody battle against him, killing Garād Abūn b. Adash […]. The sultan Abū Bakr ruled the country after Garād Abūn. (ʿArab Faqīh, 2003: 8-10)

This period is notably marked by the systematic murder of the reigning ruler by the next ruler, or by one of his relatives. None of these five rulers were descendants of Saʿd ad-Dīn and therefore none were members of the legitimate dynasty. They seem to have been regional rulers under the sultanate authority, Ibrāhīm b. Aḥmad for example, who was the ruler of Hubat. During these few years, therefore, some regions – including Hubat, from which *jarād* Abūn and the Imām Aḥmad also originated – would have attempted to overrule the authority of the Barr Saʿd ad-Dīn's sultans.

At about the same period of time, the author of the *Taʾrīḫ al-Walasmaʿ*, the annals of the legitimate dynasty descended from Umar Walasmaʿ and then Saʿd ad-Dīn, notes:

> Then reigned after him Sultan Muḥammad Aẓhar ad-Dīn b. ʿAlī b. Abū Bakr b. Saʿd ad-Dīn in the year eight hundred and eighty-three of the Hegira. The duration of his reign was thirty-one years; some say it was thirty-two years; the duration of his reign was the longest among those of the line of the Walasmaʿ. And after him reigned Sultan ʿAlī b. Muḥammad b. Aẓhar ad-Dīn and Allah knows it. The duration of his reign was two years. And after him reigned Sultan Faḫr ad-Dīn one year and half a year. And after that reigned our lord Abū Bakr b. our lord Muḥammad b. Aẓhar ad-Dīn. (Cerulli, 1931: 49)

The five men listed by ʿArab Faqīh do not appear in this legitimate list, which is probably precisely because they are not legitimate. However, these few years seem troubled, if only because of the reigns' brevity. Second, Faḫr ad-Dīn, who reigned between Muḥammad's two sons, does not seem to have been a Saʿd ad-Dīn descendant and he would therefore have been a usurper. That said, the author gives him the title of sultan and thus credits him a certain legitimacy. Indeed, this same author does not provide the title of sultan to another usurper who reigned before Sultan Muḥammad, a man named "Ibrāhīm b. *qāṭ* Naṣr ad-Dīn," who reigned for only 10 months before being murdered and replaced by Muḥammad. Third, these few reigns mark a narrative break within the *Taʾrīḫ al-Walasmaʿ*. Unlike previous reigns since Saʿd ad-Dīn for which precise dates are systematically given, only vague reign lengths are noted for Sultan Muḥammad's reign. This is quite surprising as they are the last reigns mentioned, and they are also the closest to the writing period. There is no reason why the author should know the precise reign dates of the 15th century sultans and not those of the sultans he most likely knew personally. Is this vagueness an expression of the troubled period that appears in ʿArab Faqīh's text?

Another indication that the shift of the capital occurred during troubled times is the discrepancy between the sources on this matter. Two texts explicitly mention this shift: the *Taʾrīḫ al-Walasmaʿ* and the *Taʾrīḫ al-mulūḳ*. The *Taʾrīḫ al-Walasmaʿ* notes:

> And after that reigned our lord Abū Bakr b. our lord Muḥammad b. Aẓhar ad-Dīn and Allah knows it. It was he who transferred the people and the army from the land of Dakar to Harar to settle there in the month of *shaʿbān* of the year nine hundred and twenty-six [i.e. July 17-August 14, 1520] and he remained seventy-four years before the year one thousand of the Prophet's Hegira [i.e. 1591-1592], may the best of prayers and the purest of peace be upon him. (Cerulli, 1931: 49)

And the author of the *Ta'rīḫ al-mulūḳ* on the other hand considers that:

> The movement of the *jarād* Abūn and the Sultan Abū Bakr b. Muḥammad Aẓhar ad-Dīn, from Dakar to Harar, to settle in the latter, took place during the month of *sha'bān* in the year 926 H. (Mercier, 2020: 41)

Written from the sultans' point of view, the first text indicates that it was Sultan Abū Bakr b. Muḥammad b. Aẓhar ad-Dīn alone who transferred the population and the army of Dakar to a place called Harar. On the other hand, the second text indicates that while this move was made by the same Sultan Abū Bakr b. Muḥammad b. Aẓhar ad-Dīn, he was helped by the *jarād* Abūn. We have seen that the *jarād* Abūn, according to 'Arab Faqīh, took power over the sultanate during the troubled period and then was overthrown by Abū Bakr b. Muḥammad. According to the *Futūḥ al-Ḥabasha*, the *jarād* Abūn continued his struggle against Abū Bakr long after this overthrow. Indeed, the Imām Aḥmad is said to have been under his command until his death and continued the struggle against Abū Bakr ('Arab Faqīh, 2003: 9). Moreover, the author of the *Ta'rīḫ al-mulūḳ* considers the *jarād* Abūn to be so important, that in addition to associating him with Abū Bakr for the transfer of Dakar to Harar, he precisely specifies the time of his death: "The *jarād* Abūn was killed at the time of twilight on Tuesday, the 7th of the month of *sha'bān* in the year 931 H. [i.e., Tuesday, May 30, 1525 AD]" (Mercier, 2020: 41). No other information on this period is contained in this text. Sultan Abū Bakr's death is not even mentioned even though we know from the *Futūḥ al-Ḥabasha* that he was killed by Imām Aḥmad during the 1520s and after *jarād* Abūn's death ('Arab Faqīh, 2003: 21; Chekroun & Hirsch, 2020b). It seems for the author of the *Ta'rīḫ al-mulūḳ*, the *jarād* Abūn is much more important than the Sultan Abū Bakr.

Thus, the scant evidence about this period all tends to demonstrate that, before moving the capital of the sultanate from Dakar to Harar, the period was politically unstable. However, while there is no question that the transfer of the capital must have been intimately linked to the internal conflicts within the sultanate, it is difficult, given the available documentation, to understand the precise reasons for it. Was it a tactic on the part of the sultan to distance himself from voices that spoke out against his authority? Is it an attempt to re-found the sultanate on new foundations or a sign of an oppositional victory that made him flee? Are there other reasons (climatic, economic, etc.) for this choice? Was the pressure from some neighboring Somali populations also a factor?

3. Fortifications of the Barr Sa'd ad-Dīn's urban places

As mentioned in the historical sources, at least during the 19th century – but we can also assume since the foundation of the emirate in the mid-17th – the

emirs of Harar controlled the entrances to the city.[4] The 4- to 5-meter-high city wall that demarcates the city has 5 gates (Wagner, 2005: 1013). Before the Egyptian occupation, these gates were locked at night, the keys were guarded by the authorities, and foreigners were forced to leave the city walls (Abdullahi Mohammed Ahmed, 1990: 322). The city's wall thus formed a border between the city and the surrounding countryside. In 1875, following internal conflicts in the emirate, the city was occupied for 10 years by the Egyptians who reorganized its administration and opened the city to foreigners and non-Muslims. As demonstrated by Avishai Ben Dror in his book dedicated to the Egyptian occupation of Harar, "the Egyptians preserved one of the most prominent symbols of Harar – the *jugal* (city wall). They did not change the route of the wall, but rather renewed and strengthened its gates" (Ben Dror, 2018: 77; Hecht, 1982: 57-58). Finally, the conquest of the city by Menelik II in 1897 and the integration of the region into the Ethiopian Empire marked the definitive opening of the city and the abandonment of the use of gates as a system of limiting access.

The first mention of the construction of the city wall appears in documentation during the government of Emir Nūr. The latter placed the legitimate sultan [i.e. a descendant of Saʿd ad-Dīn] under guardianship as early as 1551-1552. Nūr then ruled Harar and the Barr Saʿd ad-Dīn until his death in 1567-1568. Emir Nūr is primarily known for killing the Christian King Galawdéwos in 1559, which is cited both in textual sources and in oral tradition, and specifically within the Galawdéwos chronicle (Solomon Gebreyes, 2019: 56-58) and the *Taʾrīḫ al-mulūḫ*:

> He is the one who led the second conquest as well as the one who killed the king of the Ḥabasha. He fought the king named Aṭnāf Sajad, killed him and cut off his head. He went down with that head to the Barr Saʿd ad-Dīn and I saw it myself with my own eyes. (Mercier, 2020: 41)

But Emir Nūr is also known for giving Harar its present shape. In the same period, what historiography calls "the great Oromo migrations" began. Though the time frame and modalities of the migrations remain obscure (cf. Ficquet, 2002), these "migrations" saw the installation of Oromo populations who probably came from southern regions of the country into the southern and eastern

[4] In 1855, Richard Burton presented himself before the Emir not disguised as he previously had been as an Arab merchant. He thus became the first undisguised European to visit Harar. He notes: "After sitting for an hour at the eastern gate, waiting the permission of the Emir to enter his walls, we were ordered by a grim guard to follow" (Burton, 1855: 147). To my knowledge, this is the first mention of the control of the city entrances by the Emirs in the sources.

half of the Christian kingdom and into Barr Saʿd ad-Dīn territories. The Oromos supplanted the existing populations present in the medieval period and in particular the Muslim populations under the domination of the Barr Saʿd ad-Dīn Sultanate, including those surrounding the city of Harar. The *Taʾrīḫ al-mulūḳ* explains that the construction of the walls was undertaken in large part in order to defend against the newly arrived Oromo who were plundering the region:

> There came an exceptional famine in our country. […] The Jāla [i.e. Oromos] plundered the people of all regions. […] The *Jāla* [i.e. Oromos] plundered (*taḫaṭṭafa*) the area and preyed (*ḫarraba*) on the region (*balad*) of Sīm, Shawā, Nujub, Jidāya and Dakkar and most of the land of Harjāyā. The survivors built fortifications (*al-ḥuṣūn*) and dug trenches (*al-ḫandaq*). (Cerulli, 1931: 53; Mercier, 2020: 42)

In response to the Oromo attacks, it seems that a general fortification of the region took place. The regions mentioned here are also found in other textual sources of the time. These are some of the main territories under the authority of the Sultans of Barr Saʿd ad-Dīn. Some of them are mentioned as early as the 13th century in the *Dhikr at-tawārīḫ*, the so-called "Chronicle of Shawah." These annals of some Ethiopian Muslim territories in the 12th-13th century, written in Arabic at the end of the 13th century, mention many Islamic territories, including Shawah and Jidāyah that the *Taʾrīḫ al-mulūḳ* says were fortified in the mid-16th century. Shawah and Jidāyah, but also Dakar, Harjāya and Sīm, are found in many Arabic and Geʿez sources of the 14th and 15th century (see Chekroun, forthcoming) up to the writing of the *Taʾrīḫ al-mulūḳ* and the mention of their fortification. These regions do not only appear in the textual sources after the collapse of the Barr Saʿd ad-Dīn, but also just after their fortification.

The ambiguity of the quotation from the *Taʾrīḫ al-mulūḳ* implies that, in addition to Harar, all the localities mentioned and that were attacked by the Oromos were fortified. Moreover, Harar is not explicitly mentioned in this list. No precise date is provided in this text, however, in Harar, these fortifications seem to have been decided upon before the death of Emir Nūr and after his return from his war against the Christian king [i.e. after 1559-1560 and before 1567-1568]. Furthermore, the same text mentions the presence of a gate and a ditch surrounding the city in the 1570s within a description that leaves no doubt about the presence of fortifications surrounding the city:

> They even arrived at the city of Harar and besieged its people for several days. Fighting took place between them at the entrance to Harar, until the city gate was filled with corpses and the Jāla turned back. The wazīr was wounded by about twenty blows from the blades and collapsed in the ditch. God Almighty saved him; he was brought back to the city of Harar and lived. (Mercier, 2020: 44)

Other textual sources confirm this period of fortifications. Shortly thereafter, the port city of Zaylaʿ, under the Barr Saʿd ad-Dīn Sultanate authority, was also adorned with protective walls. A fragment of a chronicle in Arabic from the late 16th century explains that this construction was carried out at the behest of the city's governor, the *jarād* Lādū, by a man from Yemeni origin, a Qurashī:

> And he began [the construction] of the walls [*darb*[5]] of Zaylaʿ to protect it, and this happened on the day of Wednesday, the fifth of the month of *safar* of prosperity. This was by the hand of ʿAṭiya b. Muḥammad al-Qurashī, who was in charge of the construction of the walls by the governor of Zaylaʿ at that time, who was the *jarād* Lādū. The sultān Muḥammad b. sultān Naṣīr was then in al-Ḥabasha [i.e. Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia]. The *jarād* Lādū died in the land of Awsah in the village of Warābah on Friday, the 26th of the month of *shawwal* in the year 996 [i.e., September 18, 1588]. (Cerulli, 1931: 89)

The decision to build walls "to protect it" probably took place between 1575 and 1577. According to the *Taʾrīḫ al-mulūḳ*, Sultan Muḥammad b. Naṣir b. ʿUṭmān b. Badlay ruled over the Barr Saʿd ad-Dīn between 1572/3 and 1577. He went on an expedition against the Christian kingdom towards the end of his reign. This expedition was a bitter failure for the Muslims who notably suffered a part of their troops deserting to the Christian side. During the sultan's absence in 1575/6, a man named Manṣur b. Muḥammad b. Ayyūb moved to Harar to fight the Oromos (Cerulli, 1931: 162-163; Paulitschke, 1888: 509). Christian sources confirm the date of this Sultan Muḥammad' expedition. The *Short Chronicle*, a compilation of short notices regarding the history of Christian Ethiopia from the legendary reign of Menilek I to the modern period, states that in the 13th year of Śarḍa Dengel's reign (r. 1563-1597), i.e. in 1576, Muḥammad arrived in Christian territory and that "in the 14th year, [Śarḍa Dengel] marched against Muḥammad, gave battle to him in the valley of the Wabi River, chase him off, and wintered at Zaḥon-dour" (Basset, 1881: 117). As for the chronicle of Śarḍa Dengel's reign, it notes that "the king of Adal, called Muḥammad" arrived in Christian territory in the 13th year of that king's reign. He killed the "chiefs of the Muslim (*malasāy*) tribes" and their families. Even if they were Muslim, because they were Muslim vassals of the Christian king, this was seen as an attack on the Christian kingdom. In 1577, the following year, Śarḍa Dengel decided to attack Muḥammad, whom he found on the side of the Wabi, a river south of his kingdom. After more than a month of fighting, Muḥammad was betrayed by one of his own, captured, and killed in the Christian camp (Conti Rossini, 1907: 56 and 59). Thus, between 1575 and 1577, while the Sultan of the Barr Saʿd ad-Dīn was

[5] E. Cerulli points out that the term *darb* in East African Arabic refers to a "surrounding wall," and that this meaning has passed into Somali, where the term "*derbi*" is synonymous (Cerulli, 1931: 89 note 1).

fighting the Christian king and the Oromos continued to attack the sultanate's territories, the governor of Zaylaʿ decided on the construction of protective walls just as Emir Nūr had decided a decade earlier in Harar.

This surrounding wall was described three centuries later by Richard Burton, during his visit to Zaylaʿ before going to Harar in 1854:

> After hearing the worst accounts of it, I was pleasantly disappointed by the spectacle of white-washed houses and minarets, peering above a long low line of brown wall, flanked with round towers. […] The walls, without guns or embrasures, are built, like the houses, of coralline rubble and mud, in places dilapidated. There are five gates. […] We must return before sunset, when the gates are locked and the keys are carried to the Hajj [i.e. El Hajj Sharmarkay b. Ali Salih, governor of Zaylaʿ under the orders of the Ottoman pasha], a vain precaution, when a donkey could clear half a dozen places in the town wall (Burton, 1856: 14, 21 and 48-49).

Well preserved and accessible via five gates, this wall worked in the same way as the one of Harar: at nightfall, entrance to the city was forbidden and the keys to the gates were kept by the governor. This wall surrounding the port of Zaylaʿ no longer exists. During their two 2001 visits to Somaliland, François-Xavier Fauvelle and Bertrand Hirsch identified the remains of a probable enclosure wall to the south of the present-day city, which they included within their topographical survey of the city but did not describe elsewhere (Fauvelle-Aymar et al., 2011: Fig. 2.2). Other medieval urban sites in Somaliland appear to have had similar enclosure walls, such as with the site of Amud, where "what could be the foundations of the medieval enclosure" exist as well as with the site of Sheikh where "the remains of a wall that could be an enclosure wall are noted" (*Ibid*.: 41). In contrast, the ERC project StateHorn (2020-2025), which is currently excavating five medieval sites in Somaliland, considers that, "as it is commonly the case for the medieval sites throughout Somaliland, it has no defensive walls" (https://statehorn.com/portfolio/abasa/). However, these Somaliland sites are not dated, and no texts mention them. The future results of the ERC project StateHorn should provide a better understanding and dating of possible fortifications at Barr Saʿd ad-Dīn sites beyond just the main locations of Harar and Zaylaʿ and confirm or disconfirm the information in the *Taʾrīḫ al-mulūḳ*.

Thus, it appears that the fortification of (or at least some of) Barr Saʿd ad-Dīn's urban sites was a common strategy and more or less simultaneously directed process during the second half of the 16th century in response to the arrival of the Oromos and the various upheavals the region experienced during this period (Mercier, 2022a). It should be noted that the urban sites of Awfāt, the sultanate that preceded that of the Barr Saʿd ad-Dīn in the 13th-14th centuries, also show remains of impressive fortifications. For instance, the archaeological site of Nora, dated to the 14th century, revealed a massive wall

that blocked access to the city to the north (Fauvelle, Hirsch & Chekroun, 2018: 256 and Fig. 6). The cities of Awfāt were thus fortified and probably because of their position, which was close to Christian territories. On the other hand, Barr Sa'd ad-Dīn's urban sites would have been fortified only at the extreme end of the sultanate's history in order to defend themselves not from Christian attacks but from the new Oromo threat and epidemics. Does this mean that no fortifications existed or were needed in the Barr Sa'd ad-Dīn before the second half of the 16th century? It is difficult to assess such a question. First, Harar had only been an important political center for a few decades by the 1560s, and these periods were rife with political instability. The sultans may not yet have had time to adorn their new capital with city walls. Second, the first capital of the Barr Sa'd ad-Dīn was the city of Dakar where the sultans remained for more than a century. No description of this city is recorded and its archaeological site has yet to be identified (Chekroun, 2015). It is possible that this city was fortified as early as the 15th century, although the brief excerpt from the *Ta'rīḫ al-mulūḳ* mentions Dakar in the list of places attacked by the Oromos when fortifications were built in the 1560s. Similarly, how can it be explained that Zayla', the main African port in the Gulf of Aden since at least the 13th century (Fauvelle-Aymar et al., 2011: 51-70), did not have fortifications before the second half of the 16th century? Perhaps the burning of Zayla' by Lopo Soarez and the Portuguese in 1517 led to the destruction of the medieval walls and the need to build new ones a few decades later. Indeed, in 1503, the Italian traveler Ludovico di Varthema, on his way to Persia from Aden, found himself carried by the winds to Zayla' where he stayed a few days while waiting for more favorable winds. He wrote a brief description of the city in his travelogue, which was published in Italian in 1510. He notes: "The place has poor walls and a bad port nevertheless it is situated on level ground and the mainland" (Varthema, 1863: 87-88). These "poor walls" that existed at the very beginning of the century, and which later suffered a fire as well as a Portuguese attack and subsequent years of war most likely needed to be rebuilt in order to strengthen the fortifications of the city during the second half of the 16th century.

Still, the construction of Harar's walls by Emir Nūr was not an isolated case. However, due to its position as the capital of the sultanate and then of the Emirate, on the one hand, and as the only city to have continued to prosper in the early modern and contemporary eras on the other, Harar is the only urban site from this period to have retained its wall erect. The walls of the urban sites of Somaliland are now entirely ruined (and perhaps have been since the collapse of the Barr Sa'd ad-Din in the second half of the 16th century). The port of Zayla', which was supplanted by Djibouti and the construction of the railroad, declined during the 20th century to the point where it is now a small, ruined village.

To conclude these few thoughts on the early history of Harar, it is also worth pointing out that Harar ceased to be the capital of the Barr Saʿd ad-Dīn when Muḥammad Gasha moved to Awsa, marking the collapse of the sultanate (Mercier, 2020). This transfer from Harar to Awsa in the end of the 16th century took place within a context of serious internal crisis (Mercier, 2022a). It is interesting to note the parallel between the shift of power from Dakar to Harar due to a complex political context with the shift from Harar to Awsa, which again occurred within a time of crisis and during the collapse of the Barr Saʿd ad-Dīn. In the end, Harar remained the capital of the sultanate for only a few decades The construction of fortifications during this half-century remains closely linked to the figure of Emir Nūr in contemporary oral tradition. In fact, there is no evidence today that the city was not already equipped with a protective system before the reign of Nūr and that the city walls as we know it today dates from this period. Until archaeological excavations allow us to precisely date the phases of construction of these walls, which have been reworked and rebuilt many times, it will be impossible to date the form and organization of the walled Islamic city as it appears in the sources since the 19th century. As Héloïse Mercier's work shows, the writing and rewriting of Harar's history during the late 19th century and the 20th century crystallized some narratives and associations in contemporary historical understanding, notably the importance of the figure of Nūr within the history of the city and its organization into 5 quarters and 5 gates. But, as this paper has shown, the sources are silent on these matters before the 19th century. Moreover, the walls and gates underwent many changes over the centuries. To provide one example, the gate "Bāb al-Futūḥ" is described as being to the west of the city in a 17th-century Arabic document published by Enrico Cerulli who recounted the coming of two sheriffs to Harar: "And the two Sheriffs used to go out to the Gate of the Conquests (*Bāb al-Futūḥ*) from the Western side and sit down to rest there" (Cerulli, 1931: 94). However, this same gate, whose Harari name is Assum Bari and Amharic name is Fällana Bärr, is cited as being located north of the city of Harar as early as the mid-19th century (see Burton, 1855: 144; Wagner, 2005b: 1013).

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