Teaching *Wadla Qəne* Today: Observations from a Field Research in the Wadla Region

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1 Introduction

The topic of this article, *qəne*, has very much to do with the identity of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tāwəḥədo Church and with its traditional oral education. *Qəne* (and *wadla qəne*) is intrinsically part of this very ancient African church, officially established and proclaimed as state religion around 340.¹ *Qəne* is a poem composed in the Gəʿəz language, the ancient language of Christian Ethiopia, and having a double meaning: the direct one also called wax (*säm*), and the hidden one called gold (*wäraq*), referring to the goldsmith's technique of casting gold shapes within a wax mould. Whereas the writing in Gəʿəz has virtually ceased, the oral composition and use of *qəne* in Gəʿəz continues to this day.² In every major church, the person who has the ability to compose the *qəne* and was trained and graduate from the *qəne* school, creates a *qəne* which is sung during the liturgy and other festive church services.³

Qəne is a kind of 'philosophical' or rather spiritual message composed in the Christian context of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church which is given and shared by all those who listen to it while it is sung in church. *Wadla qəne* was created in the region of Wadla (in Wällo province today).⁴ It is the most important type of *qəne* as it is the basis for all its other types.

1 Stuart Munro-Hay, "Christianity," in *EAE* 1 (2003): 717.

2 Getatchew Haile, "Gəʿəz literature," in *EAE* 2 (2005): 738–739.

3 *Ibid.*, 736–738.

4 Wadla is a historical district in the Amhara region to the south of Lasta and to the west of Angot and has been recognized as a province since the end of the 15th century. In the imperial administrative division, it was paired with Dälanta in the administrative division (*awraġġa*) of Wadla Dälanta. Today it is one of the districts (*wäräda*) in the Amhara Region of northern eastern Ethiopia and is named after the former district which lays roughly in the same area. Part of the Sämen (nothern) Wällo zone, Wadla is bordered on the southeast by Dälanta, on the southwest by Dawənt, on the north by Mäqet, and on the northeast by Guba Lafto. Today the major and administrative town in Wadla is Kon. The majority of the inhabitants practice

According to the tradition of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the *wadla qəne* is the original *qəne* created by Yoḥannəs Gäblawi. It is known to be particularly difficult on account of its grammar as well as its composition and interpretation, using many equivocal words, allusions and allegoric figures. The *wadla qəne* was created in the region of Wadla. It is in that area⁵ that my research and interviews took place. Wadla is also the name of a type of church poetry (*qəne*) proper to the Ethiopian Orthodox Təwəhədo Church. In fact, in the Ethiopian Orthodox tradition, Wadla region is said to be the place of origin of *qəne*. This was the reason of my interest to visit the place, in order to make interviews with *qəne* teachers and to see what they could tell me about *wadla qəne*, about the present situation of the teaching of *qəne* in Wadla, including of *wadla qəne*, and also to continue my quest for *qəne* and its teaching today.⁶ I also asked some questions about the *qəne* teachers' life conditions and that of their students.

In the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the students who study *qəne* must also study other topics necessary to be trained as deacons and later as priests, first of all the Eucharistic liturgy (*qəddase*). They may also study liturgical music (*zema*), with *dəggʷa* and *šomä dəggʷa* and, according to their choice, for a better education, they can also study "the Books," that is of the Scriptures, the Old and New Testaments, the Church Fathers, the monastic literature, as well as ecclesiastical law. Thus, apart from poetry (*qəne*), other subjects studied in the traditional schools of the Ethiopian Orthodox Təwəhədo Church will be named in this article such as the study of the liturgy (*qəddase*), chanting (*zema*), and exegesis or the Scripture (*mäṣḥaf*).⁷

Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity. The largest ethnic group reported in Wadla is the Amhara. Evgenia Sokolinskaia, "Wadla," in *E Ae* 4 (2010): 1067.

5 See all the names quoted in this article (in a different transliteration) in the detailed map: Svein Ege, *North Wälo 1:100,000. Topographic and administrative map of North Wälo Zone, Amhara Region, Ethiopia* (Trondheim: Norwegian University of Science and Technology, 2002). Such detailed maps with the names of Ethiopian Orthodox churches should be made for all Ethiopia.

6 See Christine Chaillot, *The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church Tradition. A Brief Introduction to Its Life and Spirituality* (Paris: Inter-Orthodox Dialogue, 2002).

7 Sevir Chernetsov, "Traditional Christian education," in *E Ae* 2 (2005): 228–230. See also: Chaillot, *The Ethiopian Orthodox Church Tradition*, 83–100. For the Psalter (*Dawit*), see: Marilyn Heldman, "Psalter," in *E Ae* 4 (2010): 231–233. For the liturgical music (*zema*), see: Anne Damon-Guillot, "Zema," in *E Ae* 5 (2014): 174. For the liturgical books (*dəggʷa*), see: Habtemichael Kidane, "Dəggʷa," in *E Ae* 2 (2005): 123–124. For *šomä dəggʷa*, book used from the beginning of Lent to Easter, see: Habtemichael Kidane, "Šomä Dəggʷa," in *E Ae* 4 (2010): 691–692. For Eucharistic liturgy (*qəddase*), see: Emmanuel Fritsch, "Qəddase," in *E Ae* 4 (2010): 271–275. For theology and particularly exegesis of the Scripture (*mäṣḥaf*) studied in the house of the books (*mäṣḥaf bet*) including the interpretation of the Old and New Testaments, of

For the composition of the *qəne*, specific grammatical, symbolic and other rules have to be maintained.⁸ Students may study all types of *qəne*. The place where *qəne* is taught is called “the house of the *qəne*” (*qəne bet*), one possible stage of the traditional church education in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Here the students focus on the theory and practice of the composition of *qəne*. This study is difficult and can take many years. The student must first perfectly master the ancient church language, Gə‘əz, by building up his vocabulary as well as composing and interpreting *qəne*. He must also profoundly study traditional Ethiopian Christian cultural, social, intellectual and educational and spiritual values.⁹ The students move from place to place, in order to study with some very good *qəne* teachers of their choice.

The main historic centers for learning *qəne* are in Wadla (Wällo), Goṅṅ (Goṅṅam), Wašāra (Damot/Goṅṅam), and also Gondär, each having distinct features.¹⁰ As the learning of *qəne* requires studying with different teachers and in different schools and places, students attend lessons with more than one master and in more than one school, in order to reach a high level of mastering *qəne*.¹¹

According to Ethiopian Orthodox church scholars, the *qəne* goes back to St. Yared, since short *qəne*-like compositions are found in the *daggʷa* (liturgical book with hymns and troparies) said to be composed by him.¹² But, according to Habtemichael Kidane, St. Yared does not appear to have set the forms and meters for the genre thus his hymns cannot be defined as *qəne*.¹³

the Church Fathers (*liqawənt*) and of the Monastic literature (*māṣahəftä mänäkosat*), see: Habtemichael Kidane, “Māṣhaf bet,” in *E Ae* 3 (2007), 834. For liturgical dance and its instrumental accompaniment (*aqqʷaqʷam*), see: Kay Kaufman-Shelemay, “Aqʷaqʷam,” in *E Ae* 1 (2003): 293. For the hymn called *mästägaber*, name also used as a hymn for the study of hymnody, see: Ezra Gebremedhin, “Mästägabə,” in *E Ae* 3 (2007): 857–858. For *arbaʿət*, element found in the *daggʷa* and *šomä daggʷa*, see: Habtemichael Kidane, “Arbaʿət,” in *E Ae* 1 (2003): 317.

8 Habtemichael Kidane, “Qəne,” in *E Ae* 4 (2010): 283–285.

9 Ibid., 285.

10 Ibid., 286 referring to Admasu Ğämbäre, *Māṣhafä Qəne (Zəkrä Liqawənt)* [*The Book of the Qəne (The Memory of the Scholars)*] (Addis Abāba, 1970/71), 10. At the 17th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies in Addis Abāba in November 2009, I presented another paper: Christine Chaillot, “How to Preserve the History of the Oral Traditional Education of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in Ethiopia: *Qəne* teachers in Wašāra, Goṅṅ, Sälalo and elsewhere in Goṅṅam,” in *African Studies. Forging New Perspectives and Directions*, ed. Nina Pawlak, Hanna Rubinowska-Anioł and Izabela Will (Warszawa: Elipsa, 2016), 199–215.

11 Habtemichael Kidane, “Qəne bet,” 286.

12 Yared is credited with the invention of Ethiopian church music and hymnody. Cf. Antonella Brita, “Yared,” in *E Ae* 5 (2014): 26–28.

13 Habtemichael Kidane, “Qəne,” 284.

In fact, the beginning of the composition of *qəne* is attributed to an early 15th-century scholar from Wadla named Yoḥannəs Gäblawi.¹⁴ This is the Wadla claim. Then there is the Goḡḡam claim (in Goḡḡam)—attributing the deed to a certain Tāwanäy who flourished after the 15th century. The line of Yoḥannəs Gäblawi is said to have precedence on other *qəne* teachers. Yoḥannəs Gäblawi is said to have acquired his *qəne* inspiration during a spiritual meditation. Some say that he was born at Gäblon in Wadla (Lasta), and that his *qəne* flourished at the time of Emperor Zär'a Ya'əqob (1434–1468). Later Dədq Wäldä Maryam and Tāwanäy formed two separate *qəne* styles—the *wadla* and the *goḡḡ* schools. The Wadla school was led by a succession of seven teachers—all with the title *dədq*.¹⁵

In his book, a collection of *qəne*, a great contemporary Ethiopian Orthodox scholar and a *qəne* specialist, Admasu Ġämbäre,¹⁶ gives a genealogy of the *wadla qəne* teachers. He writes: “When one is asked who started [*qəne*] there are some who say Yoḥannəs Zäḡäblon born in Wadla; there are some who say Tāwanäy or Däqqä Əstifa born in Goḡḡam.”¹⁷ Then Admasu Ġämbäre says that all are right and that there is no reason to quarrel about this. In a short history of Wadla and Goḡḡam *qəne*, he states:

First the Wadla party group made as their basis the history that the one who started *qəne* was Yared. In 1460 year of mercy, Yoḥannəs Gäblawi after realizing that it was Yared who started the *qəne* way asked him: ‘Reveal it for me.’ He went for a retreat (he hid himself to pray and fast) to a place called Däbrä Tabor which is located between Boräna and Amara Sayənt. It is said that this place was the town of King Yəkunno Amlak. After that the mystery [of *qəne*] together with versification was revealed to him [...]. After that he taught *Abba Wäldä Gäbrə'el*, (and) *Abba Wäldä Gäbrə'el* taught *Šämrä Ab*; *Šämrä Ab* taught around 1470 year of mercy in the time of Emperor Bä'ədä Maryam. [...] After that *Šämrä Ab* taught *Ləḥib*; *Ləḥib* taught *Elyab*; *Elyab* taught *Dədq Wäldä Maryam* and *Tāwanäy*. At that time *Grañ* invaded [Ethiopia] and the government was disturbed. *Tāwanäy* stayed on an island called *Däqqä Əstifa* on the island of the Lake

14 This was told to me by several *qəne* teachers.

15 See a list of teachers in: Mariye, “The Origin of Qəne and the sources for the Qəne Subject Matter.” Such lists are traditionnaly learned by heart by the students in *qəne* schools and (thus) may somehow differ.

16 Tedros Abraha, “Admasu Ġämbäre,” in *E Ae* 5 (2014): 221.

17 Admasu Ġämbäre, *Mäṣḥafä Qəne*, 10.

Tana. When he was leaving that place, he removed the most important part of Gəʼəz grammar (*aggäbab*); he kept only *qəne*. Because his master Elyab had already died and because he was not willing to ask his brother Dədq Wäldä Maryam, he abandoned the grammar and started to teach only *qəne*. That is why there is not much grammar and verb conjugation in the *gong qəne*. But Dədq Wäldä Maryam went to a place called Yäčäräqa in Dawənt and stayed there together with other scholars. He kept the verb conjugation and the grammar and taught. After him six scholars followed him and each of them had the name *dədq*. *Dədq* means 'hero.' When one says, 'a hero of mystery' [that is of *qəne*], one means *dədq*. At the time of the sixth *dədq* the community of students became large and so seven [types of] *awağ*,¹⁸ seven [types of] verb conjugations and seven [types of] grammar were taught there.¹⁹

In another book, Habtä Maryam Wärqənäh, at one time head of the Holy Trinity cathedral in Addis Abäba (*liqä šəltanat*), has got one chapter about *qəne*.²⁰ This is what Habtä Maryam says about Yoḥannəs Gäblawi:

The place where he lived was Wällo, in Amara Sayənt, in the town of Däbrä Tabor. He taught many people. But the one who became a role model or who was his successor was a monk called *Abba Wäldä Gäbräʼel*. *Abba Wäldä Gäbräʼel* taught Šämrä Krəstos; he is also called Šämrä Ab. Šämrä Ab taught having expanded his school, he took more students. He even taught Emperor Bəʼədä Maryam. [...] This Šämrä Ab taught Ləhib and Elyas. Elyas taught Täwanäy and Dədq Wäldä Maryam. Täwanäy became the father of the *gong* way; Dədq Wäldä Maryam became the role model for the *wadla* way. The *qəne* bet or the difference in the [*qəne*] way began at that time. It was the time of war, the [16th century Muslim] Grañ invasion, so there was not much communication among them. Therefore, Täwanäy's disciples made the *qəne* difficult and the grammar (*aggäbab*) short. But because Dədq Wäldä Maryam continued to teach and kept his position, (he) managed to keep the way of *qəne* and the principles of grammar (*aggäbab*). Because he was known by his name, those who continued his teachings were called 'dədq' and continued teaching. This is

18 It is a general study of the Gəʼəz grammar.

19 Ibid., 10–11.

20 Habtä Maryam Wärqənäh, *Ṭəntawi Yä-Itiopya Sərʼatä Təmhərt* [*The Ancient Educational System of Ethiopia*] (Addis Abäba: Bərhanəna Sälām Qädamawi Haylä Šəllase Mattämiya Bet, 1970/71), 172–211.

why, being called the *wadla qəne* or grammar (*aggäbab*), it is praised and is called after them. In this way, the history tells about seven Dədq who taught the *wadla* way. However, the last *dədq* taught Dədq Wäldä Maryam. Dədq Wäldä Maryam taught Ma'əbäl Wäldä Həywät Meča. Ma'əbäl Wäldä Həywät taught *Aläqa* Getahun Gete Gämora Mika'el Däbr. After that, however, one teacher started mixing the *wadla* grammar with the *gonġ* and the *wašära*, due to his desire of not being an ignorant in one of them [...]. When we look at the issue from the distance and study it deeply, there is no doubt that the [first] *qəne* composer was Yared.²¹

These two accounts somehow differ. According to Habtä Maryam Wärqənäh, “one teacher started mixing the *wadla* grammar with the *gonġ* and the *wašära*.” As for Admasu Ġämbäre “at the time of the sixth *dədq* the community of students became large and so seven [types of] *awaġ*, seven [types of] verb conjugations and seven [types of] grammar were taught.” How to interpret this? Further studies are needed to answer these questions.

For the time being I shall describe the present situation of teaching *qəne* in some parts of Wadla where the first *qəne* teacher, Yoħannəs Zägäblon Gäblawi, is said to be born, at least by Admasu Ġämbäre. I shall now present *qəne* teachers whom I met during a visit in some churches around Kon, in November 2009.²² Before leaving Addis Abäba, I had asked in a hurry some advice about some names of *qəne* teachers and places in Wadla to the regretted Ethiopian Orthodox scholar *Abba Säyfä Šəllase* (d. 2010)²³ who had only time to tell me about two places: Abdiqon Giyorgis²⁴ and Yänäġġa Mika'el and its *qəne* teacher Təkkalləññ Mängäša. Some people working for the diocese in Waldiya and in Kon²⁵ also gave us the names of some *qəne* teachers teaching there. We slept in Gašäna.²⁶ Then we visited people working for the Ethiopian Orthodox Church

21 Ibid., 174–175.

22 I was accompanied by Magda Krzyzanowska who also made some interviews with the *qəne* teachers; I want to thank her very cordially for her translations of the interviews from Amharic and also for helping me in finalizing this article, especially for the translation of some texts (cf. notes 17 and 20) and for the transcription of Amharic proper names and terms according to the *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*.

23 Amsalu Tefera, “Säyfä Šəllase Yoħannəs,” in *EAE* 5 (2014): 506–507.

24 The village of Abdiqon Giyorgis lies on the way from Wäldiya to Gašäna, in Douftsi Hamousit. Ege, *North Wälo*, map 58. You must turn to the left, for about 5 km, then walk half an hour (or all the way by 4×4). The place is known as a famous traditional school, also for *qəne*. In 2009, I was told that no teacher of the traditional schools was left there but I could not check.

25 URL: <http://www.maplandia.com/ethiopia/amhara/north-wello/kon/> (13.05.2019).

26 Gašäna is a crossing place: coming from Wäldiya you can turn to the right to reach Lalibäla;

in Wägäl Tena town, the administrative centre of the present Dälanta *wäräda*.²⁷ Then a list of teachers and places was established to be visited around Kon.

2 Field Research in the Wadla Region

2.1 *Qəne Teachers near Kon*

Near Kon, the first *qəne* teacher we met²⁸ was *Märiqeta*²⁹ Əzra Bərhanu, a blind man, at Yädəhun Mädhane ‘Alām church.³⁰ He was born in 1944 EC³¹ in Asgağā village (a three-day walk from there), where he began his traditional education in Tādbabä Maryam church in which he graduated. He first studied *dəggʷa*³² and then *qəne*, for five years, with *Märiqeta* Gäbrä Mäsqäl³³ (d. 1986 EC). Then he taught *qəne* in Wāmbär Zaragaw for four years. From 1971 EC he began to teach *qəne* in his present place. Before him, there was here a *zema* teacher, *Märiqeta* Kiros, but no *qəne* teacher. Əzra Bərhanu was graduate in *wašära* and *wadla qəne*; and his teacher Gäbrä Mäsqäl knew three *qəne* styles: *wašära*, *wadla* and *gonǵ*. At that time, Əzra Bərhanu was teaching *wašära sāmənna wärq* (that is “wax and gold” with literal and figurative or “hidden” meanings³⁴). He said that there is not much difference between the *wadla* and *wašära qəne* and that they are almost the same, which surprised me.³⁵

straight you go to Däbrä Tabor; and left to Kon. URL: <http://www.maplandia.com/ethiopia/amhara/north-wello/kon/#map> (13.05.2019).

27 Wägältena, also known as Wägäl Tena, is located in the Däbub Wällo Zone of the Amhara Region, with an estimated total population of 7,205 in 2005. It was the main city of the former Wadla Dälanta *awraǵǵa*. Situated on the recently constructed main road between Dässe and Lalibäla via Kone and Gašāna, Wägältena is expected to become a communication link between these historical places.

28 We began to visit *qəne* schools on 11 November 2009.

29 Evgenia Sokolinskaia, “Märiqeta,” in *EAE* 3 (2007): 786.

30 From Kon, we drove by pickup for 14 km in the direction of Däbrä Tabor, stopped, turned right, and then walked for about 6 km. Ege, *North Wällo*, map 68.

31 EC refers to the Ethiopian Calendar, with a seven-to-eight-year gap between the Ethiopian and Gregorian calendars. Emmanuel Fritsch and Ugo Zanetti, “Christian calendar,” in *EAE* 1 (2003): 668–672. The liturgical year begins on the 11th (12th on a leap year) of September.

32 With *Märiqeta* Gera Wärq, for five years.

33 Gäbrä Mäsqäl’s teacher was *Märiqeta* Təbäbu, a famous teacher (died during the reign of Ḥayla Šəllase) from Yäǵǵu who himself was teaching in Gayənt Mägäč Qirqos and who had graduated with teacher Buruk. Əzra showed us a notebook with notes by *Märiqeta* Gäbrä Mäsqäl.

34 Denis Nosnitsin, “Sāmənna wärq,” in *EAE* 4 (2010): 507.

35 According to Habtemichael Kidane, the *wašära qəne* is relatively simple and its meaning can be caught even by someone who is not specialized in *qəne*; the *gonǵ qəne* is difficult to

In November 2009, he had 40 students (and 66 students the year before).³⁶ They came not only from the surroundings but also as far as Šäwa, Goğğam and Təgray. At the practical level, in 2009 Əzra Bərhanu said that he received a salary of 30 Birr a month.³⁷ He had some fields for growing crops. His family lived from hand to mouth, but this was not enough to keep the whole family, sometimes, if harvest was bad, daily food became a problem.

As for his students, they got some money from their parents who were farmers to get their food (cereals and grains) bought from the market. They did not go for begging their food, as this is the ancient custom for traditional students of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, because the neighbours had only little for themselves. Here they received no financial help from the church or diocese.

In the afternoon, we met *Mämhər*³⁸ Nahu Sännay of the church of Giyorgis in Dorära.³⁹ He was born in 1935 EC in Giğğu, around 150 km from here, where he began his traditional education which he finished in Goğğam.⁴⁰ He studied *qəne* for six years with Wäldä Mika'el whose teacher was *Mämhər* Sahlu from Mäqälä who was teaching *wašära* and *gongğ qəne*. Then he went for *qəne* graduation to Goğğam, in Gongğ, where he spent three years. His teacher was Məhrät Şəgge from Walta Maryam in Goğğam who had graduated in Moṭa Giyorgis. Məhrät Şəgge was teaching *gongğ* and *wašära qəne*. Then our teacher went to Gondär to study “the Books.”⁴¹ After graduation there, he began to teach *qəne* and “the Books” for eight years in Gayənt Zuramba (the place of graduation for *zəmmare*, 65 km from Däbrä Tabor) where he also studied *zəmmare*, one of

understand due to its profound meaning, using complicated concepts and images, often only understandable to the author; the Gondär *qəne* is characterized by its melancholic mood and is didactic alluding to the teaching of the *qəne* teachers. Habtemichael Kidane, “Qəne,” 284. The grammar of the *wadla qəne* is difficult.

36 During my visit the students were absent as they had gone home to help their parents for harvest and were coming back after Epiphany.

37 In January 2009, 10.46 Birr equaled one US-dollar, URL: [http://nazret.com/blog/index.php/2009/01/13/ethiopian_central_bank_depreciates_birr_\(13.05.2019\)](http://nazret.com/blog/index.php/2009/01/13/ethiopian_central_bank_depreciates_birr_(13.05.2019)).

38 Marie-Laure Derat and Denis Nosnitsin, “Mämhər,” in *EAE* 3 (2007): 713.

39 From Kon, go for 4 km in the direction of Dälanta, then turn right for 6 km (rocky road which can be used by pick ups), then walk 45 minutes to Dorära Giyorgis church which is situated down, half way between the plateau and the valley; the interview was made near Balä Əgzi'abəḥer church, without going down to Dorära, because we met the teacher on the way. Ege, *North Wälo*, map 68.

40 He also studied *zema*, *aqq'wq'am*, New Testament and Old Testament. He studied *dəgg'w* with Wäldä Giyorgis.

41 In Gondär city, with *Mämhər* Bərhanu, in Bä'ata Maryam church, Old Testament and New Testament, for nine years.

the five books of liturgical song, or *zema*. Then he came to teach in the present place. In 2009, he was 67 years old. He was then teaching *wašära* and *gong qəne*, not *wadla qəne*.

In November 2009, 25 of his students of *qəne* were present, not the usual 45 as some had left to go home and help their family for harvest. During Lent the number of students grows up to fifty. He had no student to study “the Books” with him. In November 2009 (European year), his salary was of 55 Birr a month.

The next day, we took the road in the direction of Arbit and Däbrä Tabor. From Gašäna, after 23 km, the car dropped us on the side of the road and we walked to the right in direction of Wäqeta Maryam church (now in Mäqet *wäräda*,⁴² not in Wadla *wäräda*), looking for *Mämhər* Dibäkwəllu Geṭu. We met him on the way, near Gabrə’el church (that is about half way), as he was going there for a funeral.⁴³ He told us about his life. He was born in Lāyamba Mika’el (Lasta), in 1936 (the year when the Italians arrived in Ethiopia, he said).⁴⁴ He studied *wadla qəne* in Waro Mika’el (*wäräda* of Mäqet). His teacher for *wadla qəne* at Šādaho, Sändära Maryam church was Wase for about one year. Wase’s teacher was from Abdiqon Giyorgis, but unfortunately Dibäkwəllu Geṭu could not remember his name.⁴⁵ *Mämhər* Dibäkwəllu’s next teacher was in Sämada in Däbrä ‘Inq’wä Maryam, *Mämhər* Geṭu Täsämma,⁴⁶ with whom Dibäkwəllu studied some *qəne* of Goḡḡam for four years.⁴⁷ His first and last teacher with whom he learned all kinds of *qəne* (*wadla*, *wašära*, *gong*) for four years was *Mämhər* Bätträ Wärq⁴⁸ in St. George church in Säne Gäbäya in Sämada, on the way to southern Gondär. Dibäkwəllu, graduated with him in all types of *qəne*.

42 Mäqet is one of the *wäräda* in the Amhara Region of Ethiopia, in the North Wällo Zone.

43 From Gašäna, take the direction to Däbrä Tabor for 23 km, then walk to the right to Gabrə’el church where we met the *mämhər* and made the interview; the walk took less than one hour. In 2019, I was showed a non-asphalt road (for 4×4 drive) on the right leading down into the valley and reaching very close to the school and church of Wäqeta Maryam.

44 As it is the custom, he studied the Psalter (*Dawit*) and *zema* in his village.

45 Dibäkwəllu said that he never heard of the famous Ṭəbäbu of Abdiqon. He only knew that the place was famous with many *qəne* teachers. He remembered the name of one teacher, Däbrä Mäsqäl, who was the teacher of the blind teacher met the day before in Kon and who taught at Betä Yoḥannes (near Kon).

46 Geṭu Täsämma was a student of *Mämhər* Wəbəšät (he could not remember his second name) from Goḡḡam (he could not remember the exact name of the place).

47 From Geṭu Täsämma (who did not know *qəne* well, but knew history well), for about three years, Dibäkwəllu studied the Psalter, Hymns (*nägs*) and *tərgum* (that is the interpretation) of *wəddase maryam* and *qəddase maryam*.

48 Bätträ Wärq learned from Buruk, a teacher in Däse (also mentionned the day before by the blind teacher).

He also said that he went to Şälalo where he studied *qəne* with the famous Mother Gälanäş. He stayed there only one year and found the *gong qəne* there very difficult. *Mämhar* Dibäkwəllu also studied *aqqʷaqʷam* for three years with *Mämhar* Ayyälö Märäwi at Mäqet, Kurifta Kidanä Məhrät. When we met him in 2009, Dibäkwəllu said that then he was not teaching the *wadla qəne*, but *waşära qəne*. When I met him in February 2019 he said that he was teaching different types of *qəne*, including *wadla*. According to Dibäkwəllu, when we met him in 2009, no one was then teaching the *wadla qəne* in Wadla.

On 13 November 2009, we went to Yänäğğa Mika'el.⁴⁹ The place is historically important for *qəne* as some say that Yoḥannəs Zägäblon Gäblawi (that is of Gäblaw), the first composer of *qəne*, was born there.⁵⁰ When we went in 2009, there was no *qəne* teacher. It is also here that taught the famous teacher Täckalləññ Mängäşa (d. 1969), apparently the last *qəne* teacher in this place (of what we then understood).

We asked the few traditional teachers whom we met about him,⁵¹ as well as a farmer, Taddäsä Mäkʷännən, who had been Täckalləññ's student. He told us about Täckalləññ's grand son, *Märigeta* 'Alämu Yoḥannəs, living in a nearby village. We decided to visit him. We found him living near the hamlet of Zugära.⁵² He was a *däbtära* doing the *aqqʷaqʷam* in church, but he did not teach. He owned some manuscripts, which is quite unusual in a faraway hamlet. He was thirteen years old when his grandfather died and, unfortunately, he told us that he was too young to remember him well.

'Alämu Yoḥannəs studied with Nahu Sännay and with his father Yoḥannəs in Ağıčäw, but he did not study any *qəne* with his grandfather. 'Alämu Yoḥannəs said that Täckalləññ's wife was Käbäbuş Bäwqātu, the mother of Yoḥannəs. Täckalləññ Mängäşa studied *qəne* in Goğğam, in Gongğ. Later he "disappeared, became invisible" in the place called Däqqä İstifa, which means that he went there to have a spiritual retreat. Then he came back to Wadla, to Abdiqon (the place of his father Mängäşa) and later moved to Yänäğ Mika'el. He was buried

49 First by bus (in direction of Kon), and then we walked to the right for about an hour. In 2009 there was no asphalt road, but I was told that there was also a possible access by 4×4 from the main road from Gašana to Däbrä Tabor.

50 *Märigeta* La'ul Mälläs, the teacher of *aqqʷaqʷam* we met in Yänäğğa Mika'el, told us that Yoḥannəs Gäblawi established there the first *qəne bet*. Today it is a market place (twice a week).

51 With *Märigeta* Abraham, teacher of *zema*, with the *aqqʷaqʷam* teacher Ləggäsä İngədaw who spoke on the tradition of the place; and with a nun *İmmahoy* Alämitu Gəzaw.

52 Probably Zigora between Yänäğğa Mika'el and Arbit, near Qʷama village. Ege, *North Wälo*, map 68.

in the St. Giyorgis church in Abdiqon where he was born. Apparently, he taught all kinds of *qəne*, including *wadla qəne*. This must be investigated in the future with other interviews about him.

2.2 *Qəne Teachers in Wägäl ʾTəna (Dälanta)*

We also wanted to visit some *qəne* teachers in Wägäl ʾTəna town (Dälanta),⁵³ a town south of Kon. There we went to the church of Mäsqälä Krəstos built in 1987 EC, on top of a hill. In 1995 EC, the place was organized as a traditional school. In 2009 Abunä Qerällos, Archbishop of North Wällo, residing in Wäldiya was responsible of the Wadla region described here.

In 2009, there were two *qəne* teachers and 17 students. The old *qəne* teacher, Gäbrä ʾHanna, was blind. He was born in 1920 EC in ʾŞay Moča (Dälanta),⁵⁴ on the way to Iggu, three hours walk from his present place. Then he went to Lasta and later to Wadla. He studied *qəne* for one year with *Mämhər* Märawi Wärqənäh⁵⁵ (d. 1968 EC), a *qəne* graduate from Dima Giyorgis (Goğğam) who lived in Waro Mika'el (Lasta) and later in Dälanta ʾTəna Iyäsus. He graduated with him. Gäbrä ʾHanna taught *sämənna wärq qəne* and he did not know the *wadla qəne*.

Then, in the same school, we had a long talk with another *qəne* teacher who was young, Yəbabe Fäqadä (apparently, since that time, he left the place). He was born in 1969 EC in Yäggu, near Kom. He began to study *qəne* with *Mämhər* A'əmro (himself graduated from *Mämhər* Yared ʾŞifärraw from Čägode) in Yänägga Mika'el in 1985 EC, for one year. Then he studied in Gännätä Lə'ul near Wäldiya with *Mämhər* A'əmārä Mäššäša (who also graduated by Yared ʾŞifärraw in Čägode), for two years. He became assistant teacher (*zäraqfi*)⁵⁶ of A'əmārä Mäššäša. Then, he went to ʾHayq ʾƏstifanos monastery, for one year and half, and studied *qəne* by *Mämhər* Məsraq. He also studied in Däbrä Sina (Gayənt) with *Mämhər* Fərew. He graduated in *qəne* in 1995 EC by Bishop Qerällos of Wäldiya

53 We found no direct public transportation from Kon thus we had to go to Däsie and take a bus from there (leaving at about 5–6 am) to Dälanta.

54 There he first studied the Psalter.

55 Märawi Wärqənäh was teaching the *sämənna wärq qəne*. He graduated in *goğğam qəne* in Dima Giyorgis which is a place famous for *sämənna wärq qəne* and commentaries of the Old Testament and the New Testament. Märawi Wärqənäh's teacher was *Mämhər* Yared (died 1944 EC) also from Dima Giyorgis. Then Märawi Wärqənäh went to Dälanta ʾTəna Iyäsus (where he spent eighteen years and died); there Gäbrä ʾHanna studied with him for ten years. After that, Gäbrä ʾHanna went back to his native village and taught from 1951 and went to the present place (in Dälanta) in 1995 EC.

56 The advanced student of the school of *qəne* (*qəne bet*) is permitted to teach the beginners and lecture *qəne* until his graduation day as *qəne* master. Habtemichael Kidane, "Qəne bet," 285.

who knows different types of *qəne*, including *wadla qəne*. Then Bishop Qerəllos employed him to teach *qəne* in the church school of Mäsqälä Krəstos.

In 2009 both teachers had a good salary in comparison with some others in that time. In 2009 Yəbabe Fäqadä received 125 Birr a month and the old teacher Gäbrä Həanna 300 Birr. On the other side, ten or seventeen students were receiving 95 Birr a month. This place was considered as a boarding school and a kind of 'high school' of *qəne* which explains the rather high salaries in a rather isolated place.

These were the teachers I met and interviewed in 2009. We heard of other *qəne* schools in the area of Wadla but we were not able to visit them, because we had not enough time and no private transportation. For example, near Wägäl Təna, the names of two other *qəne* teachers were given, *Mämhar Fəssəha Čanne* and *Mämhar Bäyyänä* in the large church (*däbr*) of Babba Nə'akk'əto Lə'ab. And we heard about the Čaw Quṭər *qəne* school near the *däbr* of Mika'el, near Wägäl Təna town (Dälanta), on the way from Kon to Wägäl Təna in Dälanta.

3 Conclusion

In 1971/72 EC Admasu Čämbäre was still putting Wadla in first position on his list of the main centres for learning *qəne* in Ethiopia.⁵⁷ In November 2009, after my trip in Wadla, *Mämhar Gäbrä Wäld* (d. 2016), a well-known *qəne* teacher in Bə'ata church in Addis Abäba (including of *wadla qəne*), told me, after I told him that the teaching of *wadla qəne* in Wadla had somehow disappeared: "I don't know what you have found in Wadla now, but in my time there were teachers of *wadla qəne* in Wadla."

During my visit in Wadla in 2009, only two of the *mārigeta* we met, Əzra Bərhanu and Dibäkwəllu Geṭu, had studied *wadla qəne* but they did not actually teach it at the time we met them, thus their knowledge of *wadla qəne* was somehow lost. Then it seemed to me that, in that time, *wadla qəne* (the root of *qəne*) had much decreased and was not taught in a systematic way in the part of Wadla which I have visited. This was confirmed to me by *Mämhar Fəssəha Čanne* (his school name was Nə'akk'əto Lə'ab).⁵⁸ When we asked him which teachers were still teaching *wadla qəne* in Wadla, he answered none, except sometimes Əzra Bərhanu, just mentioned.

57 Admasu Čämbäre, *Mäşhafä qəne*, 10. Cf. Habtemichael Kidane, "Qəne," 284–285 and Habtemichael Kidane, "Qəne bet," 286.

58 We called him from Addis Abäba on 3 February 2017 with Dr. Mersha Alehegne of Addis Abäba University whom I want to thank here for his help.

Mämhər Fəssəha Çanne studied *wadla qəne* from *Mämhər* Däbrä Maryam, from *Mämhər* Kaśsaye Həwaz (who lived in Čäw Quṭər Mika'el) and from *Mämhər* Wäldä Tənsa'e (who lived in Čana Mika'el), all from Wadla. He graduated in *wadla qəne* with *Mämhər* Həwaz in Nə'akk^{wəto} Lă'ab. He also went to Goğgam to study *gonğ qəne* with *Mämhər* Harägəwäyn Kənde in Wägəra Guntər in the church of Gäbrä Mənfäs Qəddus (not far from Gonğ), where he graduated in *gonğ qəne*. In February 2017, he was teaching *gonğ qəne* in Dässe (in Mənbärä Şəhay Täklä Haymanot church) not *wadla qəne*, which means that his knowledge of *wadla qəne* was not transmitted, as it is also unfortunately the case for other teachers knowing *wadla qəne*.

Mämhər Fəssəha Çanne also gave me the following information. In Nə'akk^{wəto} Lă'ab, the genealogy of *qəne* teachers is as follows: the first teacher was *Mämhər* Wäldä Giyorgis who gave his chair to Šənnä Giyorgis, then to Wəbe Gäbrä Šəllase, Bərəlle Wube, Bälay Gobäze, Mər'awi, Gäbrä Maryam gave it to Həwaz, and then to himself, Fəssəha Çanne.

When Fəssəha Çanne was a student, the following *qəne* teachers were famous in Wadla: Wäldä Tənsa'e (in Čana Mika'el), Gəčäw (in Yäčäräqa Giyorgis) and Gäbrä Mäsqał (from Sayənt Tängobaläl Mädəh) who used to teach *wadla qəne* in Tängobaläl Mädhane 'Aləm church (in Sayənt). Fəssəha Çanne named another famous teacher of *wadla qəne*, Yəhəyyəs (in Boräna Mäkanä Səlam in Kidanä Məhrät church, in Wällo), still alive in 2017, but very old and not teaching any longer.

According to Fəssəha Çanne, the famous centres to teach *wadla qəne* in Wadla were (still during the imperial period): Betä Yoħannəs (with the famous teacher Gäbrä Mäsqał), Yänägğä Mika'el (with the famous teacher Täkkalləññ Mängäša who also had a great knowledge of *dəgg^{wə}*) and Betä Hor Giyorgis where the famous Gäbre was teaching. In February 2017 there was no more *qəne* teaching in these places.

Mämhər Fəssəha Çanne also said that, in 2017, in his original place of Babba Nə'akk^{wəto} Lă'ab, *Mämhər* Bäyyänä Nəguś, mentioned before, was old and sick and not teaching *wadla qəne* any longer and that there was no more teacher of *qəne* also in Čäw Quṭər *qəne* school in St. Michael church (also mentioned before) where the last teacher was Həwaz. Həwaz taught *wadla qəne*. This interview with Fəssəha Çanne shows the decrease of the teaching of *wadla qəne* in Wadla recently. About Täkkalləññ Mängäša and the other famous teachers named in this article, further investigations should be made.

At the same time, also in February 2017, I heard from Dr. Mersha Alehegne in Addis Abäba that a group of people in the town of Wäldiya wanted to revive *wadla qəne*, with a committee under Archbishop Qerəllös and with the collaboration of the university of Wäldiya and of the local government. During my

visit in Wäldiya in January 2019, I heard the same information, also with the support of the newly appointed Bishop Erməyas. Further and more systematic studies are needed to complete my present comments on the situation of *wadla qəne*, its teaching and the situation of the few professors still teaching it in Wadla and elsewhere in Ethiopia.

Nowadays, in Ethiopia, *wadla qəne* is still taught, but by very few teachers.⁵⁹ *Wadla qəne* is said to be more complex and complicated to compose than other types of *qəne*. As mentioned before, the *wadla qəne* is particularly difficult on account of its composition and interpretation, because it employs many equivocal words, allusions and allegoric figures. This explains partly why there are very few specialists of *wadla qəne* still composing it today in Ethiopia. Also the deep meaning of the *wadla qəne*, more than other types of *qəne*, is very difficult to be understood by the audience when it is sung in church because people are less learned than in the past in this specific type of *qəne*, and also in *qəne* and in Gə'əz language in general. And today people request *qəne* which can be understood easily such as *wašūra qəne*.

Traditional education of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church has been taught for centuries and is still taught, but for how many years more? Now what about global interconnections of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church traditional education and *qəne*? Apparently external influences are none. In reality, modern life with a lot of western habits in Ethiopia has a strong and negative impact on these Christian traditional fields in Ethiopia today. It is also a fact that, nowadays, less young people dragged by modern life are interested to study Gə'əz and traditional education, including *qəne*. The question of the decreasing number of teachers and students and the reasons for that should also be discussed. For all the questions about this topic, the causes must be analysed and answers must be found, as *qəne* and *wadla qəne*, being deeply part of the traditional oral teaching of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, can be seen as intangible patrimony not only in Ethiopia but also in the history of church at large.

Other factors must be analysed. Nowadays in Ethiopia, and for many decades already, foreign influences came from the western countries, including from other churches through their missionaries's activity. For example, the missionaries, especially from the Protestant traditions, do put forward modernity and technological progress, often without respecting the traditional life and teaching of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, and sometimes also mocking not to say showing despise for the traditional education of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. One might perceive these factors as somewhat negative.

59 I hope to speak about it in another article.

One cannot stop modernity as well as western influence in Ethiopia including in the life of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Then, what to do to keep this traditional education (including *qəne*) alive for today and for the next generations? How to keep something of this traditional *qəne* teaching, which is an oral teaching thus fragile and difficult to keep? In this case, modern technical means could be very useful in order to safeguard what can be safeguarded, for example through recording and making videos.

It is now the last moment to think and to organise recording of the best teachers as well as to publish materials that they have preserved for example in their notebooks of grammar while they were students, or what they learned and remember from their teachers, some being famous and their names must be remembered as well. It is time to write their history, or at least what is being remembered today about them. Ideally all such material should then be put on a website, in order to be shared by the largest number of people (Ethiopian Orthodox Christians, scholars, etc.).

At the 16th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies in Trondheim Norway in July 2007, I presented a paper to challenge people to make specific studies on traditional education of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in Ethiopia, including on *qəne*.⁶⁰ In this paper I wish to challenge people on *wadla qəne* in Wadla. Here I present this paper as a little act of resistance in time and space, in fact a shout in the middle of the modern wilderness as *qəne*, *wadla qəne* and the teaching of Gə'əz are somehow, slowly, step by step, disappearing in Ethiopia.

All together we have to think seriously what to do, how to do it, how to answer the question of the future of traditional education, including *qəne* and *wadla qəne*, and how to save all this. The first step would be to write down in detail all the rules of *qəne*, including *wadla qəne* (especially its grammar, *aggäbab*), and also verbs, in a systematic and scholarly way.⁶¹

In the case of traditional education and *qəne* teaching in a globalized context, western scholars who really appreciate traditional education as well as *qəne*, together with Ethiopian scholars, could find ways to keep it alive and to teach it (also on Internet). In the case of our topic, *qəne*, all the rules of the different types and schools of *qəne* should be written down in a very precise and

60 Christine Chaillot, "Traditional Teaching in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow," in *Research in Ethiopian Studies. Selected Papers of the 16th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, Trondheim July 2007*, ed. Harald Aspen et al. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010), 240–247.

61 See Muluken Andualem Siferew, *Comparative Classification of Ge'ez Verbs in the Three Traditional Schools of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church* (Aachen: Shaker Verlag, 2013). See e.g. also: Hiruie Ermias, *The Issues of 'Aggabäb (Classic Gə'əz Grammar) According to the Tradition of Qəne Schools*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Universität Hamburg 2018.

detailed way. All this material should be published and shared through printed and digital media. This type of collaboration would be a way to save what can be saved of the Ethiopian Orthodox treasure of *qəne* for the coming generations. This would also configure the global interconnections and local identities in a positive way.

Some of our present considerations show that it is very urgent to make interviews and to record at least the very best teachers before they pass away and before their knowledge and traditional way of teaching is lost. For the last decade I have repeated this, unfortunately without any tangible results. If the teaching of *qəne* (and also of traditional teaching of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church at large) is not preserved properly, soon it can be lost, and forever. This is my worry. It should be our common worry.

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