Introduction

The Säbat Bet Gurage group of Ṣäbat Bet (or Šadgäär) is mainly known to the scholarly public as a linguistic category. Relevant historical and cultural data has been published, e.g., by Shack, Leslau, Worku Nida, Prunet and Berhanu Chamora.¹ I present here some of the findings of the anthropological fieldwork I carried out in 2000–2001.² The aim of the fieldwork was to reveal the history of the deep inter-ethnic relations between the Ṣäbat Bet and the northern-most sub-group of the Hadiyya, the Leemo.³

The article does not pretend to give a full picture of the religious system of the Ṣäbat Bet. It is rather a compilation of the information I gathered as a by-product of my fieldwork. It should be seen as a tentative sketch and a small contribution to the discussion of the old Gurage religious system(s) and of comparative religion studies of southern-central Ethiopia in general.

Ethnographical notes

The main settling area of the Ṣäbat Bet extends from the Southern shore of River Gombonya and the South-eastern slopes of Mount Mugo to the recent border of the Hadiyya zone,⁴ which is more or less identical to the all-wea-

¹ Shack 1966; Leslau 1950, 1959, 1979abc; Worku Nida 1984, 1990, 1994; Prunet — Berhanu Chamora 1995, 1997 [for the list of abbreviations used in this article see p. 32].
² I have to thank the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft and my adviser, Ulrich Braukämper, for their support. I owe my deep gratitude to my field-assistant and translator, Mr. Daniel Lemma from Giibiichcho in Sooro Hadiyya who accompanied me on the long walks through the difficult landscapes of Ṣäbat Bet country and history. Other results of this fieldwork s. Bustorf 2001; Id., «Oral Traditions on the Inter-Ethnic Relation of the Leemo-Hadiyya and Endägan-Gurage», in: Ulhig et al. (forthcoming); Id., «Dänwamwit», in EÆ II, 294–296.
³ In the present article, contemporary Hadiyya orthography is used for the Hadiyya terms and names; other languages are transcribed according to the commonly used system (e. g. EÆ I, II).
⁴ This was the situation during my field-stay in 2001. However, the borders of the Gurage and Hadiyya zones changed because of the establishment of the Solte zone.
ther-road from Leera to Qose. Groups of Ëndägañ are spread, beyond this line, throughout the Miißaa (formerly Kontäb) wäräda of Hadiyya zone (e.g., around the hills of Tuula and Abußurra), some can also be found in the Leemo and Sooro wärädas and even in Kambaata. In both the Hadiyya administrative centre Hossana, and in surrounding villages, part of the population is of Ëndägañ decent. The Ëndägañ also live among the different Gurage and Sölte groups. Due to urban migration the Ëndägañ can be encountered in nearly every part of Ethiopia and especially in Addis Abéba. Linguistically and culturally closely related neighbours to the Ëndägañ are the Enär in the West, the Ënnämor in the North, the Yäçæret (Geto) in the North-east, the Sölte group of Azärnät-Bärbäre in the East and South-east (Mugo and Ënnäqor area) and finally the Hadiyya group of Leemo in the South.

The economic backbone of the rural economy of the region is ensete (Ensete ventricosum; Ëndägañ: ässät) farming, with small-scale cattle breeding forming an integral part. Additionally, different types of cereals and vegetables are cultivated. According to oral tradition the Leemo received their agricultural knowledge, especially on ensete, mainly from the Ëndägañ. Intercultural marriage between the two groups was originally established as the basis of a military alliance; it became one of the main vehicles of a process which resulted in the complete transition of the Leemo economy from mobile agro-pastoralism to sedentary ensete farming.

The socio-political order of the Ëndägañ is a segmentary system based on exogamous patrilineal lineages and clans. Most decent groups are named after their (sometimes only legendary) male ancestors. The segmentary system has six levels that may be identified: segmentary level 1 (minimal lineage, umat'abarös, ‘mother-father-children’ or bid, ‘house’), segmentary level 2 (minor lineage, bid, ‘house’), segmentary level 3 (major lineage, up), segmentary level 4 (clan, tw or bid), segmentary level 5 (clan-federation or ‘tribe’, tw or bid) and on level 6 the Säbat Bet confederation. The traditional cognitive system starts the development of the genealogical tree of the Ëndägañ with the ancestor Šadgær, the grandson of the apical ancestor Ëndägañ (or Badägañ). Šadgär’s twelve sons are considered as the forefathers of twelve units of segmentary level 4: Gamio (or Gimiya), Gozo, Girme, Fasil(u), Wändmima, Zigaço, Šorko, Agzì(a), Anbässa, Wänğella, Langa and Mašto.7

5 One important settlement area around Hossana is Lareeba where the southern branch of the Sa’amär bid (or Sa’amär sab), the Sa’amarmanna, have lived since they were forced to leave the hill of Wachchamo when ras Abatä founded Hossana there. Today, the younger generation of Sa’amarmanna is linguistically nearly assimilated to the Hadiyya (o. i. [= oral informant] Doboç Megiso).

6 BRAUKÄMPER 1980; s. in particular DOHRMANN 2004.

7 By another informant the names Wäsära instead of Wändimma and Adrafa instead of Mašto where mentioned, but Wäsära (and Ţiqisa) is a low cast group (cp.
The real number of units, which are to be considered as level 4 according to their socio-political importance, is nonetheless higher than twelve. The branch of Fasilu, including the houses of Nure, Wäre and Čiraço, is the biggest subgroup in terms of number of people.

The clans of the Ṣündāgāñ are led by chiefs, some of whom are called nugs (‘king’), who are chosen according to principles of seniority, merit (also knowledge and political wisdom) and decent by the songe assemblies of the different groups. Since the incorporation into the Ethiopian empire by Mənələk II the title azmač nearly replaced the nugs title.⁸ The most prestigious of the traditional chiefs is today the nugs of the Gamio clan, azmač Kasa Mugoro; in the Wario clan azmač Ertiro and in the Adrafa clan azmač Habtā are in office. The nugs/azmač receive their titles at a merit ceremony at the former market of Šorko near the kätäma of Dänkula. The azmač to-be sits on a chair under three intertwined holy trees and is blessed and sprinkled with honey by the chiefs and elders (baliq) of Ṣündāgāñ. When a new nugs enters his compound after the ceremony the women of his household put butter on his head to honour him. As an insignia the nugs wears, like other azmač title-holders in Gurage, the gondär⁹ bangle.¹⁰

Anṭoqqọtora

The Ṣündāgāñ frequently claim to have been Christians «since abunä Zena Marqos converted the Gurage».¹¹ As oral tradition reports, due to the campaigns of imām Ahmad b. Ibrāhīm al-Ġāzī («Gran», 1506–1543) the Ṣündāgañ were isolated from the rest of the Christian kingdom, preserving the remembrance of their old religion by retaining the fast and venerating the Maryam tabot (the altar tablet consecrated in the name of St. Mary) of Bušuro.¹²


⁹ Shack (1966:152ff.) describes a similar ritual in Čaha Gurage; s. also Gabresus Hailemariam (1991:36).
¹⁰ Beside the different clan chiefs today agaż Admasu Wärqe is the political head of the Ṣündāgañ. He represents his people at the Yägoka assembly of the Säbat Bet Gurage. The title of agaż was originally that of a military leader who «killed a hundred enemies». Since the imperial expansion it became a title for an important clan chief (Shack 1966:24, 132, 171). The use of the office of agaż to refer to the highest chief in Ṣündāgañ seems to be a relatively new, «invented tradition».

¹¹ Abunä Zena Marqos (late 13th – early 14th cent.), a venerated Saint of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, was a disciple of the famous abunä Täklä Haymanot. Zena Marqos is said to have preached in Goğgām, ʿAdal and Gurageland (s. Belaynesh Michael in: Debi, 216).

A syncretism, influenced by Orthodox Christianity and the religions of the Cushitic-speaking neighbours, developed as a local form of the autochtonous Gurage folk-religion.

The missionary-ethnographer Burkhard Peter states that the Leemo Hadiiya, the Mâsâmâ, and the Êndâgân were formerly followers of a religion called «Ontoqotora». According to my informants, a cult or religious system with the name of antoqotora only existed among the Êndâgân, Mâsâmâ and Enâr, while the authority of the Êndâgân high-priest Sa’âmâr Dam (s. below) was also respected by many Leemo and the other Gurage. Peter describes «Ontoqotora» as a variant of the fandaanano (or fandaano) religion of the Leemo. It is true that fandaanano and antoqotora had some elements in common but the same can be said of many autochtonous folk-religions of the region. Antoqotora should rather be seen as the Êndâgân variant of the traditional Gurage religion and as part of a pan-Gurage network of religious and political meanings that connects the different shrines and spirit representatives.

Antoqotora is a largely unpopular term among the Êndâgân. For most people it carries a negative connotation and even the family of the high-priest Sa’âmâr Dam denied any connection between the Sa’âmâr cult and antoqotora. Whilst among the Êndâgân the term is mostly rejected as the name of the traditional Êndâgân religion, among the Leemo it is the common appellation for it.

Folk etymology derives antoqotora from the Amharic word alawqalm ‘I do not know’. It is explained that its followers are thus called because «they do not know how to fast correctly [from the viewpoint of the adherents of the fandaanano religion or Christianity]», «they do not know anything» or because «they eat everything». Obviously this etymology is not valid linguistically, but the last explanation refers to a common feature in Ethiopia: the definition of religious boundaries by food avoidance/preference regulations. The term antoqotora probably has some relation to the Êndâgân words qotorray, (ä)qotöray, «deep spot of river where offerings to the gods are made». Ac-
cording to Peter\textsuperscript{17} in Leemo sacrifices at rivers were also called \textit{qotora}. In fact the \textit{Àndågåñ} religion, like the traditional Gurage religion in general, has a type of sacrifice where the blood of the slaughtered animal is poured into the water of a river or lake.

Elders of the \textit{Àndågåñ} explained \textit{antqotora} as the designation for the form of Christianity which the Orthodox \textit{Àndågåñ} developed «after Grañ burned the churches and drove away the priests». Without the guidance of the priests the \textit{Àndågåñ} tried to maintain their religion by respecting the fast in the month of \textit{Nähase}.\textsuperscript{18} The weekly fasting days were left out. Some informants assumed that the followers of \textit{antqotora} were allowed to eat the meat of animals slaughtered according to Islamic rite or even according to any kind of rite. Already Cecchi\textsuperscript{19} mentions this custom: «The Endegan, Jener and Megger do not have any scruple about eating the meat of animals slaughtered by Muslims; they have a vague idea of divine power, often murmuring an Egzier [God] but not ascribing much meaning to it».

\textit{Antqotora} cannot be considered a systematized religion. It is a term that indicates a syncretistic complex of different but related cults. As elements of this syncretistic complex can be identified, e. g., the cults of \textit{Awaqa} (or \textit{Sa’àmår}), the cult of \textit{Umonya} and the veneration of the Maryam \textit{tabot} of Buśurro. Other elements are the cults of the \textit{zara} and \textit{idoota} spirits and the ancestors.

**Angels, spirits and mediums**

The \textit{Àndågåñ} in their folk-religion believed in God (\textit{Ågzer}) and they could pray to him directly and individually.\textsuperscript{20} God was seen as the father of the angels (\textit{Àndågåñ: mäl’ak}) which he sent to serve his creation. The spiritual beings which controlled the natural powers, the weather as well as the fate of mankind, were seen as the sons and daughters of God (o. i. Ergada Ordamo). For these spiritual beings venerated by the Gurage Shack uses the term «deities» and Worku Nida uses «gods». I would prefer to use the term «spirits», for their sphere of action is clearly not the high heaven. Some of them are

\textsuperscript{17} \textsc{Peter} 1999:163.

\textsuperscript{18} \textsc{Lebel} (1974:103) claims that Christianity in Enär could maintain itself without change during the isolation from Christian Muhår Gurage. My own information about the church Enär Emanuel near Qose \textit{kätäma}, which was allegedly founded by \textit{abunä} Zena Marqos, points to a supra-formation (\textit{Überformung}) of the original Christianity of the Enär. The priests who spoke with Lebel probably told him the narrative (also common in \textit{Àndågåñ}) of an uninterrupted continuity of Christianity in the area.

\textsuperscript{19} \textsc{Cecchi} 1888:120 [translation from German edition by D. B.].

\textsuperscript{20} According to \textsc{Shack} (1980) \textit{Ågzer} in Gurage was a deus otiosus who was not addressed directly. The direct address of God could be a more recent development under new Orthodox Christian influence but I have some doubts that this is the case.
only powerful in the local or regional range, and all of them by definition depend on the will of Jegzer. The Endägañ I interviewed used the term «angels» for this category of spiritual beings. Whether this term, which it is also used in other Gurage groups, is a survival of the time of the early Christianity of the Endägañ, a later adaption, or an introduction during the re-Christianization since the late 19th cent. remains open.

On a lower level of the Endägañ syncretistic «pantheon» different types of spiritual beings were assumed. One of the most feared categories was that of the habuusa spirits, which was probably an adoption from the Hadiyya. I also collected legends about different «monsters» which were connected with diseases of man or cattle. Like the Hadiyya the Endägañ knew protecting spirits which were passed down through the paternal line, zara, and others transmitted within the matriline, idoota. Endägañ and Leemo shared the belief that many families possessed a magical object, known as călle (o. i. Babore Ka’isso), resembling Muslim prayer beads which served as a source of power and protection.21

The ancestors had a prominent place in the religion of the Endägañ. Graveyards were seen as holy places. The individual graves were marked only by trees. During the Orthodox fasting period in Nähase 1–15 at the tæfa’at ritual, people gathered at the grave. Sheep and oxen (but not goats) were slaughtered on the graves and honey was poured onto them by the eldest sons of the deceased (o. i. Babore Ka’isso).

The most powerful spirit of the Endägañ was Awaqa (the Endägañ Waq sky-god).22 Under the name of Sa’amär he was the protecting spirit of the whole of the Endägañ and all his followers. The legends tell that the ideal number of angels was 99. The followers of Sa’amär Dam claim that Sa’amär was the highest among them. Consequently he was syncretized with the Archangel Gabriel. The other angels have their shrines and priests among other Gurage as well as non-Gurage groups.

Like the Waq spirits of other Gurage groups Sa’amär is the spirit of the sky and of war. Unlike the other Waq spirits, however, Sa’amär also embodies characteristics of Bożżä, the Gurage spirit of thunder and social order.23 Sa’amär was like Bożżä a spirit who punished the violation of social norms by lightning and thunder. He also controlled the wind (especially the whirlwind or cyclone) and the birds but not the rain which «comes from God»

21 BRAUKÄMPER — TILAHUN MISHAGO 1999:27; PETER 1999:163ff., 130f; o. i.: Babore Ka’isso; Ergada Ordamo. Through inter-marriage with the Hadiyya the concepts of ġaaraa (zara) and idoota were also introduced in Kambaata and Mäsmä (BRAUKÄMPER 1983:258f.; PETER 1999:136). Čälle were also known among the Solṭi, according to my recent research in that group.

22 Cp. also SHACK 1966; LESLAU 1950:53.

As a typical element of the Gurage religion the ḃndágañ had associations of unmarried young women (ṃēd; Čaha: mʷyäḥí). These mēd had a similar relation to the high priest of Saʿāmār like as such associations had to Božžä in Čaha.

The representative of the spirit Saʿāmār was the high-priest and possession medium Saʿāmār Dam (‘Master [or Lord] Saʿāmār’). The Saʿāmār Dam was respected not only by ḃndágañ, but also by Leemo, Mäsmäs and the other Sābat Bet Gurage. Although the cult almost vanished in its home country, the Saʿāmār Dam still plays a certain ritual role in connection with the appointment of the high-priest of the Božžä cult, the Gʷeytakʷyä. As the «eldest of the angels» the Saʿāmār Dam has to recognize the Gʷeytakʷyä and the Waq priests in the Šōndar ceremony. After a damo (a priest of the traditional religion/spirit intermediary) died his ritual clothes and objects, which were also called Šōndar, had to be kept by the Saʿāmār Dam until he could hand them over to the new ritual leader. A new Saʿāmār Dam had to be recognized by the Wäydämam, the representative of the all-Gurage female spirit Dāmwamwit in Čaha (o. i. Ergada Ordamo).

The ritual office of the Saʿāmār Dam had been handed down within the paternal line of the (originally Mäsmäs) clan of Saʿāmār bīd for nine generations. Usually it was inherited by the eldest son. The Saʿāmār Dam was an

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28 When a house was hit by lightening and the purification rite was carried out, the Saʿāmār Dam received part of the possessions of the affected family. The high-priest's share was also called Šōndar (o. i. Ergada Ordamo). PRUNET — BERHANU CHAMORA (1995:64) explain Šōndar as the permission «to modify some of the rules [...] which Gʷeytakʷyä must obey».
29 According to PRUNET — BERHANU CHAMORA (1997:560) the Saʿāmār Dam does not need any approval by another priest. According to TERREFE WOLDESADIK (1967:4, n. 11), only the Saʿāmār Dam could free other spirit representatives from the ritual restrictions they had to follow. In the early 1960s, for example, he permitted the Wäydämam, the highest representatives of Dāmʷamʷit, to enter the houses of others, to shake hands and to raise mules.
30 The only exception is the recent Saʿāmār Dam Garamo Ermanččo who was the youngest son of his predecessor. He took over the office shortly after the Revolution of 1974 as his father ordered before his death. The assembly of elders did not accept the decision at first, but then a small cyclone (traditionally associated with Saʿāmār) emerged and wandered directly to the appointed son. This was seen to be a sign of his vocation (o. i. Ergada Ordamo).
homme fétiche and the central sacral figure of the Êndägañ, endowed with an important integrating function. In political terms the Sa’ämär Dam, who also attended the songe meetings, had an outstanding position as an authority that surmounted ethnic sub-groups and that was even trans-ethnic. An indication of this is that he had the right to be the first to light the mäsqäl bonfire, an honour which falls traditionally in the hands of highest ranking political heads. Even the Leemo are said to have waited to light their fires until the smoke of the fire of the Sa’ämär Dam could be seen (o. i. Ayyäläč Araga).

The Sa’ämär Dam was the head over a couple of other Awaqa priests (Êndägañ: awa’ sınıf, damo) in Êndägañ country. The Qosi Dam (also Qosea-dam) from the clan of Gamio was one of them. The last of this extinguished line of spirit mediums lived near the church of Sasgita Maryam and the compound of the nugs. In the Šorko area the last Damo Wäyabbo from the clan of Girme still lives. He claims that his ritual office was introduced to Êndägañ because in a war the ancestor Šadgär kidnapped a women with the name of Sorgo who represented the spirit Wäyabbo. Her son became the first Damo Wäyabbo of Êndägañ.

Every awa sınıf, including the Sa’ämär Dam, was assisted by a number of ritual specialists, the maga. They served as interpreters of the prophesies of their lords and they were responsible for the purification rites when a house was hit by lightening. If a maga was (in the ritual sense) poisoned he went to a maga specialist, the awssa from the clan of Girme, who was able to purify him by rubbing koso leaves onto his head and face. To become a maga the body of the novice had to be rubbed with koso, bisanna and duquśa leaves.

The awa sınıf had to keep a number of avoidance rules similar to those of other high ritual functionaries in many Southern Ethiopian cultures:

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31 Still today this can be felt: although the recent office holder grew up as an Orthodox Christian his prayer and blessing is considered to be very powerful («he is blessed in order to bless the people»). Today he acts as a high dañña (‘traditional judge, leader’) and representative of Êndägañ (o. i. Ergada Ordamo; Garamo Ermanččo).


33 PETER 1999:141.

34 PRUNET — BERHANU CHAMORA (1997:559) mention the «Ewäy Abbo» cult without any further information.

35 The recent office holder says he had to stop practising when the Därg regime begun a campaign against «feudal practices». He still wears the šaš headdress as a sign of his office and follows some avoidance rules.


38 E. g., the Hawzulla in Dubamo, s. BRAUKÄMPER 1980:211f., 217; Id. 1983:263.
dance of goat meat and goat products,\(^3^9\) no visits to the houses of others («an angel cannot be invited»), no eating in the presence of others, no cutting of hair and beard, no contact with women who menstruate, etc.\(^4^0\) The Sa’amär Dam only drank milk of a cow with the colour of sowre (Endägañ: light brown/grey), which was reserved only for him. In the past his food had to be prepared by his wife or daughters only and slaughtered by the maga. His preferred meat was that of calves and a special type of kočço (ensete bread) was prepared for him.

Umonyér\(^4^1\) was a female angel/spirit medium from the clan of Wário/Wäre (others said Çiraço). She was considered as equal to the other awa’ø and joined their gatherings. The last Umony medium died at the beginning of Ḥaylā Ṣallase I’s reign. She had already had to stop her ritual activities before, however, when Hemaço Seqeto (of the Endägañ clan of Nure) the balabbat of Kontāb ordered that the trees of her holy grove (däbr) on the hill of Šorko were to be cut down.\(^4^2\) Umoniya was called «the angel for the women». She was considered to be gentle and a good adviser. She was asked in particular to help in cases of infertility and childbirth. Umoniya did not use the haruspicum to prophesy, like the other awa’ø, but she could foresee the fate of her followers by «looking into her shadow».

**Origin of the Sa’amär Dam**

A comparison of the legends of origin of the different Gurage spirits, shrines and spirit medium lineages can be very fruitful, and can contribute to our understanding of the hierarchies and relations between them. The legend documented here was recounted to me by ato Ergada Sa’amär Dam in his house near the grave of his father Sa’amär Dam Ordamo in Barče, Endägañ.\(^4^3\)

«Čumo lived at the shore of Lake Boẓžábär.\(^4^4\) Abara came from Mäsmäš. He traded with cattle. Čumo lived in chastity. Every morning she sat at the shore of the lake in the sun. Near her were people constructing a road, and Fuga.\(^4^5\) When they passed her they saw her jumping into the

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\(^3^9\) On the avoidance of goat products s. also Braukämper 1983:253, 260.

\(^4^0\) On avoidance rules s. Prunet — Berhanu Chamora 1997:561; it is stated there that the Sa’amär Dam only meets people in the open air but Sa’amär Dam Garamo invited me into his main house and allowed me to visit his ritual house gananna.

\(^4^1\) An informant explained that «Umoniya is another name for Awaqa».

\(^4^2\) He used the wood to build his new house and it is rumoured that this is why he died before it was finished.

\(^4^3\) The translation from Hadiyya into English was made by Daniel Lemma.

\(^4^4\) For the religious significance of Lake/River Boẓžábär in Ẹza Gurage s. also Shack — Habte Mariam Markos 1974:66 and n. 8, 67; Gabreyesus Hailemariam 1991:134f.

\(^4^5\) The Fuga are endogamous craftsmen who are traditionally marginalized by farmers and pastoralists.
water. They reported what they saw to the elders who then went to the lake and saw her sitting there. The elders decided to order the people to catch the virgin. The people started to observe when she used to jump into the water and when she left it and when she sat at the shore of the lake. They prayed to God that they would succeed in catching her. After fifteen days, after she left the water, she sat on the back of a cow and rode on it. The people caught her and brought her to the damo who lived near this place.

They asked him: ‘Please invite this woman to stay at your house as a guest who was sent to us by God’. But the damo answered: ‘I do not want her. Only if she is sent by Man is she my guest. If God sent her I will not take her. God is not my guest’. After he had spoken like this he abruptly vanished forever. This is how Šumou got her house where she lived for a long time. After several years the elders gathered and urged the virgin to marry. She answered: ‘Yet, the time hasn’t come. I am waiting for a certain man. He will come with many cattle of many different colours. I will marry him’. After five years a man came with a big number of cattle, with many bulls and calves. And they had many different colours. The name of this man was Abara. He camped near Šumo’s house. He sent somebody to ask her for water. Šumo asked: ‘Who is he?’ Then she saw him with his cattle of many different colours. He sat in the shade of a big podocarpus tree. ‘This is what I was waiting for’, she said, ‘My cattle should mingle with his cattle’. This is how they became married. They had six sons: Šntändera, Idig, Anfia, Qadan, Habemanna and Šaka.46

One day two bulls fought against each other, one owned by Šumo, the other owned by Abara. Abara’s bull won. Šumo got very angry and said to her husband: ‘Kill this [your] bull’. But he answered: ‘Instead of killing my bull, kill me. Only because I am living on the land of your fathers, you want to kill my bull. That is why we should go to the land of my fathers’. But Šumo refused to go to the land of his fathers and she did not want to let her sons go. Abara went to the elders and told them what happened. The elders decided that children and cattle should be divided and one half should migrate with Abara and the other should stay with Šumo. Thus he took three children with him and she stayed with three children in the land of her fathers. Qadan went with his father to Mäsmäs, Habemanna went to Kambaata. Šaka, the youngest son, was determined to go with his father. But because he was still a child Abara brought him to Šamgöm, the daughter of a wöge [fortune-teller], in Buşurro. ‘I will take him later’, he told her.

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46 Šntändera, Idig, Anfia are Säbat Bet Gurage clans, Qadane is a spirit medium clan in Mäsmäs (BRAUKÄMPER 1983:55; maybe the name Qadane derives from a certain Kidanä tabot [?]), the Habemanna are a Kambaata clan.

47 A fight between bulls can eventually indicate a spiritual fight similar to that of two gaarraa moora, ‘bull of the protecting spirit’, known among the Leemo (s. Peter 1999).
After his father left, the fortune-tellers gathered and observed the boy and said: ‘He shall not go to his father’s land’. Ġǝṃğǝm asked them: ‘When his father comes to fetch him, what shall I do?’ The answer of the fortune-tellers was: ‘When the father comes to fetch him, tell him that his child died. We will show him a grave that we have prepared. The boy shall be hidden’. And they did so. When Abara came, they told him that his child died and showed him a grave. Abara started to open the grave but he only found wood. He understood that they did not want to give him his son.

The boy grew quickly. Ġǝṃğǝm became like Saʾamär Dam. Now, people started to come to Ġǝṃğǝm to bring her oxen, flowers and honey and they asked her for her blessing. More and more people came. One day they came already early in the morning. She had only prepared half of her hair-dress and they disturbed her. She became angry and said: ‘What day is this that people do not let me style my hair? What’s going on with the angel of this day?’ After she spoke like this, suddenly a strong wind started and took her and threw her on the earth. She was swallowed by the earth for ever.

This is how the office of Saʾamär Dam came into the Čaka line».49

This account is to be correlated with two other Gurage legends of origin: 1. the legend of origin of the Waq of Čaha, Ogʾāt, documented in two versions by Gabreyesus Hailemariam and Worku Nida and 2. the legend of origin of the Ĝǝvyetakʷɔyä ritual office which is known through the information given by Prunet and Berhanu Chamora.50

1.1) In the legend of origin of the Waq of Čaha, Ogʾāt, the choice of the new (first) medium of Ogʾāt is indicated by the loosening of the person’s hair-dress. The loosening of the hair-dress thus becomes a sign for the chosenness of a medium. Ogʾāt, the legend says, asked the father of the chosen medium to give his daughter to him to become the new Wägäpäča dämam spirit medium. A similar background may be considered to lie behind the anecdote about Ġǝṃğǝm’s unfinished head-dress. 1.2) After the father agreed, the girl chosen by Ogʾāt is said to have been taken away by the wind or cyclone. After a transition period during which she stayed in the trunk of a tree she came back fully initiated in her new office. Probably Ġǝṃğǝm’s va-

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48 According to an informant every day is protected by a special angel.
nishing originally indicated the same type of initiation. Not understanding (?) the cultural context, the teller of the story (or already the person who told it to him) put the event in a time when she already was a spirit intermediary. Something similar must have happened to the damo near Bożżăbăr. 1.3) On the seventh day after the return of the new Ogvät medium a virgin girl brings her water from Bożżăbăr mixed with honey, and after this the new medium is allowed to meet her new husband, the damo of Wągapiča. In the story of Ćumo the elements «virgin», «Bożżăbăr» and «woman entering the house of a damo» can be identified, but they have totally different narrative functions. The traditional elements survived but they seem to be somehow confused now. Unfortunately there was no chance to record the legend from any other informant for comparison or confirmation.

2.1) By correlation with the oral tradition of the Bożżă priests, Ćumo can be identified with Žumwäd, the first, and the only female Gveytakowyä spirit medium. According to Prunet — Berhanu Chamora Žumwäd is said to have come from Arabia together with the first Sa’amār Dam. In Ethiopia the Sa’amār Dam went to Ūndāgañ while Žumwäd first established her sanctuary in Muḥor, then in Ėza, later in Ėaha and at last her present one in Ūnor (Ūnnámor).

2.2) For the conflict of Ćumo and Abara over the fight of the two bulls a similar motif can be found in the legend of Žumwäd. But while Abara is the husband and his bull kills the bull of his wife Ćumo, in the Gveytakowyä legend it is a maga of Žumwäd who kills her bull. By this incident, it is said, that Žumwäd lost prestige and therefore decided that her successors in office should be male.

2.3) In the genealogy of the Gveytakowyä line the second office holder was Wāsrāräd. But he is not mentioned among the list of sons of Ćumo and Abara. Prunet and Berhanu Chamora consider the mother of Ćako (Ćako) and Žumwäd to be the same person. Žumwäd, the first Gveytakowyä, according to them had three sons, Wāsrāräd, Anfuya (probably the Anfia of the Ćaka legend) and Hundar, and one daughter, Ćabratā. The mother of Ćaka (Ćako) and her husband Bāqāstā had eight sons (Dāmmala, Dasara, Žanżuwo, Ćako, Ezafiye, ᖳmitye and Idig [eighth son and daughter unknown]). The legend

51 The names Ćumo and Žumwäd are not much different, Ć and ż are often free variants in Gurage languages (s. Leslau 1979c:62, § 9.42). Ćumo can also be Ūumo, Ćamgam can also be Ūmžam.
53 This origin of the Sa’amār Dam without any additional information was told to me by some Ūndāgañ informants as well.
56 Damala (Dāmmala), Dasara and Žanżuwo (cp. n. 49) sometimes appear in Ūndāgañ genealogies as sons of the apical ancestor Ūndāgañ (also Badāgañ) preceding.
of Ġaka gives a possible answer to Prunet and Berhanu Chamora’s question as to whether there were two Žumʷäds, the mother of Ġaka (Ḡako) and the mother of Wäsräräd. There were two: Žumʷäd (Ḡumo) and Ḍṃḏṃ. Žumʷäd is the mother of the Gʷeytakʷxyä and the Sa’a’mär Dam and she links the two cults together. Ġaka must have had another father than Wäsräräd or this discrepancy shows how the legends shifted away from each other in order to serve the different needs of the clans of the Gʷeytakʷxyä and the Sa’a’mär Dam.

The legend of Ġaka seems to be a recent compilation and re-interpretation of fragments of different narratives. At the beginning of the story Ḍumo seems to come from nowhere. The «land of her fathers» is somewhere near Lake Bożžābär but her genealogical origin is unknown to the teller of the story. It is not clear why she is caught by the order of the elders. Are there no parents to be asked? Is she chosen to marry the damo and to become through this a spirit intermediary? But why is the Damo refusing her and what is the meaning of the Damo’s odd blasphemy? He vanishes, or, to put it in other words, he is abruptly taken out of the story in order to establish Ḍumo as a rich unmarried woman on her own land. The elders urge her to marry but she prophesizes whom she will marry. Her marriage with the nomad pastoralist Abara ends with divorce. Behind this a fission of two associated groups can be assumed, the six clans Šntäzāra, Idig, Anfia, Qadan, Habemanna and Ġaka (Sa’a’mär bīd). The intention of the narration is to show the prestigious genealogical linkages of the Sa’a’mär Dam line. It explains how Ġaka, a Mäsmās child, came to Šndägañ and why he lived in Ḍṃḏṃ’s gananna in Bušurro. Ḍṃḏṃ is the daughter of a fortune-teller and she «became like Sa’a’mär Dam» or is even called «the first Sa’a’mär Dam» by other informants. From her Ġaka received his role as ritual head in Bušurro. From his mother, the first Gʷeytakʷxyä, he had his own spiritual genealogy. By the legend Ġaka and the lineage of Sa’a’mär Dam is endowed with the prestige of three different spiritual lineages: one connecting it with the wider context of Gurage religion, one connecting it with a local priestly lineage, and one with a prestigious Mäsmās ancestor.

**Rites**

In Šndägañ religion the giving of gifts (sacrifices, tributes) had great importance. The relationship between people and higher spiritual beings (angels and even Maryam) or their intermediaries respectively resembled that of patron and client. The individual as well as the smaller or bigger social units could appeal to spiritual counterparts represented by a spirit medium or cer-
tain natural phenomena (trees, rivers) in order to gain a victorious war, protection, wealth, fertility etc. After their wishes were fulfilled people had to give what they had promised.

The *qotora* and *dänne* ceremonies were two complementary types of sacrifices. The *qotora* ceremonies were carried out during night-time, mainly by groups of women. Men only accompanied them to protect them from wild animals but did not take part. The names of rivers which are remembered for their ritual function are Ameka, Dogossa, Fonģorra and Ambuyambo.

The *dänne* ceremonies under the holy trees were exclusively for men. They were carried out in daylight and were connected with political meetings. Times of misfortune were occasions for such gatherings. When the Ǝndägañ were attacked by an enemy or threatened by disease and epidemics the *Sa’ämär Dam* could give instructions as to what type of sacrifice could prevent danger and where (i.e., which meeting place, tree) it should be carried out. Protection ceremonies that were remembered by informants, were those against a wild animal («a big snake») with the name of *Qoro Me’awi*, *Habũsa gofur-ra* («a big snake which killed people»), a big bird with the name *A’ona golũnse* (Hadiyya lit.: ‘vulture, take it away’, probably a cattle disease), the war leader «Gũn abagada [eventually ‘leader of the country’] from Oromiya» and «Ewidaganne» (?), an Italian. Ergada *Sa’amär Dam* described the rite in the following words: «Every clan had to bring [as a gift for the *Sa’ämär Dam*] 15 calves and wood and they prayed together. After the prayer a strong wind begun and took away all evil. It was carried to the Gibe [river] where it fell down and burned. It was possible to see the fire there. Everybody at that time believed in the *Sa’ämär Dam».

At holy trees there were also made other sacrifices. In daily life women brought milk and butter to certain holy trees to smear them at the trunk or leave them there in a bowl. Every year *Awaqa* received the first grain, the first milk, and the first calf.

In the case of the different *awa’o* the distinction between gift and tribute cannot be drawn easily. The *Sa’ämär Dam* was in control of large land and huge herds of cattle. It is said that «nobody could visit him without bringing honey». Feasts were dedicated to *Sa’ämär* and they were the occasions where every clan or sub-clan had to bring milk, butter, honey and cattle to his

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57 The Angel *Sa’ämär* dwells upon *ṭǝd* (Ǝndägañ for juniper) trees which also mark his sacral space. Other trees with connection to him are *olola* (Ǝndägañ for *Ficus vasta*) and *wēra* (Ǝndägañ/Hadiyya for *Olea sylvestris*) and *sǝgba* (Ǝndägañ for *Podo-carpus gracilior*).

58 «Wood» refers to twigs which had to be brought as a votive offering. BRAUKÄMPER (1983:262) describes a similar custom in connection with the *Hawzulla* medium.

59 The trunk of the inthronisation trees on the old market of Sorko was smeared with butter when I visited the place. Unfortunately many holy trees were cut down during the (re-)Christianization period.
shrine district (gananna). For the yearly celebration of the maŋoya feast, a day after māsqäl, delegations from all clans of Ëndägañ and beyond came to honour him and to bring a sacrificial tribute. Maŋoya was also the day when people had to pay their debts, e. g., the promised oxen in return for the good outcome of a conflict or a fertile year. When the oxen were brought to the gananna people sung «abô hēčō, abô hēčō» (‘Awaqa shall be greeted’). The young women, especially of the maga families, started to sing repeating «maŋoya, maŋoya», clapping hands and dancing. Drums were beaten. People gathered around the gananna. When the Sa’ämär Dam approached the gananna followed by his maga he rang his handbell and people had to step aside. Some of the oxen were slaughtered and the meat distributed. The Sa’ämär Dam (or the damo respectively) carried out a haruspexium with the abdominal fat of the sacrificed oxen. He prophesized the fate of the clan which had given the oxen. The Sa’ämär Dam then gave the order as to which colour and features the oxen to be brought in the next year should have in order to prevent misfortune. While doing this the high-priest sat in a tukul (round house with grass-thatched roof) in the gannana and his maga loudly exclaimed his words and prophecies. He always ended with the words: «If you follow me [my instructions] you shall be blessed». After the feast the unmarried women wandered from village to village singing mēd songs and receiving special ensete food (buzanna) from those they visited (o. i. Ergada Ordamo; Wa’adero Ordamo).

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60 The gananna was forbidden for women and members of the endogamous Fuga people who were considered to be impure. The first gananna was in Bušurro. A new one was established in Šawia two generations ago.

61 S. also PRUNET — BERHANU CHAMORA 1997:562.

62 According to BRAUKÄMPER (1983:265) the Hawzulla medium was saluted three times with «abbo heño».

63 The insignia of a Sa’ämär Dam are the ambar arming which is said to have been handed down for 12 generations, the ankase ceremonial staff and the handbell donâ. My informants, brothers of the last Sa’ämär Dam and uncles of the recent, reported of two different ceremonial dresses: 1) a black cape (kabba) and a cap patterned in the colours black, red and white; 2) red clothes («red like the colour of the tabot cloth»), once a year combined with the skin of a leopard (cp. with cloths of the Gweytakwäyä in PRUNET — BERHANU CHAMORA 1995:60f.).

64 For the clan of Sa’ämär bûd and its branch in Hadiyya, the Sa’ameramma, there was also another feast in the first half of Ţorr in Bušurro gananna. It was mainly a gathering dedicated to the ancestor-Sa’ämär Dams. With the death of the last guardian of the gananna this tradition is considered to have died out (o. i. Ergada Ordomo: Doboč Megiso).

65 The term mēd designates ritual associations of unmarried women similar to the m’âyät associations in Caha Gurage (for more information see s. SHACK 1966, index; WORKU NIDA 1990). But LESLAU (1979a:208) explains mēd as «kind of zar-spirit».
The tabot of Bušurro (also Bušurra) Maryam is considered to be the oldest tabot of Ëndägañ country. According to oral tradition it was brought to the region from the north by the followers of the Gurage founding father azmač Sōbḥat. Legend tells that the Ëndägañ migrated to Bušurro guided by their ancestor Šadgār. It is a general topos that they spread from there into their recent settlement area. The tabot of Maryam has a certain significance as the emblematic symbol of the ethnic identity of the Ëndägañ. Maryam is called «the mother of Ëndägañ» (o. i. Kasa Mugoro). 66

The Maryam tabot is said to have been hidden in a cave to save it from the looting warriors of «Grañ». Since then the tabot is said to have been guarded by a big snake (o. i. Gobozo Abayye; Kasa Mugoro; Kersummo Lilato). 67

Around the place a certain cult was developed in which women became the main actors. The «cave», a high-situated cleft on the slopes of Mount Mugo, became the destination of annual pilgrimages held at Šarr 21, the day of Maryam or Šräfta ('Her Falling-asleep', i. e. the day of Mary’s death). Women from all over Ëndägañ climbed up the steep steps 68 from the village of Bušurro in order to fulfil the promises they had made to Maryam to gain fertility or other things they had prayed for and to support their wishes for the next year. The women brought gifts like special ensete food (Ëndägañ: atakana, bərabərat 69), milk, butter, honey or even animals to be slaughtered near the «cave». On other days the «cave» was visited in less important as well as urgent cases. The cult only stopped in 1998 70 when the priest of the new church of Bušurro Gabrael ordered to take away the tabot and to bring it into his church. The priest, a purist Orthodox, forbade all, in his view «pagan», activities at the «cave» and ordered all pilgrims to come to his church. But still I could observe that somebody had made an offering of incense directly at the «cave» (o. i. Gobozo Abayye; Kasa Mugoro).

While the cult of Bušurro Maryam dates back to the unknown past, Ethiopian Orthodox faith in its «pure» form reached the Ëndägañ again with the expansion of the Ethiopian empire under Emperor Mənilśk II. It seems that

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66 The significance of the place is enchanced by the fact that at the eastern side of the Bušurro hill the dwelling place and the holy grave yard of eight generations of Sa’amār Dam, Bušurro gananna, are situated.

67 Doubt can be arouse as to whether there ever was a real tabot, for legends of Christian relicts hidden in caves are a wide spread motif in southern as well as northern Ethiopia.

68 A considerable number of steps are hewn directly into the rock and signs of long usage can be identified.

69 For the usage of bərabərat in the context of spirit possession s. Shack 1971:35f., atakana is considered best quality ənsât food.

70 This was one year before I visited the place at Maryam’s day.
the Ëndägañ’s consciousness of having an old Christian origin, and the Christian elements in their folk-religion, made it much easier for them to accept the religion of the new rulers. Conversation partners explained to me that for the Ëndägañ it was «no problem» to adopt Orthodox faith «because of its similarities with antoqotora». The process is described by some informants as only a formal matter. That this is not fully true, is witnessed by the example of the desecrated holy grove of Umoniya (s. above). The Ethiopian administration saw the relatively unproblematic conversion of the Ëndägañ as a «return» to Christianity and some chiefs quickly gained acknowledgement as officials of the Emperor. The balabbat Hemačo Seqešo was even appointed as the head of the whole Kontäb wàrëda, which also included a large part of the Hadiyya population who had formerly dominated the Ëndägañ.

The indigenous chiefs actively supported the (re-)Christianization, e. g., by building churches. The following list of churches shall show the development of Orthodox Christianity in the main settlement area of the Ëndägañ. After Bušurro Maryam, the second oldest church in Ëndägañ is considered to be Assar Giyorgis in the heartland of the country near the old market of Šorko. Some conversation partners said that here was a pre-Manïlök church. Others speak of a kind of fortification which allegedly stood at this place. The construction of Assar Giyorgis was probably taken out by the order of balabbat Hemačo Seqešo during the reign of Manïlök II. The third church, Anfofo Mika’el, was built in 1916 Eth. C. in the vicinity of the village of the Sa’ämër Dam near a healing jëbül (‘source’). Qäňnazmaq Ba’ore erected in 1923 Eth.C. the church of Sasgita Maryam on the ground of a «grave yard of the pagans». In 1926 Eth.C. balabbat Wälä Sänbät Lagisso founded the church of Wäläo Maryam (he later also founded K’iletat Baläwäld church). Then in 1933 Eth.C. balambaras (sangaqoro) Er’ebf founded Gidaša Kidanärät. During the reign of Haylä Sàllase I the following churches were built: Barče Mädhane ˚Aläm,UMBolča Gabré’el and Nafaga Gabré’el (on the ground of a «pagan grave yard»). Many of these churches were built near näftaňa settlements (like Nafaga). More recent churches are Nafaga Ura’el, Bušurro Gabré’el (which before was already the dwelling place of a hermit), Leera Gabré’el (in today’s Sølte zone) and Geeğa Mika’el (in today’s Hadiyya zone).

Today the majority of Ëndägañ follow a relatively conservative Ethiopian Orthodox faith. Since the time of the Islamic war-leader Hasan Ënğaamo, who is said to have had intermarriage with Muslim Azär-

71 At the steep northern side of the hill of Šorko, reaching near to Assar Giyorgis, a stone wall of seemingly older date can be identified. In a legend azmaq Søløto (clan of Čiračo) ca. 6 generations ago hid his people in a cave at Assar Giyorgis to save them from enemies. Informants told me about a fortification a little below the Assar hill dating back to a war between Alaaba (Qabeena?) and Ëndägañ.
Pl. i. Saʿamār Dam Garamo Ordamo, wearing the traditional šaš (priest’s headgear) with his mule, photo courtesy of the author.
nät-Bärbäre, Hadiyya or Ṣnnámor Gurge some Ṣndägañ follow Islam. Catholic missionaries from Ṣndobăr, who entered the country during the Italian time, were reported to have been driven out. Protestant missionaries penetrating Ṣndägañ country, e.g., Baptists supported by a Korean (!) organization, have until now had very little success and are observed with great suspicion.

After the (re-)Christianization under the Ethiopian emperors the old religion was weakened considerably; under the Därg regime repression additionally increased. The different religious functionaries were considered feudalists who drained wealth from the peasants, and their faith was seen as a sign of backwardness. The large lands of the awaʔo were taken during the land reform and the flow of gifts and tributes weakened every year until it totally stopped. The recent Saʿamār Dam, Garamo Ordamo (s. Pl. 1), was introduced to his office at a very young age at the beginning of Därg rule. He has no personal experience of the old religion in full function. The Saʿamār Dam is still surrounded by many taboos and secrets, and the gananna is still a holy place where trees are not allowed to be cut. The high-priest’s blessing and advice is asked for in the meetings of the songe assembly and his ritual role in the Gurge religious system remains untouched. Garamo Saʿamār Dam describes himself as a «normal peasant» and an Orthodox Christian who prays «for Ṣndägañ, for Ethiopia and for Peace». Let me join him in this prayer.

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2) Araga Ersido: from Leera and Hossana, dañña of the Nure clan, lawyer, former member of Ḥaylä Ṣollase I’s «parliament», grandson of balabbat Hemačo Seqeto, interview: 1 December 1999;

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SUMMARY

This article presents some of the findings of anthropological fieldwork carried out in 2000/01 among the Ëndägañ. It gives a tentative sketch of the religious system of this Säbat Bet Gurage group and attempts to reveal the meaning of the term anţoqoţora which is sometimes used to designate the Ëndägañ folk-religion. Anţoqoţora here is identified as a syncretistic complex of spirit cults within a wider network of Gurage traditional cults, composed of elements originating from neighbouring religious systems as well as from Orthodox Christianity. Constituents of anţoqoţora are the belief in a high-god and the cults of Sa’amär, the Waq (sky-god) of the Ëndägañ, the cult of Umonya and the veneration of the Maryam tabot of Bušurro. Other elements are the cults of the less powerful protecting spirits and ancestors as well as malevolent spiritual beings. The article provides a description of the central features (ritual functions, feasts, avoidance rules, sacrifices etc.) of the cults of the Sa’amär Dam and other high-priests in Ëndägañ, like the Qosi Dam, the Damo Wäyabbo, Umoniya and their ritual assistants, the maga. Special emphasis is given to the analysis of a legend about the origin of the descendance line of the Sa’amär Dam, collected by the author. It is demonstrated that the legend endows the Sa’amär Dam line with the prestige of three different spiritual lineages: one connecting it with the wider context of the Gurage religion, one connecting it with a local priestly lineage, and one with a prestigious Mäsmäs ancestor. The article also describes the syncretistic cult of the Bušurro Maryam tabot and discusses the re-christianization of the Ëndägañ area when it was included into the Ethiopian Empire.