
An Investigation into the *Walābū* Oromo Script Devised by Sheikh Kemal Adem

Nuraddin Aman¹

Abstract

Oromo is one of the Lowland East Cushitic languages of the Afro-Asiatic language phylum, spoken by the Oromo people,² who have a strong oral tradition, which has served in the transmission of information from generation to generation. Apart from the oral tradition, travelers, European missionaries, Oromo ex-slaves, Oromo religious leaders, and professors have been working to make Afaan Oromo a literate language since the late 18th century. As such, several scripts have been adopted and created for Afaan Oromo literary productions for a long time. In this course of Afaan Oromo literary development, Ethiopic (Geez), Arabic, '*Ajami*, Sheikh Bakri Saphalo's orthography, and Latin have all been used. Likewise, an effort by *Sheikh* Kemal Adem in the early 1960s is another notable example. Therefore, this paper introduces Sheikh Kemal Adem's *Walābū* Oromo script together with its linguistic analysis. To that end, the study employed a qualitative research approach, and the data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. The fieldwork was undertaken in Bale, Southeast Ethiopia, through observations and interviews. The findings show that Sheikh Kemal, like his predecessors, devised an Oromo script that represents all Oromo sounds. He produced four manuscripts using this script, covering both secular and non-secular topics.

Keywords: *Walābū*, Oromo, Script, Sheikh Kemal.

1. Setting the Scene

Oral tradition is highly developed among the Oromo people and it has contributed to the transmission of knowledge from generation to generation.³

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²The people call their language, *Afaan Oromo* and in this paper the two names (Oromo language and *Afaan Oromo*) are used interchangeably.

³Tilahun Gamta. 1993. "Qube Afaan Oromoo Reasons for Choosing the Latin Script for Developing an Oromo Alphabet." *The Journal of Oromo Studies* 1 (1):36–40.pp38.; Feyisa Demie.1996. "Historical Challenges in the Development of Oromo Language and Some Agenda for Future Research." *The Journal of Oromo Studies*, 3 (1-2):18–27.pp.18.

This can be seen from the existing rich Oromo oral literature with folk tales, stories, songs, proverbs, poems, parables, and wit.⁴

Initially, in Ethiopia, the Ethiopic (Ge'ez) script was adopted to write mostly Ethio-Semitic languages, particularly Amharic and Tigrinya in both Eritrea and Ethiopia. This script was also used to write some of the Cushitic languages in the country. Besides the Ge'ez script, other scripts like Arabic and 'Ajami have been used to write different literary works in various parts of Ethiopia. In this regard, the Oromo Muslims prefer to use the 'Ajami since it is a long time up-to-date.⁵ Accordingly, Muslim Oromos in Harar, Wallo, Jimma, Bale, and Arsi used to write Afaan Oromo using the Arabic alphabet by adding diacritic marks above or below the Arabic letters to represent sounds which are omitted in Arabic. The Arabic script was mainly used to transcribe Oromo texts of religious poems and to write praise poems for Muslim saints, as well as prepare other religious educational and instructional materials.⁶ However, the use of Arabic, Ethiopic, and other orthographic scripts hindered the majority of Oromo speakers from writing and reading their language by using these scripts, which are not suitable (modified) for representing each Afaan Oromo sound.⁷

In their attempts to write in Afaan Oromo, different scholars and intellectuals have tried to adopt different scripts. Among these, Cerulli,⁸ who attempted to write in Afaan Oromo using both the Ge'ez and Latin script, expressed the shortcomings of the Ge'ez script mainly in terms of equivalent sound representation for each Oromo sound.

It was during the 19th century that Oromo written literature using the Latin script began to spread in Ethiopia by European missionaries who visited western Oromia.⁹ From the 1840s, different European missionaries such as

⁴FeyisaDemie, (1996:18); Mohammed Hassen. 2003. "Shaykh Bakri Saphalo (1895-1980): A Prolific Scholar and a Great Oromo Nationalist." *The Journal of Oromo Studies*, 10 (1-2):135-178.pp.136.

⁵Meyer Ronney (2016:160); "The Ethiopic script: linguistic features and socio-cultural connotations", <http://www.journals.uio.no/osla>.

⁶Andrzejewski, B.W. 1975. "A Genealogical Note Relevant to the Dating of Sheikh Husayn of Bale." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 38(1): 27-39.

⁷Feyisa Demie. 1995. "Special Features in Oromiffa and Reasons for Adopting Latin scripts" *The Journal of Oromo Studies*, 2(1-2):22-29.pp.24.

⁸Cerulli, Enrico. 1922. *The Folk Literature of the Galla of Southern Abyssinia* (Harvard African Studies 3). Boston: Harvard University Press. pp.15.

⁹Mekuria Bulcha. 1994. "The Language Policies of Ethiopian Regimes and the History of Written Afaan Oromo: 1844-1994". *The Journal of Oromo Studies* 1(2):91-116. pp.93.

Krapf, Masisas, Viterbhos,¹⁰ and Oromo ex-slaves in Europe, for instance, Akka Fedhē and Aman Gonda, together with Tutschek, published books composed of Latin alphabets without sound modifications.¹¹ As a result of their endeavors, some Oromo individuals got missionary training in Europe and subsequently made their achievements in producing literature.

Onesimos (*Abba Gammachis*), who was in his early thirties in 1886, continued with translating religious works which he had already started on his return from Sweden.¹² Besides their great efforts in introducing modern education and missionaries in western Oromia, Aster Ganno and Onesimos were among the pioneer Oromo intellectuals who made their attempts at transforming the Oromo language from oral to written forms. From 1885-1898, they accomplished their significant publications, composed in Ethiopic script.¹³ During this period, Onesimos translated seven books, two of them with Aster Ganno in the Ethiopic syllabary. He also compiled an Oromo-Swedish dictionary of some 6,000 words¹⁴ and translated the New Testament in 1893 and the Holy Bible, which was published in 1899.¹⁵ Another significant contribution of Onesimos to Oromo literature is “*Jalqaba Barsiisaa*” or the “*Oromo Reader*”, a pioneering work he produced with Aster Ganno, which was published in 1894. This text is all about the short stories that were originally compiled from the Oromo oral tradition. The second work of Aster Ganno and Onesimos is on “Birth's Bible Stories”, entitled *Si'a Lama Oduu Shantami-Lama*.¹⁶

In the 1940s, an attempt was made to devise a suitable Oromo orthography by religious leaders like Sheikh Bakri Saphalo of Hararghe.¹⁷ Sheikh Bakri's

¹⁰Zelalem Aberra. 2003. “Transition from Oral to Written Oromo Poetry”. *The Journal of Oromo Studies*, Volume 10, Number 1 and 2. pp. 120.

¹¹Tesfaye Tolessa. 2009. “A History of Written Literature in Afaan Oromo to 1991”. A.A.U Unpublished M.A Thesis, department of history and management. pp.7

¹²Mekuria Bulcha, 1994:93; Zelalem Aberra, 2003; Feyisa Demie, 1995 and 1996.

¹³Asafa Jalata. 2007. “Oromummaa. Oromo Culture, Identity and Nationalism”. *Oromia Publishing Company*, Atlanta, Georgia, pp.166.

¹⁴Onesimos Nesib, *The Bible*, (1893), *The Galla Spelling Book*, (Moncullo: Swedish Mission Press, 1894).

¹⁵Mekuria Bulcha.1995. “Onesimos Nasib's Pioneering Contributions to Oromo Writing”, *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 4(1) (University of Uppsala, Sweden: 36-59). pp.40.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Mekuria Bulcha, 1994:91, Mohammed Hassen, 2003:135. See also R. J. Hayward and Mohammed Hassan. 1981. “The Oromo Orthography of Sheikh Bakri Saḥalō”, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* (University of London), Vol. 44, No. 3, pp. 550-566; Aliyi Khalifa. 200. The life and career of Sheikh Bakri Saphalo (1895-1980)”, (A.A.U,

contribution is an extraordinary achievement pertaining to the development of the Oromo written literature, particularly in devising an indigenous Oromo script. Sheikh Bakri Saphalo introduced the new script a long time before the introduction of *Qube*, the Latin-based Oromo orthography, by modern Oromo scholars. Sheikh Bakri's script was used among the Oromo people, particularly in various parts of Hararge.¹⁸ Sheikh Bakri himself initially attempted to employ the Arabic script for Afaan Oromo literature. Additionally, he adopted non-Arabic symbols over the original Arabic script.¹⁹ To memorize easily, he called them by the phrase “*Gaccaphii nyaadhachoo*” or “*Gaccaphiitii nyaadhu*,” literally, eat be seated.²⁰ These six ‘*Ajami*’ sounds are portrayed as follows;

[Ġ= غ], [Č’= چ], [P’= پ], [ḡ = گ], [d= ظ] and [f= ف].²¹

Sheikh Bakri's attempt at script innovation for Afaan Oromo was initially successful, as he was able to solve the difficulty of writing Afaan Oromo by using ‘*Ajami*’ sounds. However, acquainting non-Oromo sounds, both consonant and vowel, to native speakers later on did not provide him with the sagacity he hoped for. Therefore, Bakri was not successful in solving the overall writing and reading problems of Afaan Oromo.²² As a result, Sheikh Bakri was obliged to find or create a better script that represents all Afaan Oromo sounds.²³ Additionally, Sheikh Bakri learned Amharic and its script with the intention of employing it for the Afaan Oromo literary corps.²⁴ His effort to use both Arabic and Ethiopic scripts did not satisfy him because of inherent pronunciation problems while pronouncing unfamiliar phonemes.²⁵ A good example pertaining to the difficulty of using the Ethiopic script for Oromo writings that Sheikh Bakri himself sketched out was thus: the problem

unpublished B.A. Thesis in history,), p. 50-65; Nuraddin Aman. 2012. “Philological Inquiry into the History Manuscript of Šeikh Bakri Saphalo (Abubakar ‘Usmān) (1895-1980)” *Kitāb Irsāl As-sawāriḥ Ilā Samā’ At-tawāriḥ fikašf an Tāriḥ Oromo*, (A. A. U. Unpublished M. A. Thesis), pp.16.

¹⁸ Mohammed 2003:135; Nuraddin 2012:16-18.

¹⁹ Oromo Tv, “Galmee Seenaarraa” (2015).

²⁰ Informant Najad Hassen.

²¹ Nuraddin Aman, (2012: 24-27).

²² Tesfaye Tolessa, (2009: 78).

²³ For the detailed description of Šayḥ Bakri's Oromo orthography see Hayward, Robert J., and Mohammed Hassen. 1981. “The Oromo Orthography of Shaykh Bakri Saphalo.” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, XLIV (3): 550–566.

²⁴ Muhammad Hassan, (2003:pp138).

²⁵ Teferi Degeneh Bijiga, 2015. “The Development of Oromo Writing System”, (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Kent). pp.112.

of consonant gemination ('Burē' and 'Burrē', 'Doba' and 'Dobbā', 'Hatē' and 'Hattē')²⁶, long vowels ('dute and dūte, boru and bōrū, etc) and the absence of "d" [dh] (Voiced alveolar implosive. Ex: dādā 'butter', dāgā 'stone' sounds in Ethiopic alphabet. In fact, "there was also a feeling that the syllabary was more suitable for Ethiopian Semitic languages, such as Amharic and Tigrinya, than the Cushitic languages to which Oromo belongs".²⁷ This obscurity later compelled Sheikh Bakri to abandon both Arabic and Ethiopic scripts, which he considers ineffective for accurately representing Afaan Oromo sounds.

Despite Sheikh Bakr's attempt to employ 'Ajami for Oromo literature, his prominent student named Dr Abdulshekur Mohammed Aman, who was a lecturer and researcher in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, devised his own 'Ajami script, deviating from his teacher in the use of diacritic marks. However, due to the introduction of the Latin-based Qube orthography, Dr Abdulshekur's invention was unfortunately not widely spread among the Oromo people.²⁸

Another pioneering achievement in the developing script for the Oromo language was the contribution of Sheikh Mohammed Rashad Abdulle, the student of Sheikh Bakri. During my interview with him, while he was in a hospital for treatment at Adama town in 2012 (according to the Gregorian calendar), he informed me that while he was in Somalia he was ordered by Siad Barre (the then President of Somalia from 1969-1991) to work with one Somali citizen to adopt Latin script (*Qube* orthography) for Somali languages.²⁹ Besides his assignment for Latin based-Somali orthography, he developed the *Qube* orthography for the Oromo language and has written several books dealing with both secular and non-secular matters. Here are the Afaan Oromo sounds adopted by Sheikh Mohammed Rashad in 1969: C (č'), CH (č), DH (d), NY (ñ), TH(t), SH (š) and PH (p').³⁰

Before and during the Derg (military) regime, Oromo scholars and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) began to adopt consonants and vowels that represent the sounds of the Oromo language. Among these, Haile Fida, with a study group of Oromo students in Europe, published a book entitled "Hirmaata Dubbii Afaan Oromo" in 1972; a drama script entitled "Bara Birraan Bari'e"

²⁶Aliyi Khalifa, pp.41

²⁷UNESCO, 2003. "Writing unwritten languages a guide to the process", eds. Clinton Robinson and Karl Gadeli, (anonymous), pp. 27.

²⁸Informant, Dr Jeylan Kedir.

²⁹Informant: Sheikh Mohammed Rashad.

³⁰Abdulsemed Mohammed, "History of Oromo Writing and the Contribution of Dr Mohammed Reshad" (unpublished paper).

and “A Short Course of the Oromo Language” by Bitema Borru in 1976; Oromo Dictionary by Gragg in 1982; “Oromo-English Dictionary” by Tilahun Gamta in 1989; “Oromo Oral Treasure For New Generation,” and “How to Read Oromiffa and Use Its Grammar” by Mengesha Rikitu, published between 1992 and 1993³¹ are the major achievements for the development of Oromo written literature in Ethiopia.

1991 Now	1939 Moreno	1974 Haile Fida	1977 OLF	1969 Dr. Sheikh Mohammed Rashad
C	č	č	C	C
CH	C	C	CH	CH
DH	Ḑ	Ḑ	D	DH
NY	Ñ	Ñ	N	NY
X	Ṭ	Ṭ	T	X
SH	Š	Š	S	SH
PH	P	P	P	PH

Table 1: The general attempts of different scholars in adopting Latin based orthography³²

The development of the Oromo script continues to this day. Sheikh Kemal Adem's endeavor in the early 1960s is a notable example of this. Therefore, in this paper, I introduce the Walābū Oromo script devised by Sheikh Kemal Adem. Like Sheikh Bakri Saphalo of Hararghe, Sheikh Kemal also invented a unique Oromo script that represents all Oromo sounds. Using this script, he wrote four manuscripts on secular and non-secular topics. Sheikh Kemal's invention has never received any scholarly attention, at least to my knowledge. This study is, thus, the first attempt to present the script with linguistic analysis. To do so, the fieldwork for data collection was conducted in Robe,³³ Bale (430 km away from Addis Ababa). The study follows a qualitative research approach, giving much attention to observations and interviews in fieldwork. To gather efficient data, I began using different primary and secondary sources.

³¹Tilahun Gamta, 1993:36; Feyisa Demie, 1996:21.

³²Derived from Abdulsemed Mohammed, History of Oromo Writing and the Contribution of Dr Mohammed Reshad (unpublished paper).

³³I am grateful to the author of the script Sheikh Kemal Adem for his precious support by providing more information about his innovation as well as for his meticulous support in teaching me every aspect of his *Walābū* Oromo script.

2. A Short Biography of Sheikh Kemal Adem³⁴

Sheikh Kemal Adem Abbiyu was born in 1944 in a small village called Kabira Shayya, a village situated a few kilometers to the north of Robe town, Bale Zone. The family of Sheikh Kemal belongs to the Mandoyu sub-clan of Arsi Oromo.

During his childhood (1–14 years of age), Sheikh Kemal served his family. But later on, he started attending Islamic education in different areas. Accordingly, to satisfy his thirst for knowledge, he first moved to the place called Wada Kebanaya, a place located around Dello Sabro in eastern Bale. Following this, he attended Qur'anic schools for preliminary Islamic subjects and Arabic language under the guidance of Sheikh Abdbulkadir Sheikh Waliy and Sheikh Adem Fato of Sanbitu in Dirre Sheikh Hussein, eastern Bale. Then, he moved to Dida'a in Arsi and continued his education with his brother under Sheikh Salih Awate in Ataba, a place found around Robe Dida'a, eastern Arsi, under Sheikh Hussein Abrogne around Jaju (located 168 kilometers southeast of Addis Ababa), and Sheikh Muhammad Ali in western Shoa Ijajji town. When he was 23, he moved to Gore, Ilu Abba Bora, to study Nahw (Arabic grammar) under Sheikh Abdella Dibab. During his young life in Ilu Abba Bora, Sheikh Kemal attempted to devise a traditional coffee-combing machine.

³⁴The biographical part is taken from the interview conducted with the author of the script himself during the fieldwork from August 2014-March 2015.



Fig 1: Sheikh Kemal Adem’s innovation announced on *Bunna Board Magazine* (left) and Sheikh Kemal Adem and coffee combing manufacture he devised (right).³⁵

³⁵Credit: Photos are taken from *yä Ethiopia Bunnā Board Magazine* preserved in the private library of Sheikh Kemal. The year and date of the Magazine are not visible in the paper since it is old and has been damaged. Now, the where about coffee combing manufacture he devised is unknown.

Fig 2: Sheikh Kemal Adem



During his stay in Ilu Abba Bora, he was employed in a foreigner's shop in Mattu town. And finally, the owners of the shop paid him an extra salary for his success and honesty in his job. Subsequently, during the *Derg* regime, he left Ethiopia and moved to Omdurman, Sudan. Then, he continued his Islamic education of *Fiqh* "Islamic jurisprudence", *Tafsīr* "Qur'anic translation" and *Sīra* "Islamic history". Finally, he traveled to Saudi Arabia in search of additional wisdom and advanced in subjects

including *Hadīth*" the collection of the reports of the teachings, deeds, and sayings of Prophet Muhammad" and other courses for six years. Finally, he returned to his homeland, where he started teaching Islamic basic principles. The local people gave him the title *Sheikh Kemal Farā'ida*³⁶ for his excellent knowledge in giving analyses of Islamic law particularly his excellent knowledge of *Farā'id*. Currently, Sheikh Kemal is living in Robe town and giving services in teaching Islamic basic principles.³⁷

3. Overview of the *Walābū* Oromo Script

Sheikh Kemal started devising the *Walābū* Oromo script in 1963 G.C. For 28 years (1963-1991), he concealed the *Walābū* script from the eyes of the officials of the *Derg*. During the *Derg* era, he hid the manuscripts of the new script because of fear of imprisonment and assassination. Following the downfall of the *Derg* regime, the EPRDF government proclaimed new freedom of speech and writing in one's language. Using this advantage, the script's author persisted in his innovation and later made it known to the society he lives in.

³⁶*Farā'id* is an Arabic term referring to Islamic Law.

³⁷Sheikh Kemal Adem -Photo was taken by the present researcher in 2015.

Initially, this *Walābū* Oromo script had no name. However, recently, Sheikh Kemal Adem gave the script the name *Walābū*, a term which is derived from the ancient Oromo homeland found in the present Bale zone. In writing texts, the *Walābū* script is written from right to left like Arabic. Currently, around eight students have learned the writing system from the Sheikh. All of them are university students. Sheikh Kemal devised the *Walābū* script for various reasons. In the introductory part of one of his manuscripts entitled “Introduction to the *Walābū* Oromo script”, he mentioned the following reasons that encouraged him to devise the *Walābū* script.



















First, the Oromo people have a long history, culture, language, and political organization called *Gada*. These people have lived in the horn of Africa for a long period of time. But they lack a script that represents the sounds of Afaan Oromo or its dialects. Sheikh Kemal devised this script, which represents all Afaan Oromo sounds and makes it easy to pronounce words without any difficulty. The script is devised to avoid practical orthographic problems. Second, Sheikh Kemal opposes the adoption of Latin-based *Qube* orthography since Latin-based *Qube* was not originally the script of the Oromo language. He asserts that these great and ancient people must own a writing system. The Latin alphabet does not make the people the owners of the alphabet, but rather borrowers. Third, while the native Oromo speakers pronounce the English language, their accent is misleading or is influenced by the Latin-based *Qube* sounds. Learning to read in Latin-based *Qube* orthography may affect the native speakers of the Oromo language while speaking the English language due to the influence of their native accent. Fourth, the author states that there could be a new regulation in the future that may prohibit the Oromo people from using the Latin script unless the owners or creators of the script give a permit to use their alphabet or make payments for using their scripts. Lastly, Sheikh Kemal argues that the new script helps the readers save time and energy. According to his argument, the *Walābū* script is very helpful in writing Afaan Oromo efficiently without taking a long time and space. On the other hand, Sheikh Kemal believes that the Latin-based *Qube* orthography requires a lot of characters for a single Oromo word; therefore, it consumes many pages, which otherwise by the *Walābū* script can be significantly reduced.








3.1 Linguistic Description of the *Walābū* Script

The *Walābū* script has 39 basic sounds, comprising 25 consonants and 14 vowels. In the script, the sequence of the sounds is not similar to the order of Latin-based *Qube* orthography. In the *Walābū* script, the alphabet begins with

R and ends with NY (N) sound. According to the author of the script, this sequence of consonants is devised based on the high usage or frequency of the sounds at the beginning of most Afaan Oromo words.

Table 2: The *Walābū* alphabetical order of consonants with the equivalent Latin-based *Qube* orthography and IPA.

Orders	The <i>Walābū</i> script consonant sound representation	Latin-based <i>Qube</i> representation	IPA
1		R	r
2		M	m
3		S	s
4		L	l
5		B	b
6		'	ʔ
7		D	d
8		T	t
9		G	g
10		F	f
11		N	n
12		Q	q
13		K	k
14		H	h
15		Y	y
16		J	ɟ
17		C	c'
18		Dh	ɗ

19		W	w
20		Ch	ɕ
21		X	tʰ
22		Sh	ʃ
23		Ph	pʰ
24		Z	z
25		Ny	ɲ

In *Walābū* script, ten vowel phonemes are made up of five basic vowel sounds, each short vowel having a long phoneme counterpart. The other four vowels included in the *Walābū* script are designed to represent the three vowels, /a/, /i/, and /u/ which occur after geminated consonants³⁸ and the static (*Sukūn*) vowel.³⁹ These vowels are represented by diacritic marks over or below the basic vowels marked along with the other ten vowels. It should be noted that the author added these extra vowels in the vowel system of the Oromo language influenced by his knowledge of the Arabic language and its orthographic system.

³⁸Geminate: (Arabic: شِدَّة *shaddah*) It is equivalent to writing a consonant twice in the orthographies of languages like Oromo. See also, Maria-Rosa Lloret. 1988. "Gemination and Vowel Length in Oromo Morphophonology" (A Ph.D. Thesis submitted to the Department of Linguistics, Indiana University).

³⁹Static: (Arabic: سكون *Sukūn*) is a small symbol (◌◌) over a given letter. It is placed over a letter when no vowel should be pronounced after the letter. See also, *Al Ani, S.H. 1970. Arabic Phonology: An Acoustical and Physiological Investigation*, (The Hague: Mouton).

Table 3: The *Walābū* script short vowels

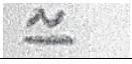



short vowels	Latin equivalent
—	a
	u
	i
	e
	o

Table 4: The *Walābū* script long vowels






Long vowels	Latin equivalent
	aa
	uu
	ii
	ee
	oo

Table 5: The *Walābū* script vowels with a geminated consonant and its example in Afaan Oromo word.











<i>Walābū</i> vowel with a geminated consonant	Example (Afaan Oromo word)	Transliteration in <i>Qube</i>	Gloss
		adda	different/forehead
		ačči	there
		heddu	many/much

Table 6: *Walābū* script which represents static (*Sukūn*) vowel with example in Afaan Oromo word.

<i>Walābū</i> (<i>Sukūn</i>)	Example word in <i>Walābū</i> script	Afaan Oromo	Gloss
		farda	horse
		sangā	ox
		jalqaba	start

The above tables show short and long vowels that come with geminated consonants and *Sukūn* in Oromo words. To identify each vowel from the rest of the vowel sounds, the author included diacritics above or below the vowels that occur after geminated consonants and represent static (*Sukūn*) vowels. The *Sukūn* diacritic mark is used to indicate that no sound is pronounced after the letter.

4. Manuscripts that are Written by Using the *Walābū* Script

Sheikh Kemal wrote four manuscripts using the *Walābū* script that deal with both secular and non-secular subjects. Below are lists of each of the manuscripts with their respective contents.

1. *Umdatu As-Sālik wa 'Uddatu An-Nāsik (Farā'id)* 'Islamic Law' (Reliance of the traveler: the classic manual of Islamic sacred law)
2. *Ibsa Sirna Barreeffama Walaabuu ilaalchisee* 'Introduction to the *Walābū* script'
3. *Seenaa Gootota Baalee* 'the biographies of the heroes of Bale'
4. *Safīnatu An-Najāh* 'the ship of salvation/success'

The manuscript of *Umdatu As-Sālik* deals with worshipping Allah and the general rules of social life according to Islam. It is the fourth text in the Al-Imām Al-Šafiy Islamic jurisprudence curriculum studied in Ethiopia. It was authored by Ahmad Ibn Lu'lu' al Naqīb (1302-1368). Sheikh Kemal translated this text from Arabic into Afaan Oromo using the *Walābū* script. It has 125 folios. The second manuscript about the introduction to the *Walābū* script deals with the general overview of the script. In this manuscript, the first ten pages are devoted to introducing the *Walābū* script, the reason why the script has been devised, and its purposes. The third manuscript (the biographies of the heroes of Bale) deals with the biographies and contributions of five main courageous personalities of Bale, particularly their roles in the Bale rebellion⁴⁰

⁴⁰The first Oromo peasant rebellion erupted in Bale, south-east Ethiopia in the early 1960s. The factor of the rebellion was primarily the cruelty of the feudal system of the Ethiopian regime, land tenure, and high taxation (Gebru, 1977:308). In fact, the movement was led by young energetic Oromo nationalists such as Ḥusayn Bune, Aliyi Dadhi, Ismi Abba Washa, Waqo Lugo, Aliyi Chirri, Waqo Gutu, Ishak Dadhi Tarre, Muhamad Gada Kallu and Hajj Adem Saddo (Østebø, 2009:188). Originally, the rebellion was begun in Dallo district in 1963 under the leadership of Waqo Gutu against the taxation policy of the central government (Ulrich Braukämper, 1982:3). Following this, other wings of this movement erupted in Raitu, in Bale under the command of Husayn Bune and extended in the lowland areas of the region up to the borderlands of Somalia against the imperial regimes of Ethiopia (P. T. W. Baxter, 1978:283-296). The rebellion was continued from 1963-1970 by the sagacity of being

that took place in the early 1960s and 1970s: ⁴¹a) Hajj Adem Saddo, b) General Wako Gutu, c) General Hussein Bune, d) Hajj Ishak Dadhi Tarre and e) Muhammad Gada Kallu.⁴² The fourth manuscript of the Sheikh (*Safīnatu An-Najāh*), like *'Umdatul As-Sālik* manuscript, is translated from Arabic into Afaan Oromo using the *Walābū* script. The text mainly focuses on the doctrine and jurisprudence of the school of al-Imām al-Shāfi'ī.

4.1 Appendix

From the above mentioned four manuscripts produced by Sheikh Kemal using the *Walābū* script, two sample manuscripts (*Ibsa Sirna Barreeffama Walaabuu ilaalchisee* 'Introduction to the *Walābū* script' and *Seenaa Gootota Baalee* 'the biographies of the heroes of Bale') are presented with translation as follows.

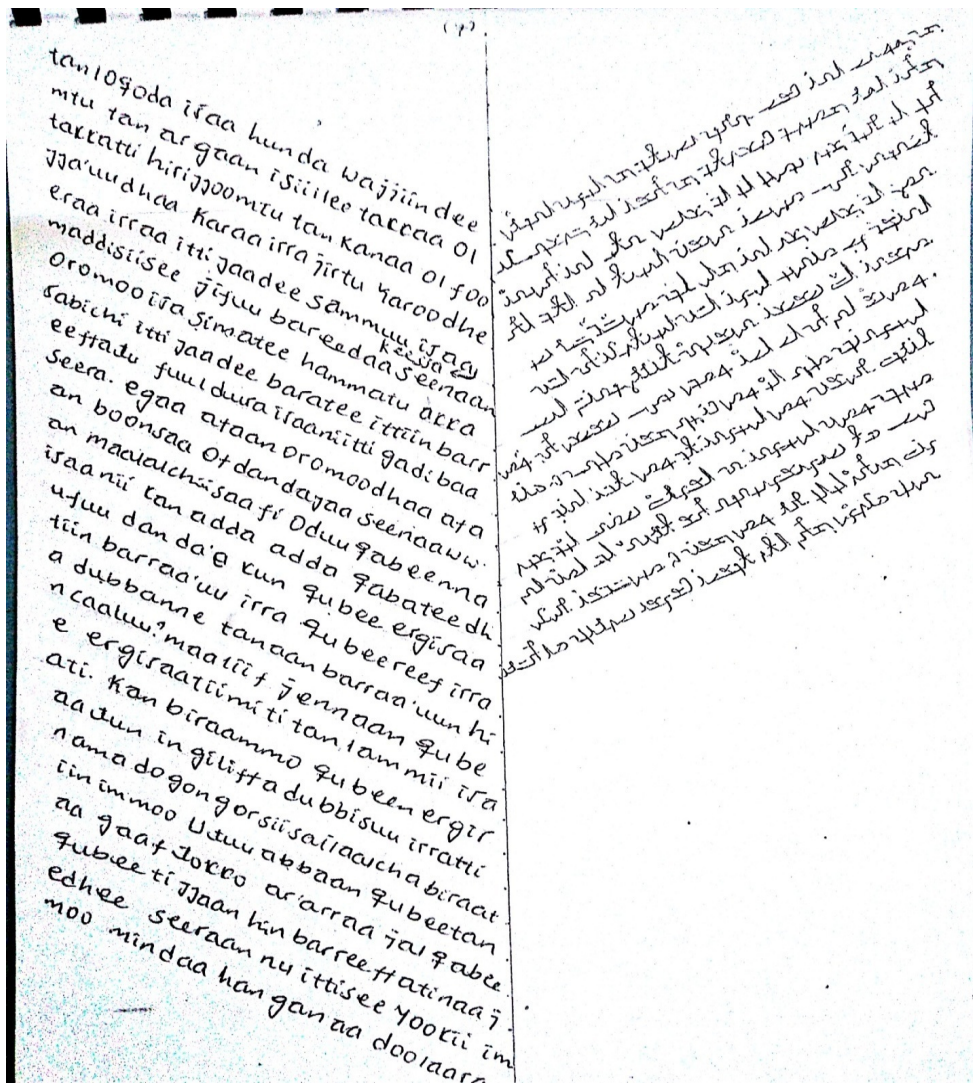
Illustration 1: Depiction of a manuscript about the 'Introduction to the *Walābū* script' written in *Walābū* script (on the right side) with its equivalent in Latin-based *Qube* orthography (on the left side).⁴³

subjugated and humiliated under the *Gebbar* system until they have power over the vast regions of Bale and the neighboring region in the early 1970s (Østebø, 2009:188).

⁴¹The author of the manuscript had taken and summarized this note from the works of Aman Nesha entitled *Qabsoo ummata Oromoo fincila Baalee*. Originally the text was recorded in Latin-based *Qube* orthography and Sheikh Kemal copied and wrote it down in his *Walābū* script.

⁴²The author of the script informed the researcher that the reason why he wrote about these heroes is for the sake of transferring the general panorama of Bale history and the courageous deeds of the heroes to the new generations.

⁴³Credit: both the *Walābū* and *Qube* are written by Sheikh Kemal Adem.



Translation:

This new script adequately represents the sound system of Afaan Oromo. Thus, the author has taken a long time contemplating and devising this script. At last, he introduced it to the public so that the Oromo people could learn and employ it in their writings. In fact, Afaan Oromo is a great, independent, and historical language that reflects the glory of the nation and thus would be better to use this indigenous script (*Walābū*). Isn't it? Because, I did not adopt this script from other orthographies, rather it is the property of the Oromo nation and belongs to this nation. Additionally, the Latin-based *Qube*

orthography is misleading when the native speakers of the Oromo language pronounce the English words, particularly their accent while speaking English is distorted or is influenced by the *Qube* sounds. Also, learning to read in *Walābū* may affect the native speakers of Oromo while reading some English lexical items. Perhaps, there could be a new regulation in the future that may prohibit the Oromo people from using the Latin script unless the owners or creators of the script permit them to use their alphabet or make payments for using it.

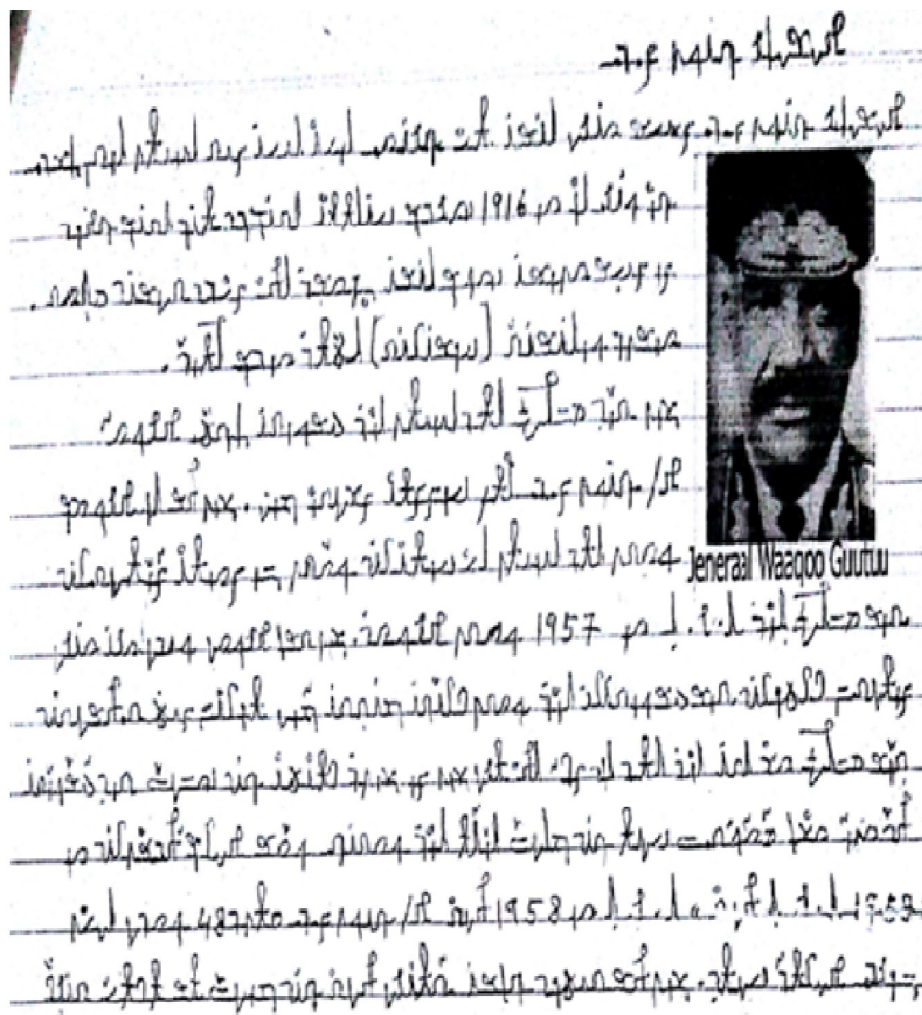


Illustration 2: Depiction of a manuscript about the biography of Bales' Heroes written by *Walābū* Oromo orthography of Sheikh Kemal Adem.

Transcription in Qube:

Jeneraal Waaqoo Guutuu

Jeneraal Waaqoo Guutuu godina Baalee aanaa Madda Walaabuu araddaa Odaa gosa Oromoo Arsii Raayituu Warra Qaalluu irraa bara 1916 dhalataniid daa'imummaa isaaniitiin maatii isaanii wajjiin gara godina Booranaa dhaqanii aanaa Liibanitti akka guddatan seenaan ni ibsa. Barnoota Qur'aanaas (diinaa) achumatti baratani xumuran. Yeroo sirni nafxanyaa ummata Oromoo irratti cunqursaa raawachuu jalqabu Jeneraal Waaqoo Guutuu umrii dargaggummaa gaheessarra ture. Yeroo kana irraa jalqabani qabsoo ummata Oromoo adda durummaan qabsoo farra gabrummaa gurmeessuun sirna nafxanyaa irratti A.L.I bara 1957 qabsoo jalqaban. Yeroo san irraa jalqabee qotee bulaa Baalee gurmeessuu fi hidhachiisuun sirna cunqursaa irratti qabsoo hadhaawaa taasisaa ture. Miidhaa fi gochi suukaneessaan sirna nafxanyaa biyya isaa irratti ummata irraan gahu akka malee yeroo gara yerootti hammaachaa waan dhufeef sirni cunqursaa kun boru biyyarraa nu buqqisuuf deema waan ta'eef har'uma irratti qabsaa'uu qabna jedhanii kutannoon ka'an. Bara 1958 A.L.I keessa Jeneraal Waaqoo Guutuu namoota 48 qabatee Somaalee iddoo Fiiltuu jedhamtu deeman.

Translation:

General Waqo Gutu

General Waqo Gutu was born in 1916 in Bale zone, Meddawalabu province, Oda district. His clan has been traced back to the Warra Qallu, Arsi Rayitu of the Oromo clan. It is said that he moved to Borana zone, Liban province, during his childhood with his family and grew up there. Consequently, he attended his basic Islamic education in Borana. General Waqo was a young man during the subjugation of the Oromo under the feudal system. Indeed, it was in 1957 E.C. that he started to lead the armed resistance against the then feudal system. Since this period, he played a major role in leading and providing armaments for the Bale farmers in order to fight for their freedom. As a result, he organized his people in an attempt to eradicate the feudal system from the region before it imposed further oppression on the Bale people. By doing so, he traveled to Filtu, in Somalia, together with his 48 comrades in order to organize a strong-armed struggle.

5. Conclusion

This study attempted to introduce an indigenous Afaan Oromo script called *Walābū* devised by Sheikh Kemal Adem of Bale. We now have a completely new entry of Oromo script, which has long been developed by an Ethiopian traditional scholar but has not received scholarly attention or been presented to any academic outlet previously. Thus, the work is original and provides fresh information pertaining to the endeavor of devising an indigenous script by an Ethiopian traditional scholar. The devising of Afaan Oromo orthographic development uncovered in this study is a breakthrough in the continuation of creativity in our language and linguistic legacy. The *Walābū* script is a unique script completely different from Ethiopic, Arabic, Sheikh Bakri's orthography, and the *Qube* as well. The linguistic and nationalistic rationale behind developing the new script in the contemporary world is also worth acknowledgment.

The *Walābū* script is believed to represent all Afaan Oromo sounds and makes words easily pronounced without any difficulty. The Latin-based *Qube* orthography normally starts with A and ends with Z, but the *Walābū* script begins with R and ends with the NY (N) sound. According to the author of the script, this sequence of consonants is devised based on the high usage or frequency of the sounds at the beginning of most Afaan Oromo words. However, this sequence of *Walābū* script may be difficult for kids (beginners) to pronounce the consonant 'R', which appears at the beginning of the alphabetical order of *Walābū* Oromo script.

Despite the long challenges he faced in the past, mainly due to political factors from the government side, currently, the author of the *Walābū* Oromo script has got a patent right in 2017. As presented earlier in this paper, around eight students have learned the *Walābū* Oromo script from the Sheikh. At present, the author of this script has the intention of developing a software system for the *Walābū* script with the concerned professionals in order to reach it out to the wider public. Last but not least, this study could help bring the writing system to light.

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