NOTES ON THE SOCIAL ORGANISATION
OF THE 'ISE SOMALI (*)

I. M. LEWIS

RIASSUNTO. — Notizie sull'ordinamento gentilizio dei Somali 'Ise, non sufficientemente conosciuto fino ora, e su tratti sociali peculiari che distinguono gli 'Ise da altri contemporanei gruppi tribali somali del nord.

RÉSUMÉ. — Notes sur l'organisation généalogique des Somali 'Ise, sur laquelle on n'était pas renseigné suffisamment jusqu'ici. On donne aussi des renseignements sur des caractères culturels spécifiques, qui distinguent les 'Ise d'autres unités tribales Somali contemporaines du nord.

SUMMARY. — This article examines the genealogical organisation of the 'Ise Somali which has not previously been fully described, and notes some cultural features which distinguish the 'Ise from other contemporary northern Somali clans.

I.

The 'Ise Somali of French Somaliland, Harar Province of Ethiopia, and the north-western regions of the new Somali Republic, despite their proximity to the modern town of Jibuti are amongst the most conservative of the northern Somali and probably the most dedicated to their traditional nomadic life. Although foreign explorers have often traversed their country and although they have long been under foreign administration they still remain one of the least well-documented northern Somali groups 1). In these notes I record some new data on the genea-

(*) My data are based on a short stay of about five weeks in 'Ise country spent mainly among the coastal 'Ise of the Zeila area.

logical organisation of the 'Ise and discuss some of the more important aspects in which their culture and social organisation differ from neighbouring northern Somali.

The 'Ise in the west of what was formerly the Somaliland Protectorate are estimated to number some 55,000, and in French Somaliland some 17,000. I do not know their strength in Ethiopia but it seems likely that the total population of the clan is about 100,000. The immediate neighbours of the 'Ise to the west are the 'Afar (or Danakil) known to Somali generally as Ōd'ali (or Ūd 'Ali) \(^1\) with whom the 'Ise frequently fight. Indeed it is probably legitimate to speak of an almost constant state of enmity between the 'Ise and the 'Afar, a situation which appears to contribute to the strong sense of clan identity which the 'Ise exhibit in such marked degree. Although the 'Ise despise the 'Afar, ridiculing those 'Afar customs such as the true levirate \(^2\) which are different from their own, and sometimes even say that the 'Afar are equivalent to sab bondsmen, Midgâns and the like, nevertheless some intermarriage takes place between the two communities. 'Ise claim that occasionally 'Ise girls are married by 'Afar men but that they themselves very rarely marry 'Afar girls, an assertion which is born out in the few 'Ise marriage histories which I collected.

To their east the 'Ise are in contact with the Somali Gadabûrsi clan with whom they also frequently fight partly through competition for access to grazing and water, but to whom they nevertheless feel themselves much more closely akin. In general the two clans share

\(^1\) According to Somali Ūd 'Ali refers to the turbulent character of the 'Afar. One explanation of the name is that it is a corruption of the Arabic a-dh-a, lit. 'he harmed' and means 'troubler', and the proper name 'Ali. There is dispute as to whom the name 'Ali refers. Some Somali hold that the reference is to 'Ali Samarrûn, ancestor of the Gadabûrsi clan, although the 'Afar and Gadabûrsi are not now in direct contact whatever may have been the case in the past. Others hold that the reference is to 'Ali Abû Ṭâlib, cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet, equating the 'Afar with those who supported the Ummayad rebellion against 'Ali in the struggle for the Caliphate about A. D. 657. An alternative etymology is from Somali őd, the thorn-scrub fence surrounding the Somali grazing camp, and 'Ali is taken to represent an 'Afar ancestor. It seems however that the Somali word Ūd 'Ali is a corruption of Adali, the name of one of the most important 'Afar groups. Cf. J. L. Krapf, Travels, Researches and Missionary Labours during an eighteen years' residence in Eastern Africa, London, 1860, p. 517.

\(^2\) Where a man marries the wife of a deceased kinsmen and rears children not to his own name but to that of the deceased. The Somali do not practise the true levirate.
peculiarities of dialect which differentiate their speech from that of the Somali spoken in the centre of northern Somaliland (e. g. by the Isāq). There is much inter-marriage between the two clans and certain sections of the western Gadabūrsī such as the Mahad 'Ase are in appearance, dress and accoutrements virtually indistinguishable from many of the 'Ise. The men of both the Mahad 'Ase and most of the 'Ise wear their hair long in the traditional Somali fashion, they also scarify their cheeks, and carry long spears, shields and long curved knives (sg. billāwe) quite different from those carried today by other northern Somali.

II.

The 'Ise trace descent patrilineally from their eponymous ancestor, 'Ise Maḥammad, whose grave ¹) lies close to that of Šayḥ Isāq at Mait in Erigavo District of northern Somaliland. This is consistent with 'Ise traditions of a general movement of the clan from the east of northern Somaliland towards their present habitat in the west. This westwards expansion which involved moving into land earlier held by Galla groups seems to have been occasioned by the expansion of the Isāq and Dārōd communities in the east ²). In addition to the expulsion of Galla groups and also probably the incorporation of some into the 'Ise clan, the westward thrust of the 'Ise impelled the 'Afar to move northwards into what are today the territories of French Somaliland and Eritrea. It has been claimed that as recently as one hundred and fifty years ago the 'Afar were still close to Zeila which with Jibuti is now well within the 'Ise orbit ³). And still today the 'Ise pressure towards the northwest continues, one line of expansion being towards the Awash River ⁴).

There is some confusion today as to the antecedents of the 'Ise clan founder. Some 'Ise regard their eponymous ancestor as a lineal descendant of Dir Somali and through the latter ultimately of 'Aqīl Abū Ṭālib, a view shared by other Somali and that ascribed to the 'Ise in the great national genealogy which links all the Somali clans and clan-families together and records their descent from Arabia ⁵). More

¹) Some 'Ise, however, say that the 'Ise shrine near Mait is not the true grave of their ancestor but only a maqām and state that he is actually buried in the Almis Mountains in the west.

²) Cf. Lewis, RSE (= Rassegna di Studi Etiopici), XV, 1959, p. 31.


⁴) Ibid., p. 181.

⁵) See Lewis, The Somali Lineage System and the Total Genealogy (cyclostyled), Hargaisa, 1957, p. 74.
recently, however, 'Ise claim that their ancestor is a saint on a par with Sayh Isāq ¹) and indeed his brother. As one 'Ise clansman put it "although 'Ise was a saint (welî), his children forgot their ancestor's calling and became warriors (waranleh) ²) ignoring for many generations the holy works of the clan founder ". Today there are a number of Sufistic hymns (sg. qasīda) sung in praise of Sayh 'Ise ' and there is a shrine where he is said to have appeared miraculously at Jibuti in French Somaliland. Here and in some other parts of 'Ise country remembrance services (sg. dikri) are held each week on Mondays and Thursdays. This cult has the appearance of being a fairly recent development; it is not mentioned by Burton ³), and it is not as strong or as widespread as that for Sayh Isāq. It appears indeed that the Sufistic cult of the 'Ise ancestor has arisen fairly recently partly as an expression of 'Ise clan solidarity in response to the Isāq cult of their ancestor, Sayh Isāq.

As an example of the growing but as yet not perhaps very extensive Sufistic literature praising Sayh 'Ise I quote in free translation a few lines from a qasīda written in Arabic in honour of 'Ise by Sayh Awad Wa'ays of the 'Ise Mamāssan.

'I In the name of God, the most merciful,
Oh God, be kind to our Sayh 'Ise, the generous,
For his sake give us abundant rain,
His praise is sung throughout the world,
He who is afflicted or in difficulties has only to seek his aid,
His presence brings relief to all affliction,
Disappointment is the lot of those who forsake the saints,
For God's mercy is by precedent with the saints,
His origins are noble, his sons leaders of the faithful, and his bounty given freely to all as it has been established'.

¹) On Sayh Isāq see RSE, XV, 1959, pp. 33-34.
²) Traditionally the occupations open to Somali fall into two classes: priests (sg. waddā) and warriors (sg. waranleh). Still today, however else he may obtain his livelihood, a man who practises as a sayh is regarded as a waddā and by definition, though not always in practice, excluded from direct participation in fighting. This is the business of warriors.
Ise is said to have had three sons: Elëye (also known as Abgål), 'Ali (also known as Walâldôn and Holleqade), and Hölle (also known as Fûrlabe). These three sons and their descendants are known as Bah Madigan because their mother was a woman of the Madigan Dir clan small scattered groups of which still survive in parts of western and eastern northern Somaliland). In fact today, however, there are six main branches of the Ise clan which I shall refer to as 'primary lineages' and these are divided into two groups. The first the so-called 'three Ise' (saddehda Ise) comprises the lineal descendants of Ise's three sons Elëye, 'Ali, and Hölle. The second, known as the 'three followers' (saddehda so'ra) consists of the Hörrône, Ùrweyne, and Wardiq. 'Ali's descendants are generally referred to today as the Walâldôn, and Hölle's as the Fûrlabe. Hörrône is grouped with these two primary lineages in a loose association called the Dalôl while the Ùrweyne are loosely attached to the Elëye, this association being called the Abgål. Finally the Wardiq stand alone as a separate group. These divisions are shown in the diagram.

Ise

'Ali  Hölle  Hörrône  Elëye  Ùrweyne  Wardiq
(Walâldôn)  (Fûrlabe)  \\
DALÔL

'Ali, Hölle, and Elëye are the 'three Ise'; Hörrône, Ùrweyne, and Wardiq the 'three followers'.

The ancestors of the primary lineages described by Ise as the 'three followers' are said to be of extraneous origin and not to be descended from Ise's sons. According to some the Wardiq are of Sayhås origin; the Hörrône of Isåq origin; and the Ùrweyne said to be descend-

1) See Mer Rouge-Afrique Orientale, 1958, p. 181.
2) The Sayhås are a clan of waddås distributed widely in Somaliland. The majority trace descent from Sayh Fiqi 'Umar, whose genealogy goes back to the first Caliph Abu Bakr as-Çaddiq and are accordingly sometimes known as the Rër Abu Bakr Saddiq or Rër Fiqi 'Umar. They probably total about 20-30,000 persons and live as pastoral nomads many of whom practise as waddås. The Rër Sayh Aw Qutub are an important branch living amongst the Somali Qgadën. Sayh Aw Qutub's tomb is at Sayh close to the border between Berao and Berbera districts in northern Somaliland. See Lewis, The Somali Lineage System, op. cit., pp. 91-93.
ed from the 'Afar. Other 'Ise again state that the Wardiq are of Isāq

descent, indeed of the Habar Tol Ja'lo clan, and derive from captives
taken in war by the early ancestors of the 'Ise. There are no doubt
other traditions describing the origin of the three followers but those
recorded here appear to have a fairly wide currency among the 'Ise.
These traditions, however, usually recalled by the members of one lineage
about another, are not, as far as I am aware, the basis of any effective
social ties between the 'Ise groups concerned and those from whom
they are said to have sprung.

Despite the division of the six 'Ise primary lineages into two cate-
gories — the 'three 'Ise ' who are 'Ise by birth (dalad) and the 'three
followers ' who are 'Ise by adoption (daqad) — all the 'Ise have a strong
sense of clan identity in relation to outsiders. Within the clan the asso-
ciation of the Walāldōn, Hölle, and Hôrrōnē as Dalōl in opposition
to the 'Elēye and Ürweyne united as Abgāl, relates largely to numerical
and fighting strength. The 'Elēye are the most numerous of the 'Ise
fractions and to offset their power the Walāldōn, Hölle and Hôrrōnē
have combined. The Wardiq who stand alone and belong neither to the
Dalōl or Abgāl division are said to be the smallest numerically of the
'Ise primary lineages and their isolation is consistent with their unique
political role in the clan. They traditionally supply the clan-heads of
the 'Ise (Ugāsyo, sg. Ugās) and are regarded as endowed with blessing
(baraka) by virtue of which they fulfill a mediatory role in relation to
the other 'Ise lineages. Thus though they are weak in fighting power
they are strong in ritual and their alleged derivation from the Sayhās
clan of wadāds is particularly appropriate.

As with other northern Somali clans each of these six primary
lineages is segmented into a large number of smaller patrilineal groups.
Segmentation is most extensive and widely ramified in the 'Elēye who
are numerically the 'long branch' (lândēr) of the 'Ise and the clan's
largest fraction. Within the 'Elēye lineage living adults count between
ten and eighteen generations to their eponym 'Elēye according to the
size of the segment to which they belong.

All three divisions, Dalōl, Abgāl, and Wardiq intermarry. Within
the Dalōl, the Walāldōn, Fūrlabe and Hôrrōnē all intermarry but there
is little internal marriage within either the Walāldōn or Fūrlabe. Within
the Abgāl, the 'Elēye and Ürweyne intermarry, and inside the large
'Elēye lineage some intermarriages take place between its two main
segments the Müsē 'Elēye and Mammāsan 'Elēye. Marriage within the
Wardiq segment now takes place between its two chief fractions, the
Rumawāq and Waḥtiśīl.
III.

As with other northern Somali none of the six 'Ise primary lineages is firmly localised nor are the movements of its members restricted to specific lineage areas. 'Ise insist most strongly, perhaps more strongly than other northern Somali, that the land which they occupy is for the purpose of grazing open to the livestock of all 'Ise without respect to their lineage affiliation. However, there is a general geographical division of the 'Ise clan as a whole into two groups — the 'Black 'Ise' ('Ise Madôbe) and the 'White 'Ise' ('Ise 'adde). The 'Black 'Ise' are those who live and move with their stock mainly in the west towards the 'Afar and in Ethiopia: the 'White 'Ise' lie to the east towards the Gada- bârsi and pasture their livestock along the coastal Guban plains. It is apparently partly their movement over this scalding white sandy terrain which earns them their name, and in addition the fact that since water is widespread and plentiful on the coast they wash their clothes more frequently. The 'Black 'Ise' on the other hand who move in country where water is less widely distributed are said to wash less frequently. They oil their hair heavily with ghee which stains their clothes, especially the shoulders of their 'tobes', black. The application of ghee to the hair is said to promote good health and longevity, an idea apparently connected with the use of ghee as a medicine and tonic, and of course as a foodstuff.

In keeping with this vague geographical division there is a corresponding difference between the 'White' and 'Black' 'Ise in their economy. The 'Black 'Ise' are said to possess more cattle and camels than the 'White 'Ise' whose chief wealth is in sheep and goats. However, after rain has fallen on the coast and vegetation is abundant large herds of camels are seen grazing there as well as often considerable numbers of cattle.

The distinction between the 'Black' and 'White 'Ise' does not correspond exactly with the genealogical divisions of the clan. Some lineages are divided between the two geographical areas and groups may change their patterns of movement over the years and according to stock to the distribution of rain and pasture through the seasons. However, the 'Black 'Ise' usually comprise the following — the Wardîq; the following sections of the Mûse 'Èlëye, Aḩtimahure, Bede Mûse, Ḥâlra Mûse, Rër Gûlëne Mûse, Rër Aшихir Mûse, Abîb Mûse, Rër Kûl, and Rër

1) Literally the 'burnt' land, from gub, to burn.
Ma'allin; the Hôrrûne as a whole; some segments of the Fûrlabe i.e., Rër Hannas, Bödböd, 'Êlêye, Rër Nûr, Rër Haği, and the Rër Gësaleh; finally the Walâldôn are represented by the Rër Bulbul, Rër Qoti, 'Ali Gadid, 'Ali Hayil, and 'Ali Gâl. The 'White 'Ise' usually include some of the Fûrlabe, i.e., the Fârah Matân, 'Ali Çire, and Nebi Same; parts of the Mûse 'Êlêye, e.g. parts of the Rër Kûl, Rër Galân, and Rër Üran; and of the Mamân, the Bah Abdarağmân, Rër Fâtağ, Bah Gurgure, Bah Fûrlabe, Bah Hağla, Rër Allâle, Rër 'Olôw, and the Rër Fiqi Yûnis; there are also some Walâldôn.

IV.

As a whole the 'Ise have the same basic social structure and culture as the other northern Somali. Like the latter and unlike their neighbours the 'Afar and Galla the 'Ise do not have age-grades; boys are initiated usually individually by circumcision and this is not a matter of entry into an age-set organisation 1). There are however a number of points at which they do differ from other northern Somali. For example, as is well-known, the 'Ise build elaborate graves, usually encircled by rings of stones some of which represent success in battle 2). Their men also still generally follow the traditional northern Somali hair style in which the hair is allowed to grow into a wide mop, although most of the other northern Somali clans, with some exception among the Ogâden and Hawiye, have now discarded this style and shave their hair short. In addition to the large knives they carry and long spears, and the scarifications on the cheeks, chest, arms and legs which they sport as decorations, 'Ise warriors also wear bracelets signifying their success in war especially against the 'Afar.

Thus traditionally I was told a youth does not shave his pubic hair until he has made a successful killing. Then a bronze bracelet called mäldaye is worn on the left wrist. The warrior with two murders to his credit wears another bracelet called 'âg on the upper arm. When

1) It is not clear to what extent the 'Afar as a whole have an age-set organisation or indeed what its social importance is amongst those 'Afar groups which appear to possess it. See DESCHAMPS, Côté des Somalis, 1948, p. 32; W. THESIGER, The Awash River and the Aussa Sultanate, "Geographical Journal", 85, 1935, pp. 1-23; I. M. LEWIS, Peoples of the Horn of Africa, 1955, p. 166; and Mer Rouge, op. cit., p. 61.

a man has killed ten people the āg armlet is opened and thrown away and the māldaye transferred to the right wrist, all other armulets and bracelets being discarded at the same time. Such a warrior with ten killings to boast of is called mirre. Not surprisingly with the strong propensity of the 'Ise for war many 'Ise poems and songs take as their theme the successful murder of enemies, especially of the 'Afar. The following is I think a fairly typical 'Ise gērār celebrating the murder of an 'Afar tribesman by an 'Ise. This was collected at Luğaye on the coast to the east of Zeila and composed by Ibrāhīm Beqsi.

Odaygī ina Mumin ē
Mūðka 1) gēla lahā
Haddā gērī 2) na'āyo
Diḥda gēdaha weynleh
Mū gōfkhēda 3) kabaydō

The old man, Mūmin's son,
Who had the benefit of camels,
If he doesn't like death,
Why didn't he avoid,
The dried-up water hole,
Of the valley with the tall grass?

Like most northern Somali clans the 'Ise have developed their own particular dance forms and songs within the general Somali pattern. One of the most interesting of what they describe as 'amusements' (sg. 'ayār) is a game which they share with some sections of the Gadabūrsi but which is not as far as I am aware found elsewhere in northern Somaliland 4). This is a form of touch rugby called go'onso (see illustrations) played with a ball made from a cow's tail, or the fibre of the hīg "alloë", or from cloth. The teams (sg. dūn) usually of equal or approximately equal numbers are often picked on a basis of maternal affiliation. Thus one side may be qūdo — those whose mothers are Ga-

1) Mūd, benefit, enjoyment of wealth (here literally of camels gēl).
2) Gērī–da, death.
3) Gōf–ha, an abandoned or dried-up well or hole. For the construction mū ha baydō cf. M. H. I. GALÅL and B. W. ANDRZEJEWSKI, Ḥikmād Sōmālī, Oxford, 1956, p. 76, note 6-7. I am most grateful to Mr. Andrzejewski for advice on the translation of these lines.
dabůrusi, while the other 'ankanbo — those whose mothers are 'Ise. Or again the two teams may be composed respectively of those whose fathers are dead and those whose fathers are alive, or on an age basis of young unmarried men (dōbo) and married men (gobane). The game starts by both sides assembling in the middle of the field and one man of one side throwing the ball to another of his team. If this man receives it without being intercepted and succeeds in passing it to another of his side and the latter is able to bounce the ball and catch it on the back of his hand without losing it a point is scored for his side. If this process is not accomplished the ball is given to the opposing team for them to attempt to score a point. In every case the ball must pass through the hands of two team-mates of the original thrower before a point is scored. The scoring is usually up to ten and there is no umpire, the spectators being entrusted with keeping the score. Injures sustained in the game which is as lively as rugby do not entitle the injured person to claim damages; it is a 'game' and nothing more.

Outside this sport the 'Ise pay blood-money and compensation on the same principles as other northern Somali. Amongst 'Ise a man's blood-wealth (mag) stands at a hundred camels and a woman's at fifty 1). Between 'Ise and 'Afar, however, the standard blood compensation for a man's life is usually fifteen camels and for a woman's half that figure. Between the 'Ise and Gadabůrusi again blood money is usually less than the full rate paid within the 'Ise clan 2).

Dia-paying groups whose members pay and receive damages in concert are organised amongst the 'Ise on the same principles as amongst other northern Somali 3). The 50,000 or so 'Ise until 1960 under British Protection were in 1958 divided into approximately fifty-seven separate dia-paying groups. As a typical example I discuss the organisation of the Hirab 'Abdalie dia-paying group, a segment of the Abdarahmān 'Elēye some 2,000 strong in male population. Their genealogy is as shown:

'Elēye 'Ise
Abdarahmān 'Elēye

1) Amongst the 'Ise as amongst the northern Dārōd Somali, but not amongst the Isāq, a married woman's own kin are responsible for her life, not her husband. If a married woman commits homicide, compensation is payable by her own kin not by her husband. But when she is killed some of the blood money may be given to her children.


The largest of these six lineages are the 'Ali Hirab who in cases of external homicide pay and receive the largest single amount of the hundred camels due, usually one quarter of the total amount paid or received by the dia-paying group as a whole. The remainder is contributed by or distributed among the other five collateral segments according to their wealth 1). Internally blood-wealth for a man is valued at fifty camels. Thus for example, if the 'Ali Hirab kill a man of the Roble Hirab ten camels are contributed by the Rër 'Ali of which one is paid by the murderer himself. The remaining forty camels are paid by the Hirab as a whole. Of the total fifty camels, fifteen are taken by the Roble Hirab as giiffo 2), seven and a half being taken by the orphans of the deceased. The balance of thirty-five camels are then shared amongst the Hirab as a whole.

Disputes between dia-paying groups within the 'Ise clan are as amongst other northern Somali clans referred to ad hoc panels of arbitrators (sg. guddi). Traditionally amongst the 'Ise a dispute is not considered insoluble until it has been referred successively to twelve such arbitrating bodies. The final court whose decision has more authority than that of an ad hoc panel is a court composed of forty-four members representative of all sections of the clan. This body is known as the Rër Gendi and although something similar appears to have existed amongst the neighbouring Gadabursi 3) in the past it is today virtually

---

1) This procedure known as 'wealth reckoning' (qabno, hōla tiris, etc.) is followed by groups poor in livestock. Amongst richer lineages assessment of group responsibility is based on male strength by 'penis count' (qōra tiris) which includes infants.

2) This term is explained in Lewis, Clanship and Contract, "Africa", XXIX, 1959, pp. 284-5.

3) Amongst the Gadabursi a hundred elders are said to have been summoned as a clan parliament at the installation of each new clan-head (Ugās). These made any modifications in Gadabursi custom which were deemed necessary and from them an advisory council (šīrka bogorka) was selected to assist the Ugās in his maintenance of law and order and prosperity within the clan.
unique in northern Somaliland. The remainder of this article is concerned with a discussion of this body and of 'Ise chieftainship, for the two are closely connected.

V.

Traditionally the Rër Gendi, or central council of the 'Ise clan, consisting of forty-four elders, was first appointed at that period in the past when 'Ise's descendants had reached a strength of a hundred. According to oral tradition then, for the first time, a body of 'Ise customary law was established by the newly appointed council. My description of this body as it functions today and of the 'Ise clan-leadership is unfortunately second hand for I did not have the opportunity of meeting members of the council or of seeing it in action when I was amongst the 'Ise. Thus I have had to rely on descriptions from 'Ise clansmen without the added support of direct observation.

Today, I was told, the Gendi which is both a judicial court of appeal and a ritual congregation, is summoned only in times of national emergency or crisis. When, for example, a severe drought or epidemic ravages the country, or a serious external threat disrupts 'Ise security, then the Gendi is convocated. The council normally, if not always, meets at Waraf near Hardo Galle 1) in Ethiopia. The forty-four councillors are very carefully chosen. Each must have only one wife and one son 2) and should possess cattle, ideally four or five head, and not sheep. Burden camels should be brought to the Gendi settlement so that trading caravans can be sent out when necessary.

Each member of the Gendi must have married with the consent of his own and his wife's kin. His mother may not be an inherited widow 3). These conditions are designed to ensure that each member of the Gendi should be 'lucky' or 'blessed'. All moreover must be men noted for their regular observance of the daily prayers and other reli-

1) This place is mentioned in a Gadabursi traditional history as the scene of a battle between the Gadabursi and Galla in the 14th century.

2) This idea of the blessedness of possessing only one wife and one son conflicts with the widespread Somali desire for many children, especially sons. I cannot explain this apparent contradiction.

3) As is well-known Somali practise widow inheritance (wā la dumālay) where a man marries the wife of a deceased brother or other near kinsman. The children of this second marriage take the name and affiliation of their genitor and father, not of the deceased.
Fig. 1

Fig. 2
NOTES ON THE SOCIAL ORGANISATION OF THE 'ISE SOMALI

81

gious tasks and of more than average piety. Somali usually refer to such devoted Muslims as ḥalālmāl, or saḥīb al-ṣalād ¹), distinguishing them from ṭawādūs and ṣayḥs with more expert religious knowledge. What is required here is not so much profound religious knowledge as elementary piety. One of the primary duties of the Gendi is to pray for the success and prosperity of the 'Ise people and much time is evidently spent in prayer. For their bodily sustenance the councillors depend largely on the milk of the cows they bring with them and on charity. The congregation is led in its affairs by a man appointed from the first-born lineage of the Yūnis Mūse 'Elēye. In addition to praying for deliverance from specific evils and interceding with God on behalf of the 'Ise, the Gendi attempts to settle serious disputes within the clan. It is not in permanent session but is summoned as need arises. Its composition changes quite frequently and a councillor must leave the Gendi settlement as soon as he bears more than one son or marries another wife. Such a person is said to have lost his ' blessing ' (du'o) ²).

The Gendi which is thus partly a ritual congregation and partly a judicial organisation works normally in conjunction with the head of the 'Ise clan, the Ugās. His position is regarded by 'Ise as being very similar to that of the Gendi. As with other northern Somali clans which have, or have had in the past clan-heads, the office is chiefly that of a peace-maker, concerned with the maintenance of internal peace and cohesion and in a vaguely ritual sense with the general well-being and prosperity of his clan. It is hardly necessary to point to the crucial significance of peace in a society so often split by feud and war. Since success in battle is very largely a matter of superior strength, in company with other northern Somali 'Ise consider that those who are weak in arms have compensating virtues. In general the weak have blessing as their portion and the 'Ise say explicity that it is because the Wardiq is the smallest and most endowed with blessing of the six 'Ise primary lineages that they choose their clan-heads from it.

From the first Ugās, Ugās Ugādīnāl who is remembered as a saint with miraculous powers over game, to the present leader Ugās Ḥassan Ḥirsi there are said to have been eighteen clan-heads. The majority it

¹) Saḥīb al-ṣalād is Somalized Arabic and means 'friend of the prayers'; ḥalālmāl, one who avoids sin, literally he whose milking stock are ḥālāl not ḥarām, a man who does not steal livestock and if he finds stray camels tries to return them to their owners.

²) Thus as noted above it appears that in the Gendi the normal Somali conception of the blessedness of many children, especially male descendants, does not apply.
appears have come from the Waḥṭiṣil segment of the Wardiṣq ¹). Today whatever may have been the position in the past the Ugās who lives in Ethiopian territory near Dire Dawa is regarded by the ‘White ‘Ise’ as a somewhat distant and remote figure associated with the Gendi, acknowledged by all but rarely intervening in their affairs. And despite the title Rōble (‘Rainy’) which many European travellers have recorded the ‘Ise clan-heads as bearing, I found no indication that the ‘Ise Ugās is specifically a rain-maker. Rather, I think, he is regarded as a ritual leader to some extent charged with the duty of securing through his prayers and those of the Gendi the general physical and moral prosperity of his people ²).

Traditionally the ‘Ise Ugās is installed near Zeila, the ceremony involving the placing of leaves on the head of the candidate and his acclamation by his people as with other northern Somali ³). After his installation the Ugās is said traditionally to be provided with a bride whose bride-wealth is paid by all the ‘Ise as a sign of their interest in and loyalty to the Ugās whose children will also rule them.

In this brief sketch I have not attempted to present a full account of the ethnography of the ‘Ise clan, but rather to document certain aspects of their culture and social organisation which differ from those of other northern Somali. I hope that these notes may encourage someone with a more profound knowledge of this proud Somali people to describe more fully the Gendi and its relation to the ‘Ise Ugās.

¹) As I was not able to visit the present Ugās and spent my time amongst the ‘Ise with the ‘White ‘Ise’ I was not able to obtain a full list of the names of the ‘Ise clan-heads. I obtained the names of only eight former ‘Ise Ugāsyso and my informants were not certain of their chronological order.


³) A fairly full account of the procedure of installation amongst the Gadabūrsi will be found in my book A Pastoral Democracy: A Study of Pastoralism and Politics among the Northern Somali of the Horn of Africa, Oxford University Press, 1961. The act of acclamining the new clan-head with fresh green leaves is known generally as ‘alēmasār (putting on leaves). The ceremony ideally should take place after the rains in conditions of abundance and plenty (baṣḥāṣ ṭyo baṟwāno) partly because such conditions are necessary for the gathering of a large assembly of people in one area and partly because the circumstances of the installation ceremony should be propitious.