

A Biography of Shekota Gumma (1865-1937)

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to examine the life history of Shekota Gumma, his teaching career and the contribution of Shekota Gumma for the spread of Islam in Gumma and its areas. Methodologically, the research as historical study attempted to examine both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources are exclusively depends on archives and oral interviews with important informants in the former territories of Gumma presently the districts of Toba, Sigmo, Dhiddeessa, Gatera and Bunnoo Bedele town. The collected oral data are analyzed. Different types of secondary sources such as books, journals, theses, are also scrutinized and relevant materials extracted for checking and counter checking. The finding of the study shows that, in his teaching Shekota Gumma never touched politics. Shekota was able to cultivate a number of Quranic students. His effort to teach his student in their mother tongue Afaan Oromo paved the way to create solidarity among the Gumma people. He also wrote down a number of religious manuscripts in Afaan Oromo using Arabic scripts.

Keywords: shekota Gumma; Gumma; Islam; religious manuscripts

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1. Introduction

Despite the enormous contribution of Islamic intellectuals of local people in the history of Islam they are neglected by the leading scholars of the country. Only a few scholars articulated the marginalization of the history of Islam in general. And this tragic state of omission is more severe when we come to the history of Islamic intellectuals. Hussen Ahmed who has eminent works on the history of Islam in Ethiopia acknowledges the replaceable responsibility of the Oromo for the further exposition and spread of Islam. He also point out as follows: "The Oromo played a crucial role in another aspect of the development of Islam" [1]. He also got recognition for his studies on Islamic history published his dissertation *Islam in Wollo* and other Articles which helped him to obtain his Professorship from Addis Ababa University in 1995E.C. Here next to Hussen I should acknowledge among other the works of Ishira Minako from the Department of Anthropology and Philosophy of Nanzan University.

Most of the studies of Ishira focused on a history of Islam and Muslim intellectuals of the Oromo of Ethiopia. With the exception of the above works we have found a few articles on the biography of Muslim scholars in Ethiopia. [2]. However, they are being silent on the biography of Muslim scholars of the Gibe region in general and Gumma state in particular. While Gumma Oromo kingdom become one of a hub of Islamic intellectuals in southwestern Ethiopia in the second half of the nineteenth and in the early twentieth centuries. The available scattered and fragmentary sources in different general secondary works are very far sighted. Furthermore, these cursory references in those general works focus only on the leading Islamic scholars. As a result, by filling the gap left by previous research works this study will help to understand the social and economic aspects of the time in addition to its biographical importance about Shekota Gumma (the term Shekota is a respected name among the Oromo of the Gibe region). Truly speaking there is a great interest in historiography for outstanding personalities who made contributions in political, economic, social and cultural aspects of a given society and for those who shaped societies for the better or the worse through their deeds. Shekota was one of those individuals who shaped the society of Gumma. In their studies Aman Seifedin and Derssa Bayessa elucidate Shekota Gumma among acknowledged Muslim intellectuals of the Gibe region [3, 4]. During his time Shekota Gumma played a great role for the dominance of *Samaniyya* order in Gumma [5]. His role for the establishment of Shi'a court in Gumma was undisputable. This paper examines the life and times of Shekota Gumma by focusing on his role for the further expansion of Islamic religion in the kingdom of Gumma and his attempts to produce his own religious manuscripts.

2. Shekota's Educational Background (*Quranic* education)

Shekota Gumma was known among the Oromo of Gumma and neighboring states by his three names Sulxaan Abashaa, Haji Adam Gumma, Abba Ware and Geetawwaan Gumma. He was born in ca.1865, to his father Abdalla Qeranso and his mother Fatimah Qoree Buyaa in the kingdom of Gumma at a place known as Sawaa in Dambi Dhiddeessa, one of the former territories of the kingdom of Gumma which is now under the administration of Bunno Bedele zone [6].



Figure1. Photo of Shekota Gumma Source: from the collection of Gummay Culture and Tourism office

Shekota Gumma attended his Islamic or *Quranic* education with other Ethiopian Muslims at Dawwee in Wollo for more than 15 years. Before he moved to Wollo he also received *Quranic* education from Shekota Tigge. While returning from Wollo in 1895 on his way to Gumma Abba Jiffar II asked him to live in Jimma and teaches his people the Quran [7]. Abba Jiffar II of the Jimma kingdom gave to Shekota 30 *gasha* lands around the areas of Manna. According to Yonas before the foundation of Jiren the kings of Jimma first established their center at *Kiftana* in the areas of Manna [8]. Within a short period of time Shekota Gumma become admired among the officials of Abba Jiffar II [9]. Ones up on the time Abba Jiffar official most probably *Abba Qoro* had been said in his public speech as follows:

Afaan Oromo

Murtiin motti Abbaa Jiffar malee okkolla

Sheekumman sheekotta Gumma malee okkolla [10]

The translation goes as follows:

Judgment without King Abbaa Jiffar will be imperfect

Religion (Islamic) without Shekota Gumma will be also partial.

The above quotation indicates that as Abba Jiffar of Jimma was popular in the fields of jurisdiction in the Gibe region, Shekota Gumma was equally important in the religious issues of the region. Shekota Gumma in collaboration with Abba Jiffar II established a number of religious centers in Gumma and its surroundings.

After he stayed in Jimma he came to Gumma in 1918 where he taught a number of *Darassas* (Quran students). A number of *Darasa* came to Gumma from the Gibe states and Illu Abba Bor to follow their Quranic education under Shekota Gumma and back to their localities. The following individuals are those studied their Quranic education under Shekota Gumma and promoted to the sheiks, Shee Abba Bora, Shee Abba Qoyas, Shee Abdurahimaan, Shee Hussen Abba Magal, Shee Xahaa of Gera Shee Kader of Limmu, Shee Abshiru of Illu were the most known *Darssas* of Shekota Gumma. Shekota founded a number of religious centers in Gumma and its surroundings. He had established the following centers in Aynoo, Baqqoo, Ilbu, Beeroo, Daamburii, Sawa, Nurallah Ahmad, Xaahoo masaraa, Quudaa Sheekota, Waarukoo, Booree, Baraa qullubbii, Gabaa Argaa, Saxxammaa Sigimoo, Cooraa, Geeraa, Limmuu, Sokoru, Dedo, Manna (Garuke) Gomma, Ilbuu and the like [11].

Shekota Gumma had a number of slaves, among Shekota's slaves Bilal Abba Dikoo, who engaged in selling and purchasing on the side of Shekota with Haji Umar the relatives of Shekota, Abba Waganno from the Watta clan, one of the cattle herders, Gibbo or Abba Magale gaguraa gagurtuu, who was highly skilled in bees farming and honey extraction. The Gumma Oromo are particularly skilled in the art of beekeeping since they considered honey to be an important part of their diet. Shekota Gumma often made traditional candles from bees wax. Honey was also used in the Quranic schools of shekota Gumma in alternative medicine. In shekota's Quranic School bee farming also provided the wax used in lighting the *madarsas* and xawashii keelaa egdu, who was the gatekeeper are the most remembered slaves of shekota Gumma among oral informants [12].

However, the holding of slaves by Shekota Gumma were criticized by some of his students, since the Quran teaches the equality of man before Allah, however the slaves of Shekota were raised to some position in Quranic schools, there were also slaves who were engaged in teaching the holy Quran. Later following the further expansion of Islam in to the kingdom of Gumma slavery and slave holding as well as slave trade abolished. According to an eye whitens account, most of them were volunteers to become slaves, even if they were labeled as slaves but actually they enjoyed every thing as a free man [13]. Shekota Gumma was also known in preparing traditional medicine, however the knowledge has not inherited by his students since some traditional knowledge has commercial value in the local and wider economy it should therefore be protected. As oral informants indicate, Shekota Gumma had written the manuals on traditional medicine, the manual is still

founded in the house of his families especially at the home of Raya [14].

Shekota Gumma was much known in cotton plantation, some sources and oral informants concerning cotton plantation in Gumma states that cotton is introduced to the kingdom of Gumma by this sheik, before him there was no practice of cotton plantation in the kingdom [15].

Gumma like other Gibe states coffee were not grown, when the all states of Gibe benefited from coffee commerce Gumma were lacked. In these regard there were an oral informants in Gumma and its surroundings those appreciated his efforts [16]. Shekota Gumma remembered among oral informants, as a man who taught the people using different examples. One's a day many individuals come to his cotton plantation field to help him. However, from these individuals some of them helped him from the bottom of their heart, while others, became laissez-faire after Shekota understood this he said to them "please do not mixed what you collect take into your home as it is, the works of Allah is the same to this", Waanta funantaan walitti hin makinaati fudhaa gala hojiin Raabiis akkasuma jedhan". At the end those who collect very much feel happy while those who collect very few feel sad [17]. Sheik Hashem Deya, Sheik Abdurahaman, Sheik Hussen Abba Magale, Sheik Xaha from Gera, Sheik Kader from Limmu, Sheik Abshru from Illu (Gumma) were the most remembered students of Haji Adam Gumma and this individuals also highly contributed for the further expansion of Islam in the kingdom of Gumma and its surroundings[18]. For instance, Ibsa asserted that,

For the expansion of Islam in Gera, Shekota Gumma also played great role.[He]preach the people only to follow Islamic law ,which [he] condemn the mass of the society to stop the ritual practice of Qaallu and to prey to one Good ,Allah. From Gera, individuals like, sheik Kadir Mangide, Haji Xahaa, Abba Gumbul and Haji Kalifa were the pivotal figure who received the teaching of the Shiks of Gumma [19].

3. Religious Manuscripts of Shekota Gumma

Ethiopia has many precious written manuscripts in Arabic, Amharic and Ge'ez languages. Accordingly, valuable and precious manuscripts are available in both mosques and churches. Each manuscript is reserved and transferred from generation to generation either in original or in copies. The best example for this is the manuscripts that are existed in *Masgidaa Shekota* and at the house of his families and relatives. He had written a number of books and series of poems. Among the Oromo of Gumma and its surrounding kingdoms, Shekota Gumma is considered as an outstanding scholar and a prolific writer. His five major works, which generally deal with religious themes, were written mainly in Arabic, although his poems were written in Afaan Oromo using Arabic scripts. None of them has been published and studied properly.

During his teaching what had been challenge to Shekota Gumma were shortages of the copies of *Quran* and other religious manuscripts. To solve this problem Shekota Gumma with his active *darasas* started to copy the *Quran* with their own hand writing. Shekota with his students fought with their traditional pens which had different colors, the favorites colors of Shekota were black and white colors. (See the color of the manuscript).

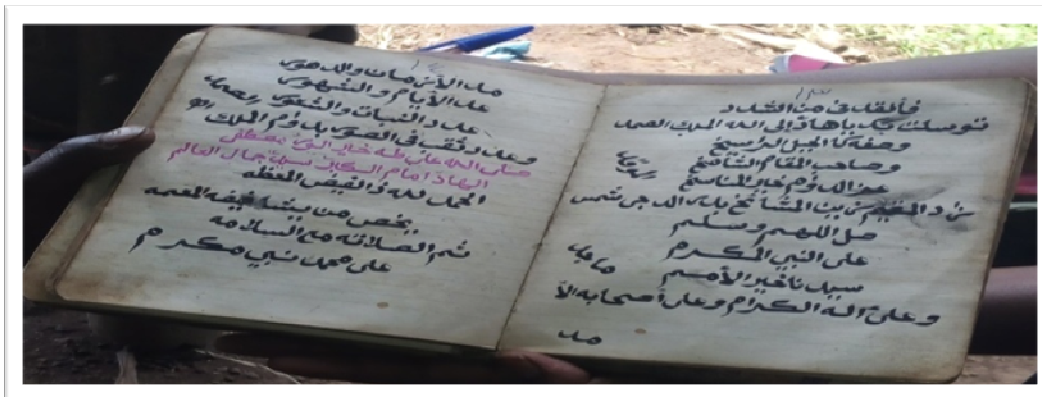


Figure2. One of the manuscripts of Shekota Gumma, *Source: from the collection of Sheik Tamam (Gummay)*

Haji Adam with Muhammednur, sheik Abdusammed Abba Lafto, Haji Muhammed Haji Adam, the son of Shekotta Gumma copied and translated *Quran* and other manuscripts in to Afaan Oromo from Arabic [20].

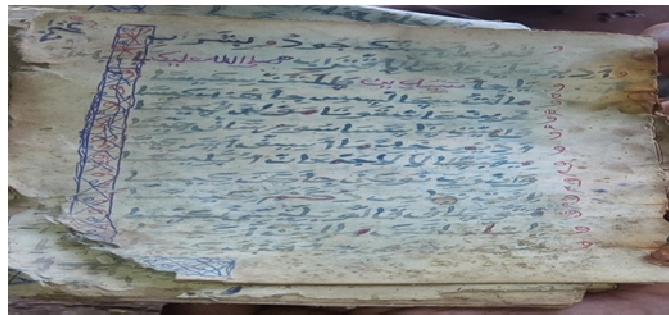


Figure3. Photo of Islamic poem of Shekota Gumma in Afaan Oromo using Arabic script

Most of these manuscripts written by Shekota and his students after him back to Gumma and some of the manuscripts were brought from Duwwe (Dawway) Wollo. Regarding this Hussien Ahimed reported as follows: “The Dawway wealthy merchants were also noted for the support they gave to local Muslim scholars. They produced for them books and other types reading and teaching materials... these were either sold at reasonable prices to the student or they were given free of charge to some of the well-established teachers” [21].

Haji Adam Gumma used Arabic script for writing down his religious manuscripts in to Afaan Oromo, among his most excellent works the following manuscripts are founded at the home of his families and relatives. *Bakurtatul-wahid* in Afaan Oromo and Arabic script, *Bakurtatul -waliid* were written for the women (females). Before their conversion to Islam, the Gumma Oromo women like the other Oromo while they grind grain they sang traditional songs, so the aim of Shekota Gumma was to replace this traditional *weedu* by *bakuratul-waliid* [22]. *Zajiratu-dulal*, written in Afaan Oromo using Arabic script, *Zajiratu-dulal* teaches the people to do good things and advice to come to the will of Allah. *Shafiyatulkurab* written in Afaan Oromo and Arabic script, this book tells as the history of Prophet Mohammed [23]. Regarding great Islamic religious work on the writing of the history of Prophet Mohammed Ishirah cited:

These followers unrelated to the wali are learned disciples to their mystical matters, well-informed in religious matters having ample knowledge and experience of witting religious manuscripts ... they are responsible for leaving written manuscripts corning the deeds and words of their venerated wali. These manuscripts were usually written in Arabic ... the most family model for them to the ideal man, Prophet Mohammed [24].

Shaafiyatu azhan: This was written in Arabic language and Arabic script. *kuxbatu-indayene*: written in Arabic language and Arabic script [25]. *Basmaal*: Is one among the most known manuscripts of Shekota Gumma. The book is read at the time of the celebrations of *maulid*.



Figure4. *Basmaal* Source: From the collections of Toba cultural and Tourism office

According to oral informants, some of these manuscripts are donated to Oromo cultural center which is recently established at Addis Ababa. The other manuscripts that are found in the hands of Shekota Gumma’s families and relatives are in bad status some parts of them are destroyed by rain and rats [26]. In addition to this, it is difficult to know the exact number of these manuscripts. The district cultural and tourism office could not take any attempts regarding this issue. Shekota Gumma had been effectively preached Islamic religion using

Afaan Oromo since the introduction and spread of Islam in to the kingdom of Gumma, the using of Afaan Oromo language in *Quranic* teaching among Shekota Gumma foresters the spiritual unity and faithful of the new religious followers of the Gumma Oromo[27].

4. His Teaching Methods

Shekota Gumma had the following outstanding qualities, he was devoted to teaching and learning, for Shekota Gumma teaching was a duty and service at the same time, shekota in his teaching never added politics, even he advanced the people to pay tributes for the king of Gumma on time [28]. Shekota Gumma when he started to teach Islamic laws in the kingdom did not get acceptances from the oldest groups, they were not willing to change their former traditional practices, such as dirking alcohols and smoking the water pipe tobacco, then after Shekota shifted his teaching from the oldest groups to the children and the teenager generation, before telling to the children about social practices which were not allowed in Islamic religion he first equipped them with *sharia* laws [29].

The students were taught drinking alcohol and chewing of chat was *haram* or was not allowed according to Islamic law. Accordingly when the *darasas* returned to their home destroyed the jars and all materials that their families used for the preparation of *Arqe* and *Faros*. The teenager also rebelled against their parents and considered peoples who dirk *Araqe* and *farso* as *haram*, even refused to shake their hands and gradually the tradition of dirking alcohols and smoking of a water pipe tobacco became *haram*. Reading *Quran* and other religious manuscripts, which he translated in to Afaan Oromo for his *darasas* was an integral part of his teaching methods, his goal was to cultivate his student's interest in and appreciation for the words of *Quran* and to encourage them to develop this talent or skill. Shekota taught people about social evils, one such social evil for him was chewing chat, and shekota ordered people to abstain from alcoholic drinks such as *dhaadhi*, *farso* and smoking the water pipe (*gayyaa*) [30].

Oral informants assert that there were certainly many personalities in the religious history of the Oromo of Gibe in general and that of Gumma state in particular. But no other person is remembered as well in the Gumma kingdom in connection with the propagation of Islam as Shekota Gumma. However, the information we have on his work is only what we obtained from oral informants and the district's unpublished materials. Regarding this Ishira stated that, "What is challenging for historians in their research work is collecting local customs of venerating Muslims, great religious leaders from sources contemporary and remote. Because of the above facts scholars of the time did not left for as written accounts" [31].

After the death of Shekota Gumma four brothers were very known in propagating and expanding Islam in the kingdom, they are Sheik Abdulqader Abba Magale, Sheik Abba Didha Abba Magale, Sheik Hussen Abba Magale or commonly known as *Shekota Boore* to mean the sheik of Bore and Sheik Mohammed Abba Magale. Boore Abiyo mosque in the kingdom of Gumma was founded by the efforts of these four Sheiks. Sheikk Hussen Abba Dejee became the first caliph of Shekota Gumma [32].

As the narrations of oral informants of Gumma he was not starved for the mass islamzation of the people of Gumma and its surroundings. The *Dawa* (religious preach) of Shekota were focused to have dedicated and quality followers than quantity. The following dialogue which had been took place between the most known Qaalluu of Gumma who was name Abbaa Siimboo and Shekota Gumma remembered by all informants of Gumma as follows. Abbaa Simboo comprehends or notified to Shekota Gumma that the existence of the three groups in the people. Qaalluu Abbaa Siimboo talked to Shekota by affirming that the first group was faithful to Qaalluu, while the second group was followers of the Sheik [Islam] and the last group belonged to the Sheik at the day time but went to Qaalluu to involve in *dalaga* at the night. Shekota answered for the notification of Qaalluu Abba Simboo as follows. Do not take those groups come to us, we also do not take those come to you and we allowed for you the third groups those engaged in syncretism of Islam with *Waaqqeffaanna* practices. When Islam started to spread in to the kingdom of Gumma at the beginning in fact some section of the Oromo especially the youth and their families relinquished *Waaqqeffanna* and completely embraced Islam .Others, however, freely accepted Islam just to avoid chargeable from the youth but secretly adopted double identities. They became Muslim who prayed to Allah during the day time and remained *waaqqeffata*, who prayed to waaqa in the evening.

Afaan Oromo

*Yaa Ayyaana Abbaa Koo
Abeeti, Abeeti.
Guyyaan Kan sheekotaa
Halkan Kan Waaqaati
Abbeeti Abeeti* [33]

free translation

the spirit of my father
Abbet, Abbet!
the day is for shekota (Islam)
The night is for the Waaqa (the Oromo word for God)
Abbet, Abbet!

One can discern from the above couplet during the day time they worshipped Islam with sheikhs and in the evening they worshipped their father's spirit. Ayyana Abbaa is very common in Oromo traditional religion.

5. Ritual Performance at Quba Sheekota Gumma

Quba Shekota Gumma site is one of the centers of ritual performance, it is established in 1936. The information about the custom of ritual performances conducted at the cult of *Quba shekota* mainly comes from the oral informants and what the researcher observed during the field work in Gummay or Tobba.

According to oral informants, the pilgrimage is conducted during the major Muslim festivals, the *Arafa (idal adha)* and the *Mawlid (mawlid an-nabi)* especially during the festival of *Mauilidan-nabi* not only the Muslims however, the Christians and the traditional religious followers were also took a pilgrimage to *Quba shekota* from different territories of the kingdom of Gumma. For this festival ox's and cows are slaughtered for both Muslims and non-Muslims independently [34]. The Christians and the followers of traditional religions also contributed money for the ritual festival at *Quba shekota*. Before the coming of the festival on Thursday night people also gathered for religious program known as *hadara*. This is ceremoniously held religious gathering with the specific purpose for react litanies. *Catha edulis* and giving supplications (*du'a*) became common [35]. Inscriptions on stone at the mosque of Shekota Gumma which indicate the year of establishment of the Mosque (1343According to the *Hijira* calendar)



Figure.5 Stone Inscription at the mosque of Shekota Gumma Source: Photo by the research

At *Quba Shekota* there is a tomb of Shekota Gumma with a house built on it. The house of the tomb itself is surrounded by a fenced enclosure and the fence is built from wood, the house on the tomb of shekota Gumma is built by wood, mud, stone and iron sheet on its roof with safer plan. The tomb was built by the very well-known Yemen know as Ali Hayeder. According to the manuscript, the construction coasted one thousand Ethiopia birr. The total width of the tomb is about 72m and it has a length of about 5m.



Figure6. Quba Shekota Gumma Source: Photo by researcher

In the eastern front of the tomb there is a mosque which is commonly known as *masgidha shekota* According to oral sources the mosque located near the tomb is used by the people for regular prayer [36]. *Quba Shekota* is significant for its value as a unique evidence of a living culture and religious tradition deep rooted in the cultural tradition and history of the Gumma and its surrounding Oromo's. It has powerful religious and social values. It provides the laws of social conduct or the rules of social behavior for living to gather, reciprocated help, cooperation, peaceful relationship and for peaceful resolution of disputes [37].

6. Conclusion

This paper has attempted to reconstruct the life history of Shekoota Gumma focusing on his literacy contribution and his ambitions to teach his people in Afaan Oromo rather than *Quranic* language, Arabic. The production of this study depends mainly on the critical analysis of literature on the archival materials and manuscripts. Oral has also been used extensively. Although the Muslim intellectuals played a pivotal role in the expansion and consolidation of Islam in Gumma and its surrounding areas, their history did not well explored still now. Moreover, some entries about early Islamic intellectuals of Gumma are oversimplified explanation. Shekoota Gumma seen as scholar among the people of Gumma and the surrounding areas still know. Many proverbs and quotations are used by the society. He was remembered among the Gumma by establishing mosques, most of the mosques in Gumma and surrounding states were called by his name. His Arabic and Afaan Oromo manuscripts were needs more analysis. Finally, this paper is far from addressing all historical narrations of shekota Gumma, because of this it is far from complete.

Even if there were sources, local scholars are not got them easily, the attitude of our society in providing and narrating the deeds of religious scholars like Shekota Gumma is very weak. Nevertheless, I hope this paper will open the way for scholars who are interested in the study of other Muslim scholars in the Gibe region.

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 [37]. *Ibid.*
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List of Oral Informants

N0.	Name	Age	Place of interview	Date of interview	Remark
1	Abbaa Digga Gaalii (Sheik)	52	Bedele	03/11/2019	He tells me about the role of Shekota Gumma's for the further speared of Islam in Gera.
2	Abbaa Garoo Fajjii (Sheik)	67	Sigimo	30/03/2018	He is a religious leader in Sigimo, he knows the role of Shekota Gumma for the speared of Islam in Gera and its surrounding areas.
3	Abbaa Taayyee Shee Sulxaan (Sheik)	72	Sigimo	17 / 12/19	He knows much about Islam and is speared in Gumma kingdom and the pilgrims to religious cults in Gumma.
4	Abbaa Tamaam Daggooyyee (Sheik)	81	Sigimo	17 / 12/19	His information on the interaction between Islamic religion and bother in the kingdom of Gumma is much important.
5	Abdurazaaq Abdoo (Obboo)	95	Tobba	17/12/2018	He tell me about the religious manuscripts' of shekota Gumma
6	Awwalee Faariis (Hajjii)	62	Gummay	5\12\2018	He tells me about the shekota's education in Wollo and his relations with his Quranic teacher
7	Gaazalii Abbaa Fiixaa (Teacher)	39	Tobba	03/12/2019	who learned about the legacies of Shekota Gumma from his families
8	Ibsaa Yaadataa (Obbo)	55	Dambi	9\10\2018	His information on the religious history of the kingdom of Gumma is very useful.
9	Jamaal Ahimed (Sheik)	97	Tobba Gummay	12\2\19	He is one of the families of Shekota Gumma. He is a good narrator on the history of shekota Gumma.
10	Kadir Idris (Sheik)	74	Tobba	18/11/2018	He reads different religious manuscripts of Shekota Gumma, and also he can prepare a traditional medicines based on the information's he gets from the manuals of Shekota.
11	Raayyaa Jamaal(Obbo)	65	Dambi\ Gomboxxaa	22/12/2018	A resourceful person on the role of Shekota Gumma, he also collected from different areas the manuscripts of Shekota Gumma.
12	Saabir Jiihaad (Sheik)	75	Sigimo	17\12\2018	He well knows about the manuals of the traditional medicines that were written by Shekota Gumma.

N0.	Name	Age	Place of interview	Date of interview	Remark
13	Shee Adam Badii (<i>Sheik</i>)	100	Gummay	23\10\2018	He is well known Sheik in Gummay Tobba in remembering the Quranic schools in Gumma and its surrounding
14	Shee Huseen Booree (<i>Sheik</i>)	75	Tobba	22/12/2018	He tells me about the role of Shekota Gumma in giving <i>birmadu</i> for the slaves in Gumma.
15	Shee Kamaal Abbaa Biyyaa (<i>Haajii</i>)	55	Tobba	19\12\2018	He tell me about the methods and examples that shekota used to educate his <i>Daras</i> or Quranic students
16	SheeKamaal Abdulsalaam (<i>Sheik</i>)	92	Sigmo	17/12/2018	He tell me about the role of Shekota Gumma for the plantation of cotton in Gumma
17	Yaasin Kamaal (<i>Sheik</i>)	89	Dambi	22/11/2019	He provides me with information on the influence of Shekota Gumma in the field of religion equally that of Abbaa Jifar in the field of jurisdiction.

NB: The age of informants is as they claim.