

African Studies Centre  
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The Total Somali Clan  
Genealogy:  
a Preliminary Sketch

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THE NETHERLANDS**

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# The Total Somali Clan Genealogy

J. Abbink

## Introduction

1.

The following sketch of the ‘total Somali clan genealogy’ has been prepared to assist researchers, lawyers, students and refugee organisations in their queries on Somali clan relations, a very touchy and nebulous issue. Some people including Somalis will find this exercise impossible, misguided or futile, but others may be stimulated in reflecting or finding out past and current relations between (alleged) clans and clan names. The idea that there will ever be an undisputed total genealogy is a chimera; the very basis of genealogical tracing in Somali culture is its flexibility as an idiom of social and political positioning of people: alternative reckonings, reclassification and ‘manipulation’ of descent and lineages are the very game of Somali life.

This genealogy is a first outline and is based on the tracking and checking of references in the literature on Somali studies and among some Somali people in the Netherlands. It is a reflection of ‘work in progress’, and does **not** purport to be an accurate ‘historical tree’; this would be impossible due to various factors:

- the diverse and partly untraceable historical origins of the groups referred to. There are also complex linkages with the Oromo and Orma in the Kenya and Ethiopia border areas, which make it difficult to speak of some groups as ‘belonging’ unambiguously to either the Somali or Oromo category (cf. Schlee 1989, 1994).
- the multiple association and dissociation of parts of clans and lineages to other clans (e.g. for ritual-religious, economic, or political purposes, often through *heer*, or ‘contract’). The institution of *shegat*, a patron-client relationship between two (sub-)clans, also falls into this category. Here clans can temporarily ‘submerge’ in another one, due to problematic economic and political conditions, but can move away and reclaim their original identity at a later stage.
- the frequent, ideologically inspired, modifications in stated levels of inclusiveness and alleged descent relations;
- the ‘telescoping’ of lines and levels of recognized descent. This holds on two accounts: a) the names of the groupings above the level of the *reer* or the individual households are a conflation of real people and legendary people. Lineages are contracted and placed under a given collective name which has been retained because of its importance in indicating a

collective identity. Some Somali individuals, however, can enumerate a descent line of more than a hundred individuals along a patriline; and b) the distinction of levels and groupings within the genealogy is subject to change in actual social life. As an example of one individual line, I have included the lineage of an Isaaq Somali on pp. 15-16. Interesting was that when asked to give his descent line and clan affiliation, the informant started with the top of the genealogy (Isaaq) and not, as one would perhaps expect, with his own family, and then tracing upwards from the lowest level.

The growth and decline of lineages and clans (in size, wealth and political influence) has also great impact on the recognition of genealogical relations. It should be emphasized that the 'total genealogy' is therefore a *metaphoric, symbolic construct*; but nevertheless it is constantly referred to by Somalis and by scholars concerned with their rich history and culture and with the political use to which these labels are put.

While its key organizing principle is stated by Somalis to be the idea of patrilineal descent (with significant excursions and tracing through maternal or 'uterine' lines if need be), the actual lines of the genealogy have thus been determined in the course of history by alliances formed in the process of socio-economic life in conditions of nomadic pastoralism and other politico-economic considerations. However, in the context of the post-Siyad Barre civil war and warlord group violence in Somalia, a select number of these 'clan-identities' have tended to become fairly rigid. The Siyad Barre regime was also notorious for systematically politicizing and playing out the presumed clan identities and differences (especially after 1978, the year of the lost war against Ethiopia, and intensifying after 1988 when the North revolted), thus creating a specific arena of segmentary political conflict and predatory violence which has marked Somali society up to the late 1990s.

In 1957 the noted British specialist on Somali studies Professor Ioan M. Lewis (emeritus professor of anthropology at the London School of Economics and Political Science) produced a work entitled *The Somali Lineage System and the Total Genealogy*. This unpublished typescript - which is no longer available and is also very rare in libraries - contained historical information on the lineages and clan-families, but did not present a list of all the reputed lineage and clan-names in a lineal order. For this Working Paper, I have extensively used Lewis's updated *Peoples of the Horn of Africa - Somali, Afar and Saho* (1994), outlining the clan and (what he calls) 'tribal' divisions among the Somali (This work also has a very interesting and amazingly detailed map of the distribution of Somali groups on the ground).

2.

The words 'clan-family', 'clan', 'sub-clan', or 'lineage' have no equivalent words in Somali. The various groups distinguished on the basis of kinship are neither corporate nor cohesive localized groups, except perhaps a certain number of lineages. Usually these groups can only be recognized as levels of genealogical depth. In Somali, the word for 'patrilineal' descent or kinship is: *tol*. In the chart below the lines are reconstructed and distinguished from right to left on the basis of this concept of patriline tracing. However, the genealogy occasionally also uses 'uterine' lines, traced through one of the women married to the male ancestor. The word for this uterine line is *Bah* which literally means 'half' (See for instance below, under the Hawiye: Bah Girei vs. Bah Arbera).

I have distinguished six levels of *tol*, starting from the top: the clan-family; the clan (-family) moieties (if distinguished) or territorial divisions; the clans; the sub-clans; the lineages; and the sub-lineages or *diya*-paying groups.

The terminology for the levels of segmentation is complex, also because of the fact that territorial dispersion and social change have given rise to new labels. Thus, the term 'clan moiety' is the most ambiguous and sometimes not correct: the names on this level (below the clan family but above the clans) can also refer to territorial associations of clans known under a certain label. Furthermore, I.M. Lewis speaks of lineages but also of three levels of segmentation below the clan: primary, secondary and tertiary segments (e.g. Lewis 1994: 211-12). Others use only clan, sub-clan, or lineage but not segments. Some authors call a 'clan' what others call a 'tribal family', 'clan confederacy' or a 'clan family'. What is termed a 'sub-clan' could also be called a clan. Thus, the terms for the group distinguished according to level of segmentation are used inconsistently in the literature (see also Bradbury 1994). They remain formal 'outsider' terms. The term 'sub-lineage' can perhaps be retained as the most recognizable, lowest level of segmentation, indicating an existing (extended) kin-group, showing solidarity and corporate identity on the basis of its obligation to unite and pay 'blood money' in case of a homicide (The *diya*-paying groups (Arabic *diya* = blood; the Somali equivalent is *mag*). Nevertheless, the distinction with a 'lineage' is often not clear. This group is often indicated with the Somali word *Reer* ('people of ...'), although this can also refer to a group with some collective identity on the basis of territorial settlement.

3.

The graphic depiction of a total clan genealogy should ideally be done on a large folding map. In the chart below, spread out over several pages, the levels of genealogical segmentation downwards are depicted from right to left. As said above, there is no pretension to give an

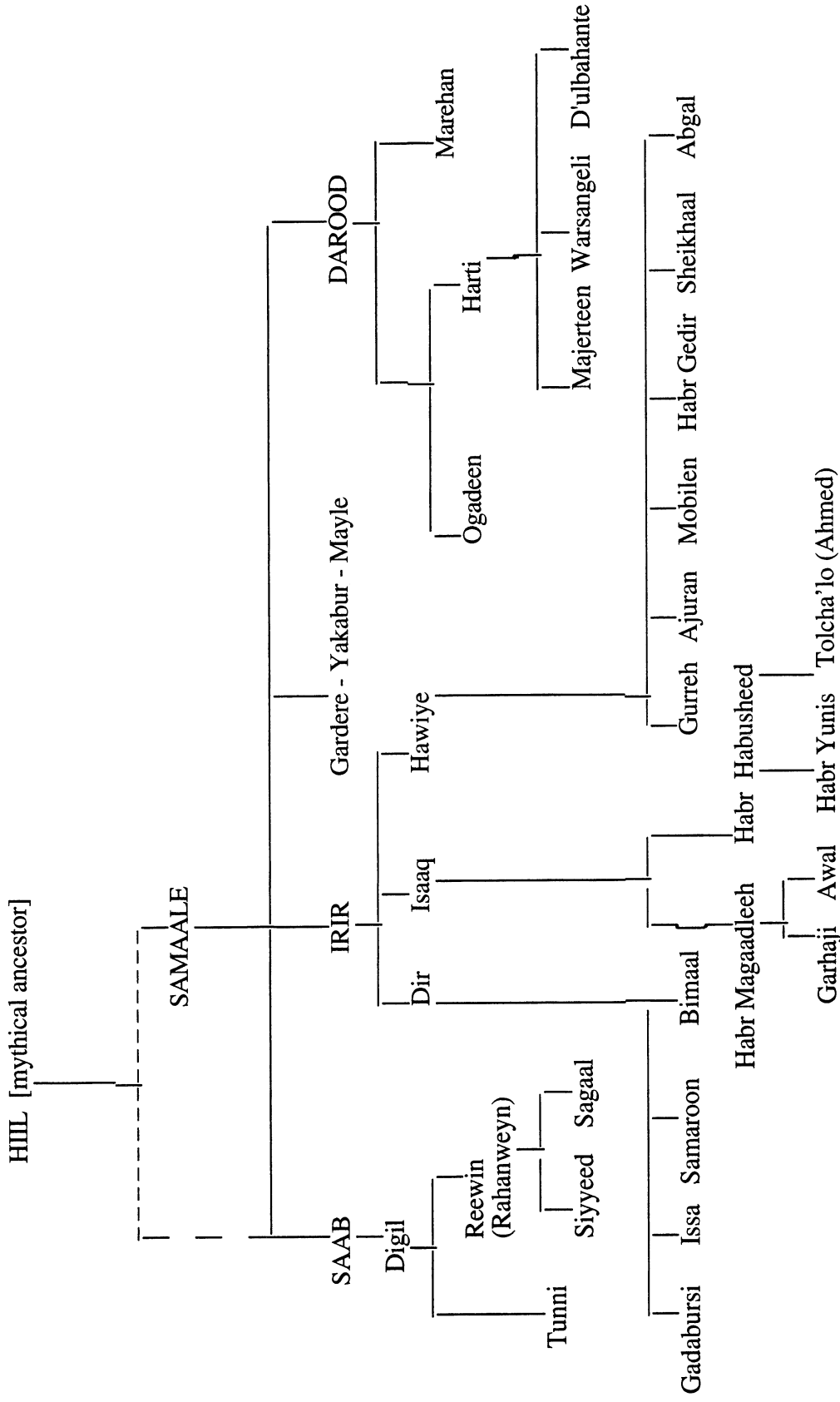
historically accurate construct. Neither are the connections with descent line versions of the Quraish lineage (of the Prophet Muhammad) claimed by some clans, e.g. the Sheikhaal, presented here (cf. however Mansur 1995, and Lewis 1994: 15). The status of the named groups followed by a question mark is insecure and could not be confirmed from more than one source.

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# 1. Chart of the main lines in the total Somali clan genealogy

The chart below is a modified version of the one presented on p. 9 of Lyons and Samatar 1996 (See: Literature).  
 It is one version of a chart which has been presented by various authors and informants as having several alternative branchings.



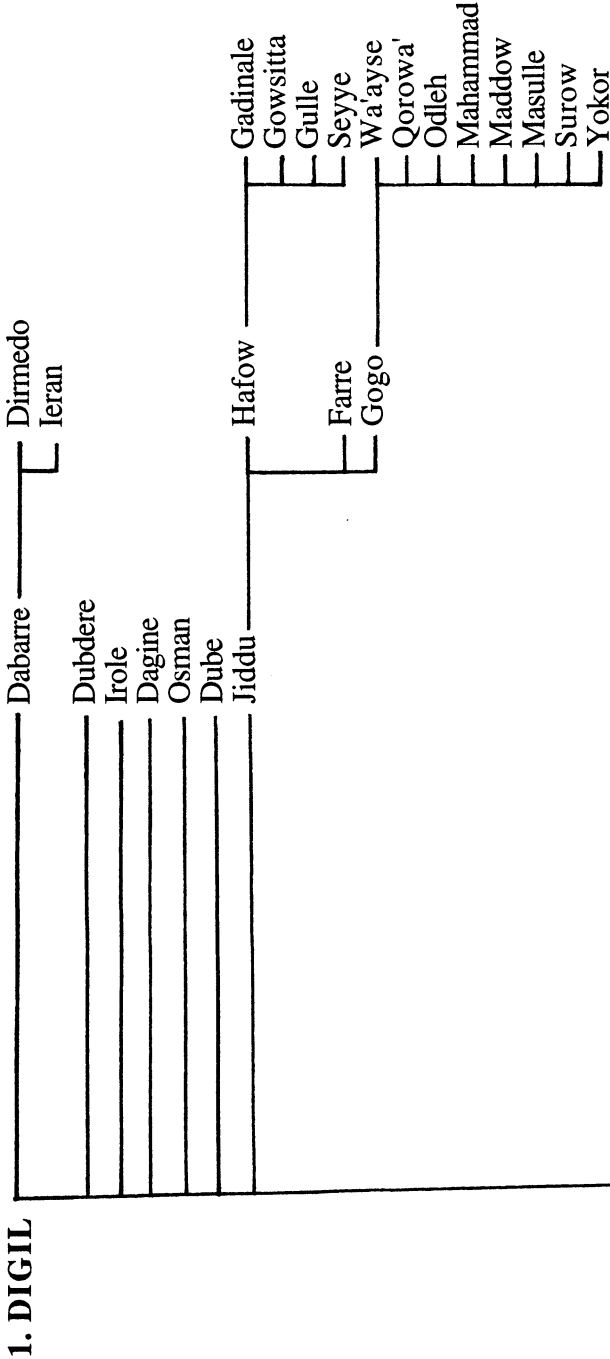
## 2. The total genealogy

From **Hiil** (the alleged first mythical ancestor) is traced **Samaale**, and often, on the same level, **Sab** (cf. Lewis 1994: 15). From **Samaale** are traced: **Irir** and **Darod**. The **Sab** are not classified as 'Somali' (cf. Lewis 1994:15), but are seen to descend from the mythical forefather **Hiil**. They are mainly cultivators in southern Somalia, the two others mainly pastoralists. Following M. Colucci, Lewis (1994: 26-27) has distinguished the 'pre-Hawiya, a group descended from an unknown ancestor collateral to **Irir**. These four categories are then subdivided as follows:

<b>SAAB:</b>	<b>Digil</b> Reevin (Raanweyn) Tunni	<b>IRIR:</b> Dir Isaaq Hawiya	<b>DAROD:</b>  Harti & Ogadeen Marehan	<b>'Pre-Hawiya':</b> Gardere Yakabur Mayle
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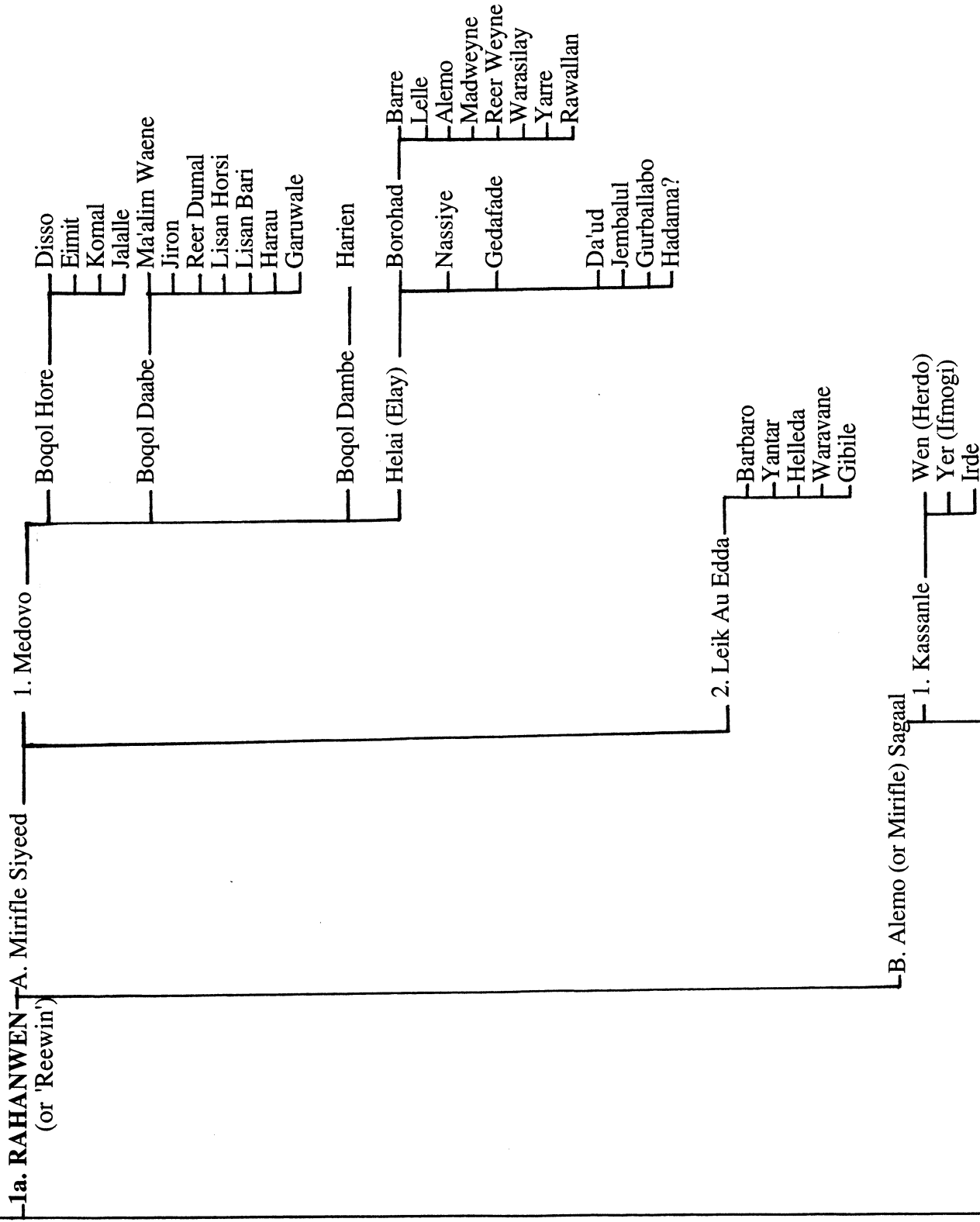
### 'Clan-families' Clan 'moieties' or territorial divisions

### Sub-clans Lineages Sub-lineages or diya-paying groups





'Clan-families'    Clan 'moieties' or territorial divisions    Clans    Sub-clans    Lineages    Sub-lineages or diya-paying groups



**Sub-lineages or  
diya-paying groups**

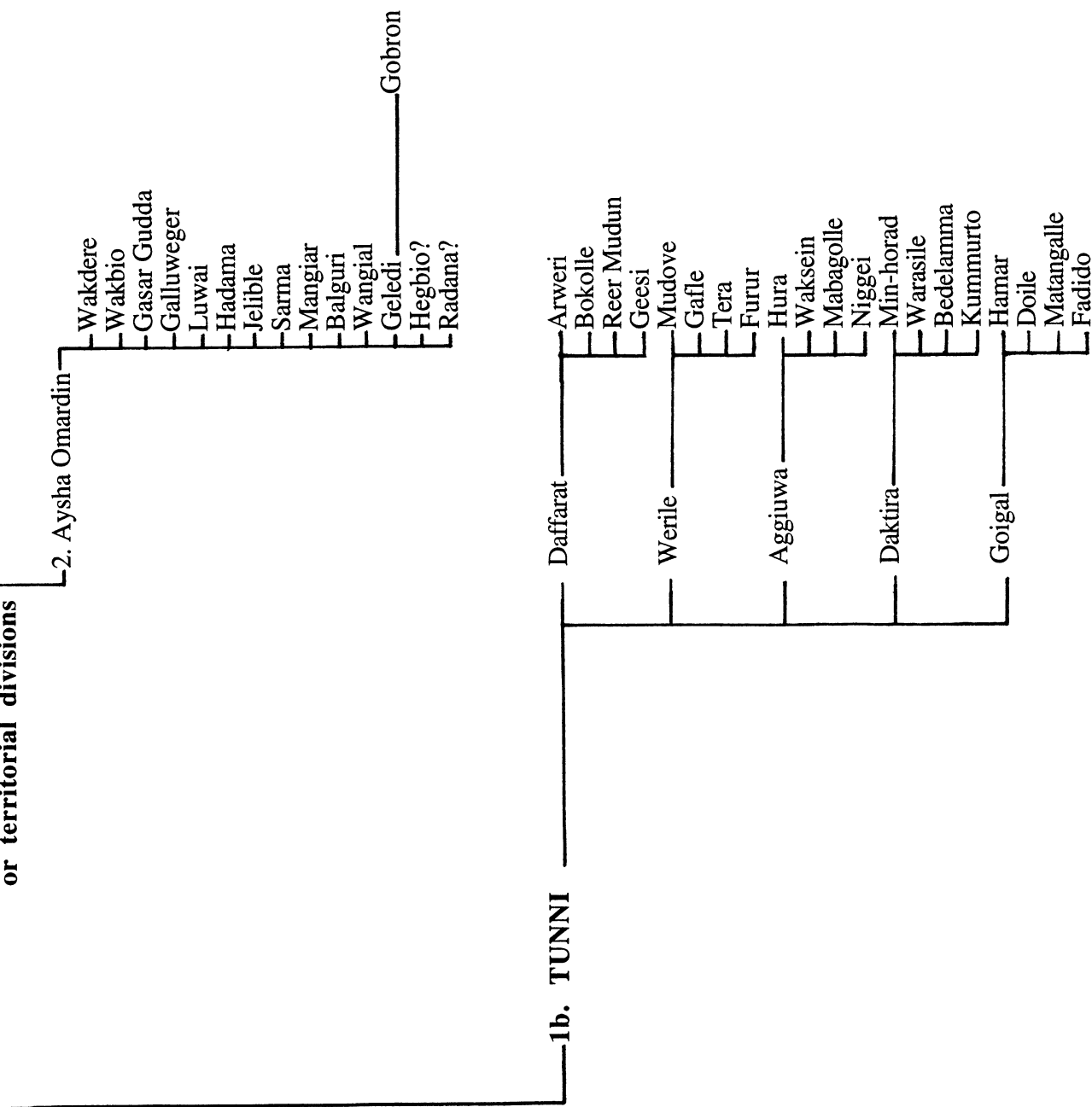
**Lineages**

**Sub-clans**

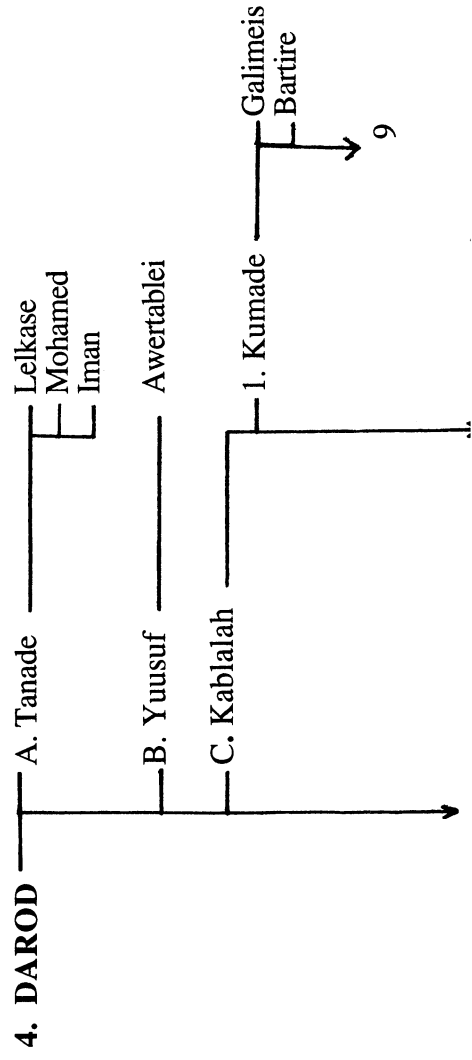
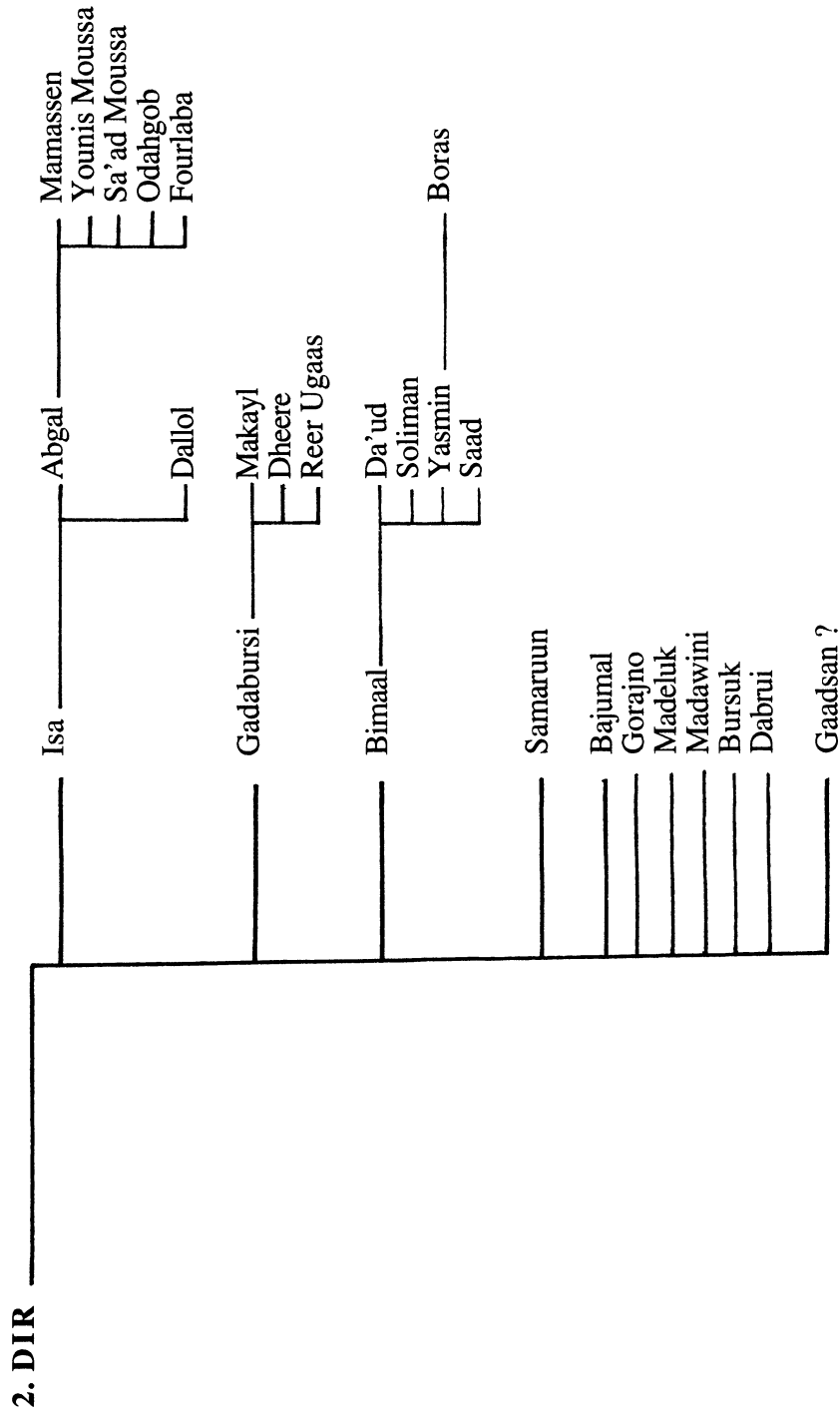
**Clans**

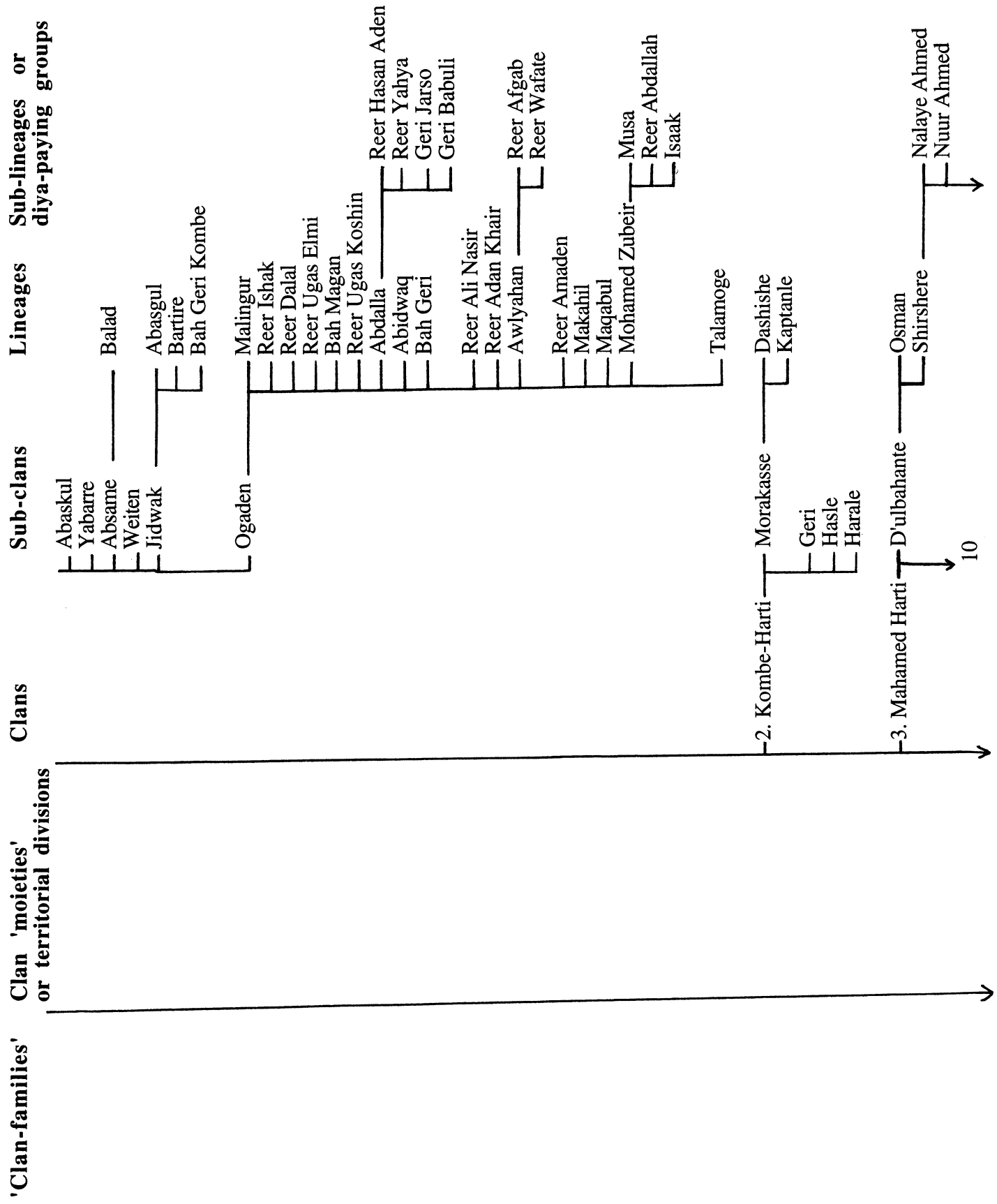
**Clan 'moieties'  
or territorial divisions**

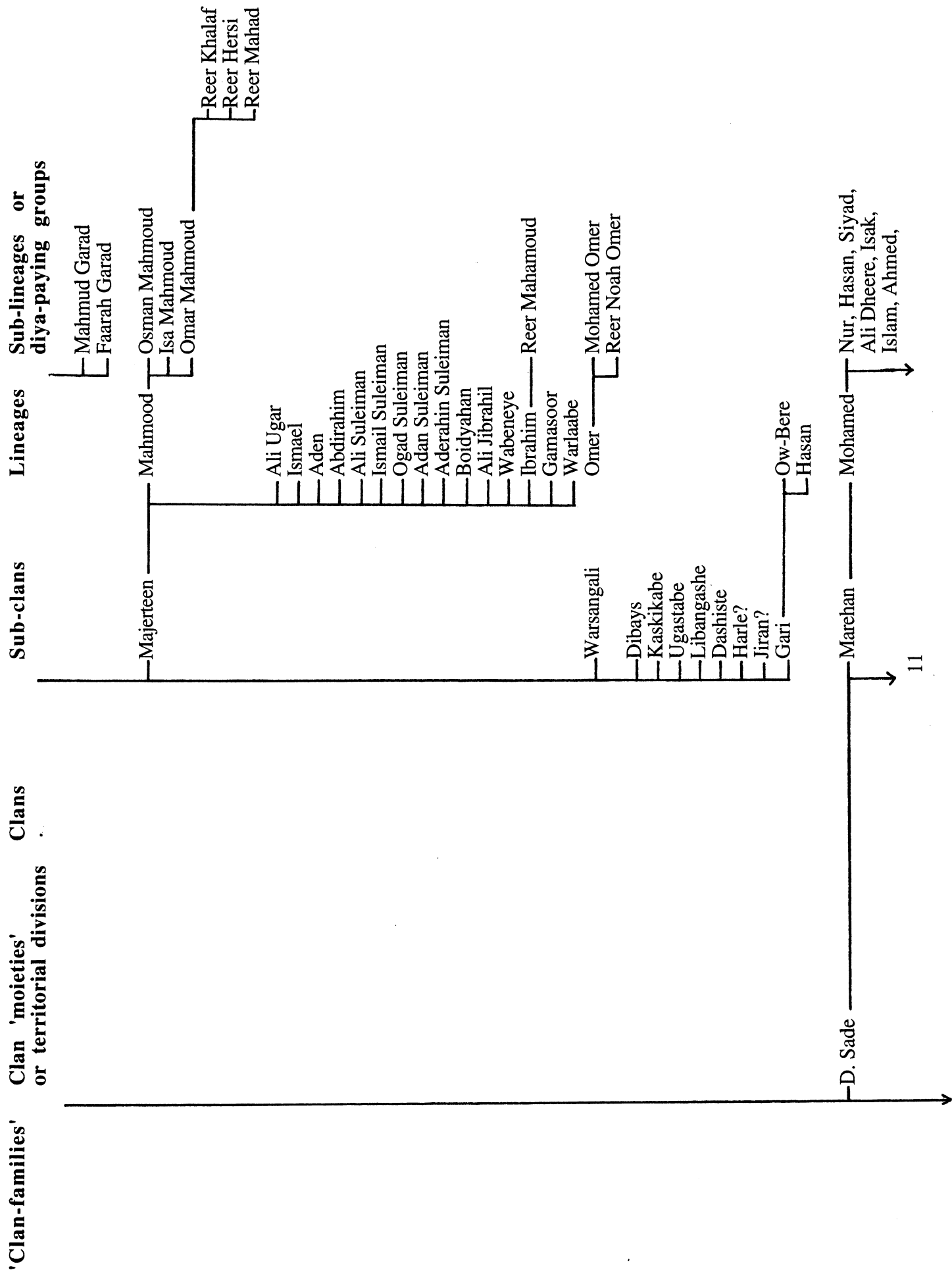
**'Clan-families'**



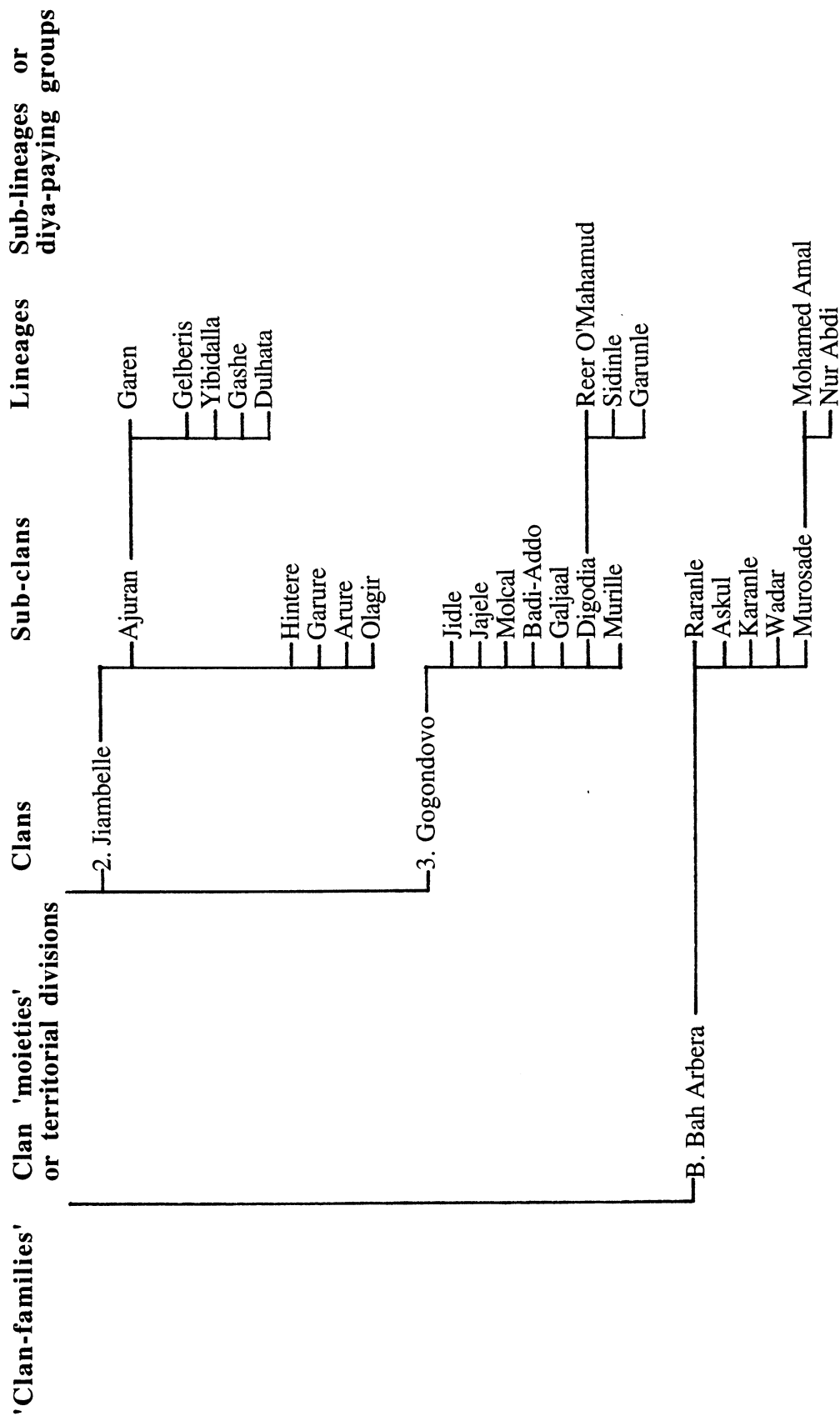
'Clan-families'      Clan 'moieties' or territorial divisions      Clans      Sub-clans      Lineages      Sub-lineages or diya-paying groups



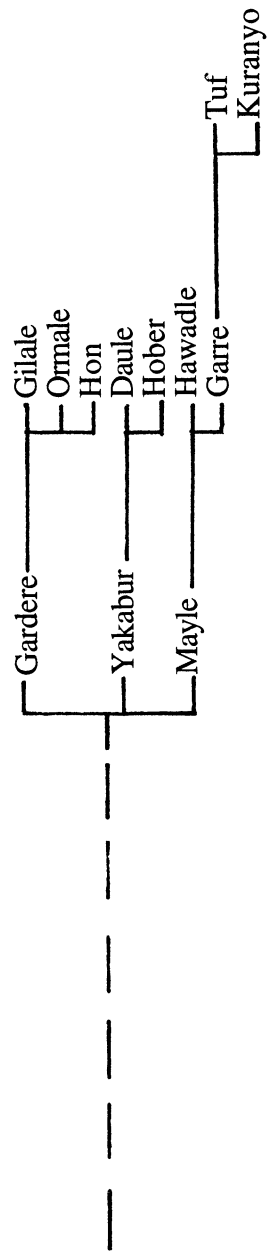


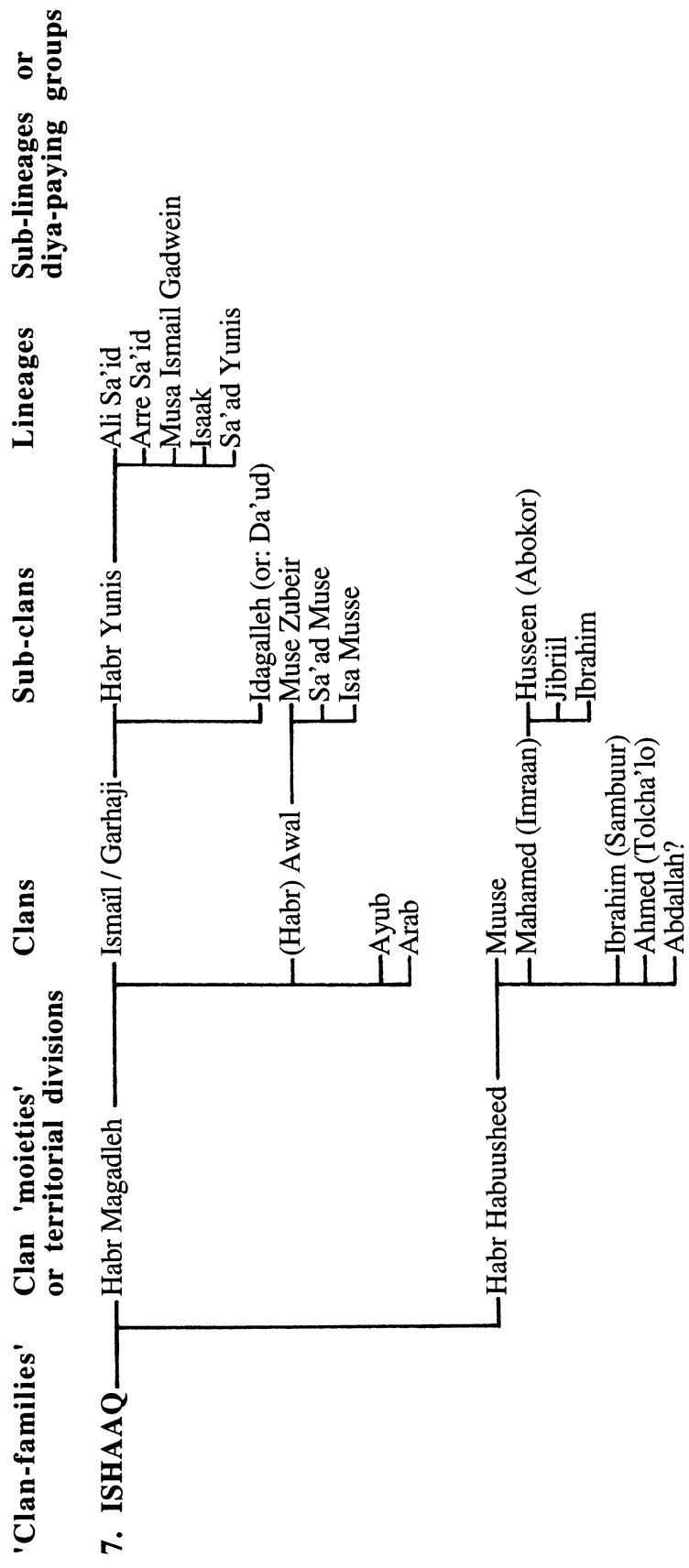






### 6. Gardere - Yakabur - Mayle ('Pre-Hawiya' group)

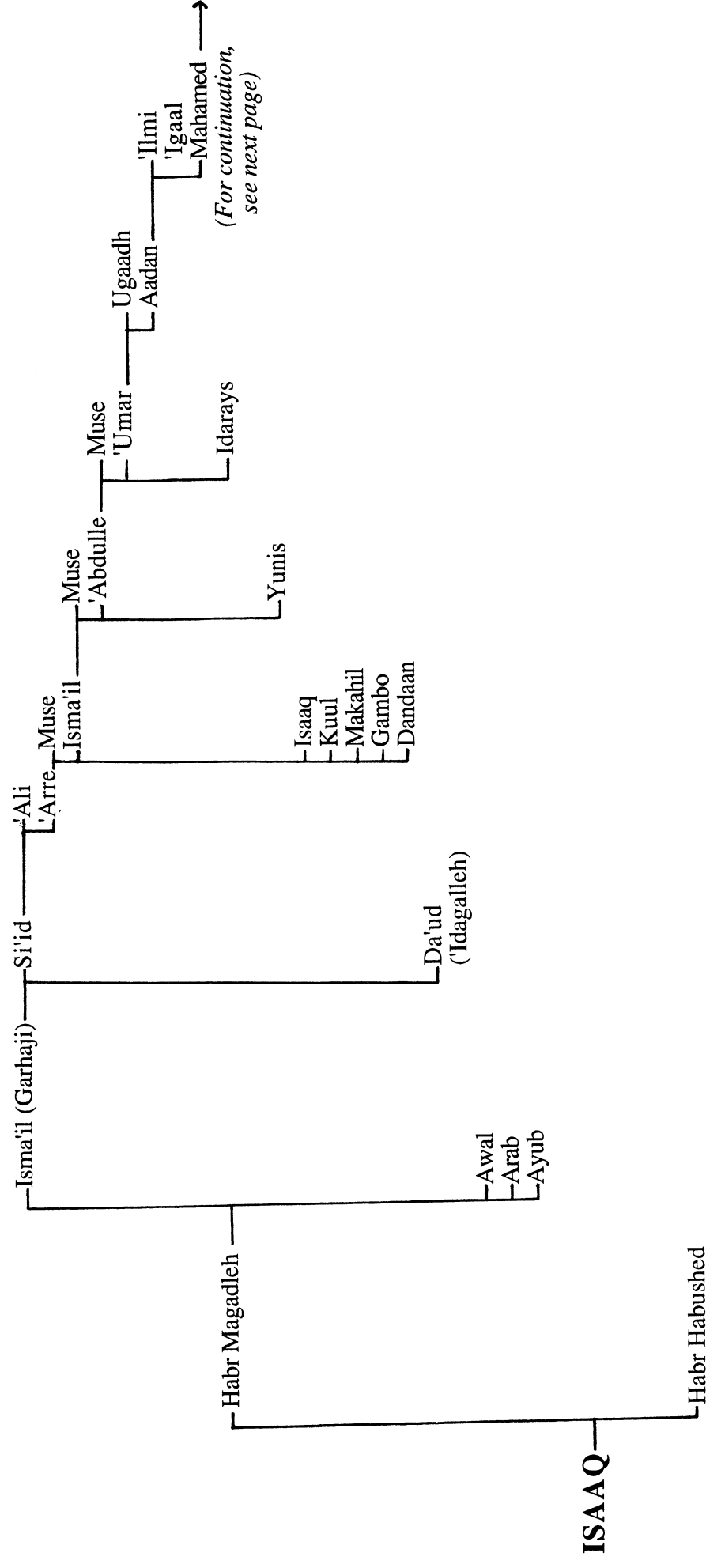


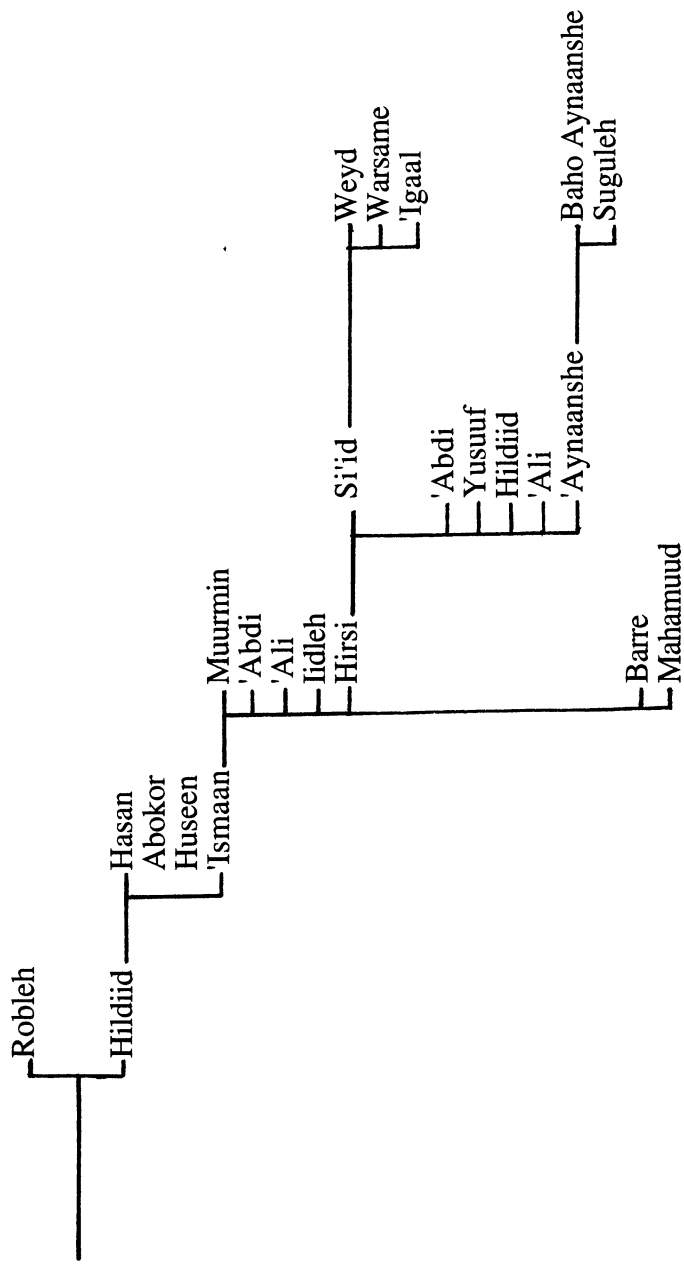




## 2. Individual example

This example is the line of Suguleh, from the Isaaq clan-family. The levels of segmentation is not that of generations (which some Somali claim might even run into 120 to 140 names) but are considerably more detailed than in the genealogy above.





### 3. Groups outside the clan framework

Somali society is not homogenous. There is no complete survey of ethno-linguistic diversity within Somali society in the past and present, but recent research has emphasized that there exists a large number of groups that do have not a place in the traditional Somali genealogy (cf. Luling 1984, Besteman 1992; cf. Lewis 1994: 41-43). They are either occupational caste groups (traditionally considered 'inferior'), descendants of Swahili and Bantu-speaking communities near the coast, or hunter-gatherer groups of diverse origins who live mainly in the riverine areas. These peoples were usually endogamous and very rarely intermarried with the 'mainstream' Somali population. The names of these groups differ in the various regions of Somalia. For linguistic diversity in Somalia I refer to the work of Heine (1992), Nurse (1992), and especially Lamberti (1986).

The groups known are the following:

Baidari: Yibir (hunters and magicians) (\*)

Midgan (leather workers, tanners and hunters)

Tumaal (blacksmiths)

Gabooye

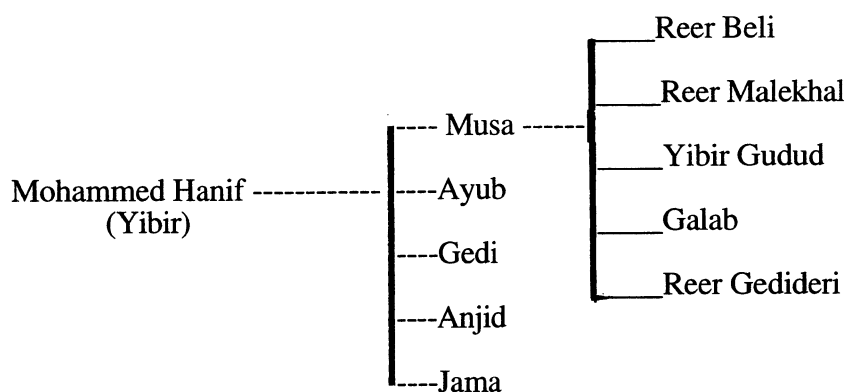
Madjiban

Gobaweyn (non-Somali hunters-cultivators in the Reewin area)

Mosa Dirie

Waraabeye (near Mandera)

(\*) Lewis (1994: 55) gives the following clan segmentation of the Yibir:



Other groups have a primarily non-clan identity, when they identify on the basis of, e.g., place of residence or linguistic/historic affinities. Some among these groups are also of non-Somali origin. They mainly live in southern Somalia.

Reer Hamar and 'Shaansi' (people of Mogadishu)

Baraawa (people of the town of Barawa)

Bajuun (fishermen and sea traders of Swahili origin, mainly in the Kismaayo area)

Mushungulu (Bantu group in the lower Juba area)

Ribe (hunters, in the middle Juba area)

Eyle (lower Shabelle area)

Helai (near Baidoa town)

Tunni Torra (near Baraawa town)

Aweer (or 'Boni', a Cushitic-speaking group)

Gosha (litt. 'people of the bush', a diffuse category, partly of people of Bantu origin)

Reer Shabelle (fishermen and small-scale cultivators of the Shabelle river area)

Some Bantu-speaking groups are sometimes also referred to as Adoon (= 'slaves') or Muki.

## APPENDIX 1

### Main political organisations and/or 'warrior' or 'warlord' groups and their dominant (sub-) clan in 1999

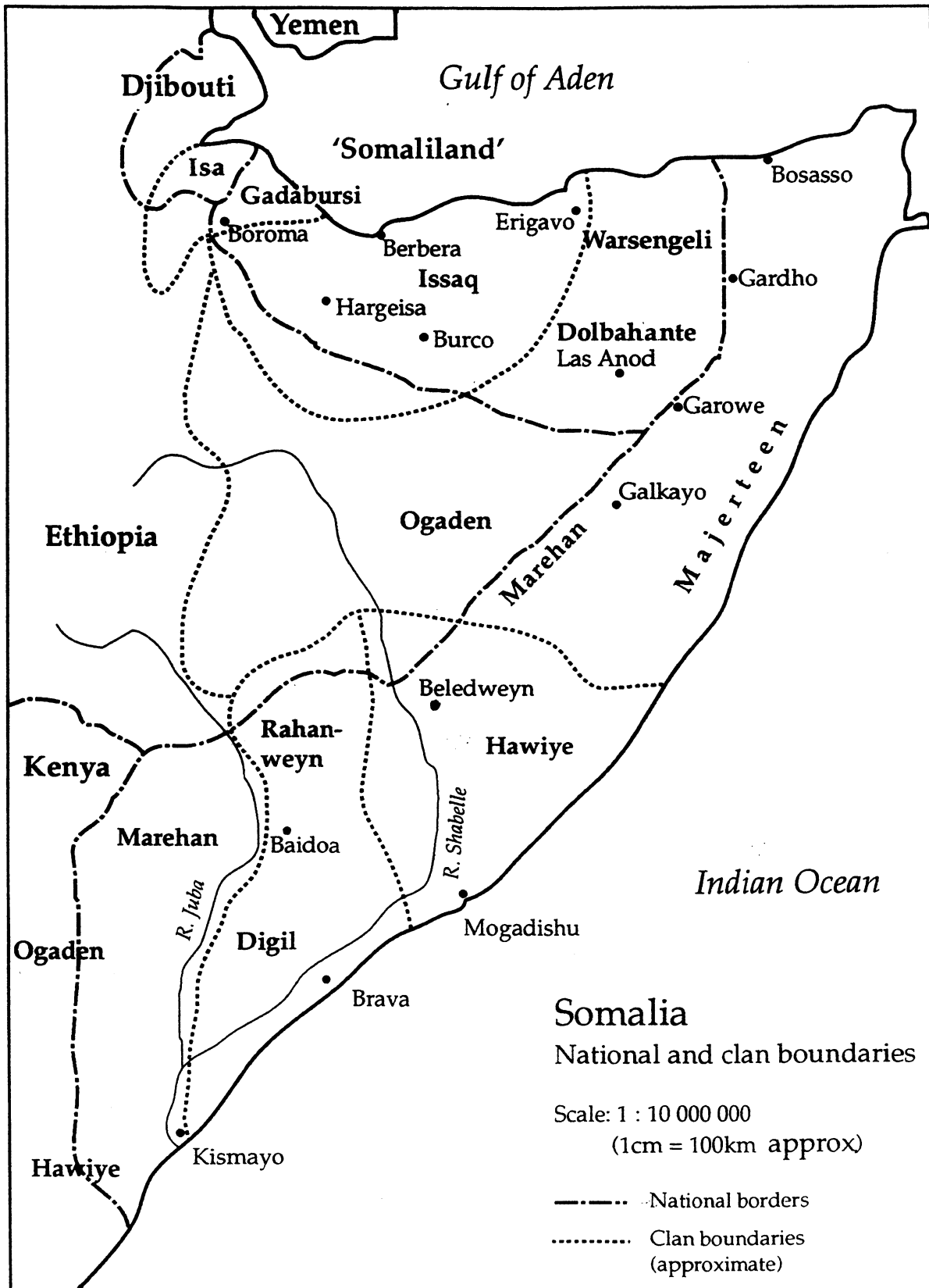
For a good survey of recent Somali political history and the emergence of these 'clan militias', see Gilkes 1999.

Organization	Clan reference	Main area of residence
USC - United Somali Congress	Hawiye	in and around Mogadishu
Divided in : USC/SSA (Somali Salvation Alliance) -	Abgal and Murosade sub-clans (Ali Mahdi Mohammed's militia)	
USC/SNA (Somali National Alliance) -	Habr Gidir, Hawadle, Galjaal sub-clans (Hussein Farah's militia) and some Ogadeni groups	
SNM - Somali National Movement	Isaaq	in Somaliland
USF - United Somali Front (a 1991 offshoot of SNM)	Isa	in Somaliland
SDA - Somali Democratic Alliance	Gadabursi	in Somaliland (Borama region)
SSNM - Southern Somali National Movement	Bimaal and southern Dir clans	south central Somalia
SSDF - Somali Salvation Democratic Front	Majerteen	northeast
USP - United Somali Party	Warsangali - Dulbahante	central
SNDU - Somali National Democratic Union	Various Darod clans outside Warsangali - Dulbahante	central
RRA - Raanwen Resistance Army	Reewin	south, between Juba and Shebeele rivers
SNF - Somali National Front:	Marehan (ex-president Siyad Barre's supporters; general 'Hersi' Morgan's group)	south and central

SAMO - Somali African Muki Organization	'Muki', Bantu-speaking groups	south
SPM - Somali Patriotic Movement	a) Ogadeni (around Kismayo; general Omar Jess's group, and the faction of Adan Abdullahi Nur 'Gabiyo' (of Awlihan Ogaden clan) b) Majerteen	south central  central Somalia
SDM- Somali Democratic Movement (now split into three factions)	Reewin, Digil, Mirifle	in and around Baidoa town and south, between the rivers
SNU - Somali National Union	(Reer Hamar; urban people, and others outside the clan system)	south central

## APPENDIX 1

### Map of the Somali area



Based on the map in:

M. Bradbury (1994), *The Somali Conflict: Prospects for Peace*.  
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