

THE OROMO OF ETHIOPIA, 1500-1850 : WITH SPECIAL

EMPHASIS ON THE GIBE REGION

Mohammed Hassen

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ABSTRACT

Amda-Siyon (1314-1344) was the founder of the powerful Christian empire. His wars were accompanied by carnage and destruction which sent tribes and groups fleeing from the storm centre, abandoning their territory, to seek refuge in difficult areas, where geographic features and distance from the zone of conflict held out hope of asylum. This altered the pattern of ethnic distribution during his reign. There are a number of indications which, beyond a shadow of doubt, establish that some groups, including some Oromo groups, who arrived in the region earlier, were forced to flee from the storm centre. The establishment of a number of Christian military colonies, in Bali, Dawaro, Fatagar, Hadiya, Waj and other areas, acted as a powerful dam that checked the flow of pastoral Oromo from the southern region to the central highlands. In the first half of the sixteenth century, the jihad of Imam Ahmad destroyed that dam. With the appalling massacre and destruction on both sides went the fall and destruction of both their defence systems. It is not so much that as so many scholars have presumed, "the so-called Galla invasion" destroyed both countries, as that the two states so battered each other that the way was made clear for surges of advance by the Oromo pastoralists. This happened, fortuitously, at the time when the Oromo perfected their complex gada system, a unique institution, which mobilized them for dynamic warfare and also provided them with a mechanism which enabled them easily and quickly to turn their enemies into allies.

This dissertation is an attempt to explain the rapid migration of pastoral Oromo, their settlement in the Gibe region, their formation into states and their Islamization. The five Oromo states of the Gibe region were formed shortly after 1800. Although the existence of these states spanned no more than a few decades, before their annexation by Menelik, the king of Shawa, this brief period was packed with events of crucial importance. It witnessed rapid, agricultural, social, cultural, political, religious and commercial progress, unsurpassed in any of the other Oromo areas in Ethiopia. In the field of religion, the Gibe region became the most famous centre of Islamic learning for all the Oromo of Ethiopia. Even today, along with Dawe in Wallo, the Gibe region is regarded as the best centre of Islamic learning in the Horn of Africa. In the field of commerce, the whirlwind of trading activities in the Gibe region gave birth to an aggressive and dynamic Oromo merchant class, the Afkala. In all these states, trading was a highly organized business in which government played a key role. This led to the development of an

impressive network of institutionized trade, which enabled the Afkala traders to engage in a brisk trade all year round. The caravan routes which criss-crossed the Gibe region and interwove it with the surrounding lands, made the area the major emporium in the whole of southwestern Ethiopia, where the products of the surrounding lands were collected, to be funnelled to the north through Gojjam or to the east through Shawa. The transit trade that entered and left the Gibe region supplied its beneficial effects to the kings in the forms of gifts and customs duties. Indeed, the Gibe states enjoyed prosperity. While the full effect of this prosperity did not reach beyond the land-owning class, the poor peasants in the Gibe region, probably enjoyed a higher standard of living than any peasants in the Ethiopian region. The abundance of cereal crops, supplemented by root crops, guaranteed their safety from famine. Cattle and fowl provided them with milk and meat. The light burden of taxation and the possibility of earning more and buying land also contributed to the better standard of living of the ordinary peasant.

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GLOSSARY

Abba	Father. It is also a common title of respect.
Abba Bokku	The father of bokku, i.e. the leader who kept the wooden sceptre used as the insignia of authority.
Abba Dula	The father of war.
Abba Gada	The father of the gada class in power.
Abba Mizan	The father of balance, i.e. minister for trade and foreign affairs.
Abba Muda	The spiritual father, to whom pilgrimage is due.
Alaka	Chief, head of clergy.
Azaj	Commander, chief steward.
Chafe	Meadow assembly.
Dajazmach	Commander of the gate.
Donachaw	Crown prince.
Garad	Hereditary provincial governorship.
Genne	The lady.
Jila	"Saintly people", i.e. those who went on pilgrimage to Abba Muda.
Kes	Priest.
Lemmi	Ambassadors, messengers.
Malaq	District administrator.
Massera	Royal residence (palace).
Mikrecho	Councillors.
Moti	King, conqueror.
Ogessa	The skilled ones.
Qallu	Oromo priest.
Ras	Head, the highest Amhara title, below that of negus (king).
Soressa	Wealthy man.

Preface

When I first came to London, my plan was to study at the School of Oriental and African Studies for a year, then go back to Ethiopia to do field work for another year, and finally to return to SOAS to complete the thesis. In the event, the political situation made it impossible for me to go back for the field work, so that I decided to stay in London and write up the thesis on the basis of the literature available here and in some other European archives and libraries. I did this with the support of my supervisor, Professor Roland Oliver.

After careful examination of the sources over several months, I realized that much has been written on the Oromo by anthropologists, while Oromo history has been totally neglected. Indeed, Oromo history did not in fact exist before the sixteenth century migration. Take, for instance, the important work of Dr. Taddesse Tamrat which was published in 1972, and covers the period from 1270 to 1527. Nothing is said about the Oromo in this book. But it provides an excellent background to the Christian and Muslim conflict in the region. And yet Dr. Taddesse failed to see that some elements of the Oromo nation were indeed the victims of the fourteenth century conflict, while other Oromo groups participated on both sides in the conflict in the sixteenth century.

With the exception of three recent studies, even the history of the sixteenth century pastoral Oromo migration (the event which actually altered the political landscape of the region) did not receive the attention it deserves. Of the three studies, Dr. Abir's book, published in 1980, devotes a chapter to the Oromo history. But the chapter contains very little new information about the migration. Dr. Braukämper's work, published in the same year, contains useful data on the migration. However, the author has been unable to free himself from the often repeated, but incorrect, history which claims that the Oromo entered the territory of the Christian kingdom only in 1522. The only study which deals at some length with the history of Oromo migration is Dr. Merid's excellent thesis, which is not yet published. The central theme in his work is not the history of the migration, but the effect it had on the Christian kingdom and the Muslim state of Harar. In the process Merid gives an impressive account of the migration. And yet the work is not free from limitations. First, Merid failed to see that some of the people he calls "Galla invaders" were actually returning to the land earlier taken

from them by the Christian authority, at least in some of the southern provinces. Secondly, in his attempt to explain the Oromo success, Dr. Merid overemphasizes the civil war that afflicted the Christian society after 1559. But by then, the Oromo success had already reached an irreversible stage and the civil war itself was generated mainly by the inability of the Christian leadership to stop the Oromo advance. Thirdly, one major reason for the Oromo success was the endless slaving-raids which the Christian leadership conducted against their pagan subjects. These raids were carried out with thoroughness, purportedly to finance the war against the Oromo. However, the Christian leadership not only failed to stop the Oromo advance, but also contributed to their rapid spread. Being a pioneer in the field, Merid does not seem fully to have grasped that the slaving-raids in the south-western provinces actually depopulated the region, creating a vacuum into which the Oromo moved rapidly, without meeting much resistance.

Almost more than two centuries after the pastoral Oromo arrived in the south-western region of what is today Ethiopia (in the second half of the sixteenth century) and almost a century after the disintegration of Emnarya in 1710, (the most important state in the Gibe region), a new order was created in the area. In the course of the Oromo settlement in the Gibe region, the ground was prepared and the stage set for the transformation of the Oromo mode of production from pastoralism to sedentary agriculture, combined with cattle-keeping. This in turn set in motion a new dynamic political process that culminated in the formation of the five Oromo Gibe states at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Although the works of Drs. H.S. Lewis and M. Abir have shown the importance of the history of the Gibe states, so far there is no coherent work on the process of the Gibe state formations, their political organization, economic foundation and ideological orientation. I hope the last two chapters of this thesis will attempt to give a coherent and detailed history of the Gibe states up to the middle of the nineteenth century.

Thus, thinking that the Oromo history before the sixteenth century migration needs to be written, I have gone as far back as the fourteenth century and tried to show that some Oromo groups had in fact lived within the territory of the Christian kingdom, especially in and south of what is today Shawa province, much earlier than hitherto imagined. I have also tried to

depict, wherever the sources permitted, the history of the states and the peoples which were affected by the dynamic processes set in motion by the Oromo migration.

If the thesis succeeds in shedding fresh light on early Oromo history, if it depicts the course of the migration, and if it analyses the profound cultural, social, economic and religious changes the Oromo society in the Gibe region had undergone, the credit is largely due to Professor Roland Oliver who has patiently guided me through the research and the writing of the thesis.

The study is based mainly on three sources. First the traditional Ethiopian Christian sources, mainly the royal chronicles of three centuries, and a few Muslim ones, together with a number of Christian and Muslim historical sources produced during the tumultuous sixteenth century. Secondly, European travellers and missionaries of the last century, who either visited or lived in the Ethiopian region, have left us some information (with varying degrees of reliability) on the Oromo society of the time. Their accounts, when supplemented by the works of modern scholars, provide a wealth of information about the Oromo people. Thirdly, although I was unable to go back to Ethiopia to do field work, I was extremely fortunate in that I got hold of some inaccessible manuscripts and a number of very useful documents. The manuscripts were written by Oromo authors on Oromo history, while the documents dealt with the Oromo history, economics and politics. I will comment on these manuscripts and documents at the appropriate places in the thesis, and here it should suffice to say that these Oromo sources give the Oromo view of their history.

I conducted researches at the Public Record Office and the India Office Library in London, and I did some research at the Ministère des Affaires Etrangères and the Archives Nationales in Paris, and also at the Propaganda Fide, Archivio Storico della Società Geografica Italiano and Ministro degli Affari Esteri in Rome. All these archives contain useful and very interesting information on northern Ethiopia, Shawa, and Harar generally, but these were not of much direct help to me. The archival material which I found highly useful for my purpose is found mostly in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

It would not be possible to acknowledge fully the range of my indebtedness. Many persons and some institutions have contributed to this study in various ways. Among them the following deserve particular mention. I owe

a debt of gratitude to Dr. R. Caulk for providing me with photo-copies of a number of invaluable documents. I am also indebted to my friend Mahdi Hamid Mude for providing me with a copy of the manuscript of Abba Jobir Abba Dula, the last king of Jimma Abba Jifar. I owe a very great debt of gratitude to Dr. Gurnar Hasselblatt for providing me with the 330 page unpublished manuscript of Tasawo Merga, which covers Oromo history from the beginning of the sixteenth century to the end of the nineteenth century. However, important as this was, it was minimal when compared to his assistance and the kindness and hospitality his family showed me whenever I visited West Berlin. I am grateful to Dr. A. Triulzi for allowing me to photo-copy some of his documents and manuscripts, which deal with the history of the Oromo in Wallaga. I am grateful and greatly indebted to the following for their kindness, advice and assistance in my work : Dr. Paul Baxter and his wife Pat, Dr. R.J. Hayward, Dr. D. Crummev, John Edward and Dr. M. Ghayasuddin. I am also grateful to Haile Larebo for translating Geez materials, and Kulan Gudina for translating German materials. Similarly, I am grateful to Mohammed Kitesa and Dr. Solomon Inquai, and many others, too many to list, for their assistance.

I am indebted to the British Council, my sponsors for three years. They also facilitated my visits to some important archives in Paris. A grant from the Central Research Fund of the University of London enabled me to visit some of the Italian Archives in Rome. For this I am grateful. I am also grateful to the Africa Educational Trust for their financial support, which came at a very crucial stage in my work. Finally, I am deeply indebted to Ruth Cranmer for typing the thesis.

Chapter One

Introduction

Background to the Sixteenth century pastoral Oromo migration : the struggle between the Christians and the Muslims from about 1285 to 1543

The first section of this chapter deals with the relation between the Shawan Amhara dynasty and the neighbouring Muslim states from about 1285 to 1344; the second with the struggle between the Christian kingdom and the Adal Sultanate up to the 1470s; the third with the rise of a new Muslim power in Harar; and in the fourth and last part it is suggested that groups of sedentary Oromo had been present in the Christian kingdom for perhaps two centuries or more, before the migration of the pastoral Oromo in the sixteenth century.

The first three sections will concentrate on the history of the struggle between the Christians and the Muslims between the fourteenth and the first half of the sixteenth century. This emphasis on the conflict between the two communities is necessary for two main reasons. First, as will be argued in the subsequent paragraphs, the Christian Muslim struggle actually prepared the ground for the massive pastoral Oromo migration of the sixteenth century. In the past many scholars have attributed the Oromo influx only to the consequences of the jihad of the sixteenth century. However, on closer examination of the sources, it becomes quite clear that the jihad itself could be made comprehensible only if the earlier part of the history of the conflict is told. The tragic drama of the jihad of the sixteenth century was rooted in the earlier stage, and even the earliest stage of the conflict going back to the last quarter of the thirteenth century. Secondly, and even more importantly, from the the point of Oromo history, the struggle between the Christians and the Muslims in the first half of the fourteenth century (in, and south and southeast of what is today Shawa province), set in motion a process that radically altered the pattern of ethnic configuration in the region. There is sufficient evidence to show that some people including Oromo groups who seem to have arrived earlier in the region, were forced to retreat from the storm centre, during the first dramatic phase of the conflict in the first half of the fourteenth century.¹

1. Infra, pp. 14-17

The paper will show that the rise of a powerful Christian empire in the first half of the fourteenth century, checked the northward flow of Oromo penetration. In other words, the southward expansion of the Christian kingdom and the garrisoning of all southern and southeastern provinces by the Christian military colonists had acted as a powerful dam that temporarily checked the flow of the Oromo northward. In the final analysis, the end result of the struggle between the Christians and the Muslim was the destruction of that dam. It is therefore, necessary to trace briefly, the history of the conflict which culminated in the jihad of the sixteenth century.

The Shawan Amhara Dynasty

Beta Amhara (the Amhara homeland) was situated in the south-western part of the present Wollo province, bounded on the west by the Blue Nile and its tributary, the Bashilo river, on the north by the region of Angot and Lasta, on the east by the escarpment leading down to the Danakil desert and on the south by the Wanchet river.¹ It was a very large and fertile province that served as the real power base of the Amhara kings of Shawa for some two and a half centuries. Situated as it was in a strategic position, it was a natural fortress which could only be reached by five gates, which were carefully guarded in times of war.² Situated between the Muslim state of Shawa and the rich kingdom of Damot, and the centre of the Zagwe dynasty in Lasta, this province seems to have benefited from the flow of trade in different directions.

With the development of the commercial activities of the Muslims in the Shawan region and the growing importance of the port of Zeila, the region of Amhara was of vital significance for the Christian kingdom and its Zagwe rulers. The major routes to and from Lasta passed through it, and it is apparent that very close contacts had been established between the province and the Gulf of Aden ... There are many reasons to show that Yikunno-Amlak and his supporters owed much of their success to this new situation.

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1. Donald N. Levine, Greater Ethiopia : the evolution of a Multi Ethnic Society, (Chicago : 1974), p. 79.
 2. Chihab Eddin Ahmad b. Abdel Qadir, surnomé Arab Faqih, Futuh al-Habasha (Histoire de la conquête de l'Abyssinie xvi siècle), trans. and ed. R. Basset (Paris : 1897), pp. 76-77, 84 and passim (hereafter Arab Faqih and cited as Futuh al-Habasha).
 3. Taddesse Tamrat, Church and State in Ethiopia 1270-1527, (Oxford : 1972), p. 66.

It has been said, and seems to have been almost accepted by all scholars, that the original Amhara were military colonists from Tigrai,¹ who settled in this region, and whose language gained the status of *Lessena negus* (the language of the king) during the reign of Lalibela, who seems to have relied on the colonists for his struggle against other members of his family.² Whatever their origin, the Amhara seem to have been a mixture of various peoples, whose ethnogenesis took shape at some undefined time, probably in the same region. "The Amhara had long been the advance guard of Christian expansion to the south".³ The region remained the very power base of all Amhara rulers for more than two centuries and it remained the celebrated graveyard of most of the Amhara kings of Shewa, who built many famous churches in the region.⁴ It also appears that all Amhara kings of this period deposited most of the gold and other valuable imperishable commodities received as tribute or gifts in this homeland. When this centre of the Christian kingdom fell to Imam Ahmad in the sixteenth century, we are told that so much treasure fell into Muslim hands that gold lost value becoming very abundant and cheap.⁵ The fertility and the wealth of this province is also mentioned in other sources.⁶

Following the revival of the Red Sea trade in the tenth century, the old caravan routes between the port of Zeila and what is today southern Ethiopia, were revitalised, and a number of commercial centres came into being along the routes. The old commercial system revived, for the exchange of products with the centre of exchange probably located

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1. Asma Giorgis, "Ya Galla Tarik" (History of the Galla) unpublished Amharic manuscript, Bibliothèque Nationale (Paris), pp. 62-63. (Hereafter Asma, and cited as "Ya Galla Tarik").
 2. Sergew Hable-Sellassie, Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History to 1270, (Addis Ababa : 1972), p. 265.
 3. Taddesse Tamrat, ibid., p. 64.
 4. Takla Sadiq Makurya, Ya Grañ Ahmad Warara (The Invasion of Grañ Ahmad), (Addis Ababa : 1967 E.C. 1974/5), pp. 6-9. (Hereafter cited as Ya Grañ Ahmad Warara).
 5. Arab Faqih, Futuh al-Habasha, pp. 338-354.
 6. Among others see Francisco Alvares, The Prester John of the Indies, eds. C.F. Beckingham and G.W.B. Huntingford (Cambridge : 1961), vol. I, p. 338.

in or near Muslim Shawa. The growth of trade seems to have created an active Muslim merchant class who traded both in the Christian kingdom and the kingdom of Damot. The latter kingdom was famous for the abundance of its gold and the international reputation of its slaves.¹ Both kingdoms apparently tolerated the Muslim merchants at first. But with the march of time, the merchants in Damot seem to have reserved for themselves the lucrative commerce which supplied the precious metal to the Muslim merchants. The pressure from the southward expanding Christian kingdom forced Damot to adopt an aggressive policy, which led to the liquidation of the Christian vanguard community and the reduction of Muslim Shawa to a tributary state.

Common enmity against Damot, and common economic interest, created a situation of close cooperation between the Amhara leaders of Beta Amhara and the leaders of Muslim Shawa. On the one hand the Muslim state of Shawa, which seems to have been founded in A.D. 896,² was decaying under internal pressures by the thirteenth century. In spite of the fact that the ruler of Muslim Shawa arranged marriage alliances with the rising leaders of Ifat, the eastern province of this Muslim state, it was impossible to arrest the tide of opposition.³ On the other hand, the ambitious Amhara leader, Yikunno-Amlak, who had already won the ideological struggle against the last Zagwe king through his patronage of the two main Amhara religious leaders, Iyasu Moa and Takla Haymanot,⁴ was in hot preparation for the final showdown with the Zagwe. Yikunno-Amlak and the ruler of Muslim Shawa each needed the other. With the material and military support Yikunno-Amlak received from Muslim Shawa, he managed to defeat and kill the last Zagwe king in a church where he took refuge.⁵ Thus in 1270, Yikunno-Amlak established the Shawan Amhara dynasty.

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1. Father Francisco Alvares, The Prester John of the Indies, eds. C.F. Beckingham and G.W.B. Huntingford (Cambridge : 1961), vol. II, p. 455.
 2. *Infra*, p. 8.
 3. *Infra*, pp. 8-9.
 4. Sergew Hable-Sellassie, Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History to 1270, p. 283.
 5. Ibid., p. 284. See also D.N. Levine, Greater Ethiopia, p. 73.

This marked the end of the Zagwe dynasty and the beginning of the new Amhara dynasty. In more than one sense it was a major turning-point in the history of the Christian kingdom. The Cushitic-speaking Agaw, who used to dominate the Christian kingdom, were deposed and replaced by the Semitic-speaking Christians.¹ Thus the victory settled the question as to which of the two elites, the Cushitic-speaking or the Semitic-speaking, would prevail in dominating the political scene of the Christian kingdom.

The new dynasty represented both continuity and discontinuity with the tradition of the two preceding ones. Continuity because the old aggressive policy of expansion and of Christian evangelisation reached its zenith. Discontinuity, in a narrow sense, because the new dynasty did not produce any monumental masterpiece comparable to those of Aksum and Lalibela. Discontinuity again, because in spite of the extent of the kingdom and its wealth, not a single Amhara king of this period minted coins, a fact which indicates that agriculture was the mainstay of the economy, unlike Aksum, where commerce seems to have been at the foundation of her prosperity. This dynasty also did not have a permanent capital, a fact which reflects the larger size of the kingdom and the inability of a single region to supply food and firewood for the growing population of the royal court.

The new dynasty went further and adopted the prestigious title of the "Solomonic dynasty". The name appealed to the pious Christians and was supported by a powerful legend which seems to have taken deep roots during the previous centuries. This was the legend of Queen Sheba and King Solomon. W. Budge thinks that this story was probably borrowed from the Jews, who settled as merchants in the country before the Christian era and whose writings are full of stories of the greatness and wisdom of Solomon.² The French historian J. Doresse, believes that the Aksumites adopted the legend in south Arabia, when they invaded that country in the sixth century.³ From which ever source it may have come, the legend was a very powerful one and it served this dynasty very well.

1. Tadesse Tamrat, Church and State, p. 68.

2. E.A.W. Budge, A History of Ethiopia : Nubia and Abyssinia, (London : 1928), vols. I and II, preface p. x.

3. Jean Doresse, Ethiopia, trans. Elsa Coult, (London : 1959), pp. 14, 85.

The geographical positions, ethnic compositions, social organisations and economic conditions of the Muslim states have been discussed by various scholars at different times. These include, Cerulli, Huntingford, Tadesse Tamrat, Merid Wolde Aregay and the latest and perhaps most comprehensive description has been given by Dr. Ulrich Braukämper.¹ Therefore, we dispense with the details and concentrate on the essentials which are common to all of them. As in many other places, the penetration of Islam was preceded by commerce, which bound together both the nomadic and the sedentary peoples of the region. It appears that, wherever commerce found strong rulers in trading centres along the caravan routes, it prospered and strengthened the hand of the ruler; whether in the accumulation of wealth by customs dues, gifts or trading profits, or in the political authority which commerce lent to the rulers of the trading centres, or in military superiority which derived from the wealth with which iron weapons were imported. Commerce enhanced the power of strong rulers where they existed and transformed weak ones into powerful ones.²

The Islamic current brought by merchants and immigrants powerfully affected the formation of states between the port of Zeila and the rich highlands of the south in the interior. Thus, between the ninth and the fourteenth centuries a number of states such as Shawa, Ifat, Hadiya, Dawaro, Bali, Adal and a number of smaller ones came into

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1. E. Cerulli, "Documenti arabi per la storia dell'Etiopia". Atti della Real Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, (1931) ser. 6, vol. iv, pp. 39 and passim; Idem "Il sultanato dello Scioa nel secolo xiii secondo un nuovo documento storico", in Rassegna di Studi Etiopici (1941), pp. 5-14. G.W.B. Huntingford, tr. and ed. The Glorious Victories of Amda Siyon, king of Ethiopia, (Oxford : 1965), pp. 3-4; Tadesse Tamrat, Church and State in Ethiopia, pp. 41-53, and passim; Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia and the Christian kingdom, 1508-1708, with special reference to the Galla migrations and their consequences", Ph.D. thesis, London University, 1971, pp. 41-42 and passim; Ulrich Braukämper, "Islamic principalities in southeast Ethiopia between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries", in Ethiopianist Notes (1977), vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 17-55, No. 2, pp. 1-43.
 2. e.g. Basil Davidson, Black Mother : A Study of the Pre-colonial connection between Africa and Europe, (London : 1970), p. 92.

existence.¹ While the Cushitic speakers become Islamicised, Islam did not seem to have gone deep into the cultural life of the people. Most of the Muslim rulers seem to have been Semitic speakers, who were Muslim in their customs, names, titles and religion.

The new order created by commerce and the spread of Islam superseded the old. In many of these states the hereditary chiefs of the sedentary, pastoralist and nomadic population of pre-Muslim times, though divested of their political power,² because of the rise of the powerful rulers in the trading centres, still wielded much influence over the population. The Muslim rulers of the commercial centres intermarried with chiefly families and surrounded themselves with bodyguards of Cushitic slaves, who formed their military mainstay in many of these states. It was only in Shawa, Ifat and Harar, that Semitic-speaking elements seem to have formed the bulk of the fighting force of these states. Even in these states, the Cushitic speakers with their war-like habits, furnished bodies of volunteers, "warriors of the faith", defending the frontiers of one state against the other, or the frontiers of the Muslim states collectively against the expanding Christian state. The frontiers frequently shifted, and these states probably fought more among themselves than against the common enemy.³ In short, Islamic currents and commerce united itinerant traders and the rulers of the trading centres. And these two forces enabled the communities of the commercial centres to form states and to impose their political leadership on the sedentary agriculturalists as well as on the pastoral communities.

1. 'Al-Umari, Ibn Fadl Allah, Masalik al-Absar Fi Mamalik el Amsar : (L'Afrique moins l'Egypte), tr. by M. Gaudefroy-Demonbynes, (Paris : 1927), p. 1; see also Maqrizi, Historia Regum Islamiticorum in Abyssinia, tr. and ed. by F.T. Rinck, (Leiden : 1790). From this Latin version G.W.B. Huntingford made an English translation in 1955, entitled "The book of the true knowledge of the history of the kings in Abyssinia", a typescript of which is found at the School of Oriental and African Studies Library, which I have consulted. (Hereafter, Maqrizi, "The book of the true knowledge"); see also Huntingford, The Glorious Victories of Amda Siyon, King of Ethiopia, pp. 3-4.

2. Between the seventh and tenth centuries Arab merchants, political refugees, missionaries and immigrants continued to visit the ports along the Somali coast, from whence they penetrated deep into the interior. The newcomers seem to have intermarried with the indigenous Cushitic-speaking peoples, in some cases becoming prominent leaders. Among others see V. Grottanelli, "The peopling of the Horn of Africa" in H. Neville Chittick and Robert I. Rotbert, eds., East Africa and the Orient : cultural synthesis in pre-colonial times, (New York : 1975), pp. 70-71.

3. 'Al-Umari, "Masalik al-Absar fi Mamalik el Amsar", p. 2

The first of the Muslim states to come to prominence was Muslim Shawa, which existed between 896 and 1285. Muslim Shawa wasted her energy in fighting against Damot, in supporting Yikunno-Amlak, and in trying to crush internal rebellion. It collapsed under the onslaught of Ifat, which was animated and unified by the desire to oppose the "unholy alliance" between Muslim Shawa and Christian Amhara and to curb the Amhara expansion. Shawa's collaboration with the "infidel" provided Ifat's leaders with the material from which the fireworks for ideological struggle was derived. Ifat's propaganda seems to have effectively disarmed the ruling house of Shawa. Internal decadence and the inability to challenge Ifat both militarily and ideologically, culminated in the total wiping out of the ruling house of Shawa. Ifat, which was only the eastern part of Shawa, now became the centre of Muslim power in the Horn of Africa, absorbing Shawa in 1285, at the time when the founder of the Amhara dynasty was dead, and at the time when, due to the internal problems of succession, the Amhara rulers were unable to support their collaborators apart from offering a small contingent which seemed to have melted under Ifat's attack and the magnanimous political asylum given to the remaining members of the Shawan dynasty. Thus ended the history of the first Muslim state in the interior after 390 years of miserable existence, characterised by endemic fighting within the ruling house.¹

Ifat emerged victorious from the struggle with Shawa by exterminating the Shawan ruling family to a man in 1285, and spear-headed the Muslim struggle against the expansion of the Christian kingdom. Ifat from the beginning was the victim of her own contradictory policy. She wanted to fly the conquering flag of Islam by aggressive policies against the Christian kingdom, while commerce remained the base of her prosperity. It seems that aggressive policies and commercial prosperity were supposed to march gently hand in hand, the one aiding the other. In fact, they were sharply opposed to each other from the outset. Aggressive policy entails war, and war disrupts commerce, which in turn destroys the basis of prosperity. Ifat had also another major weakness. She was the leader of the Muslim states that were linked by commercial routes and chains of trading centres and united under the so-called Zeila confederation. This was only a

1. E. Cerulli, "Il sultanato dello Scioa nel secolo xiii secondo un nuovo documento storico", RSEI, pp. 5-14.

nominal confederation, because Zeila was only a common port for all and the gate to the land of the Prophet. Apart from this symbolic unity, the members of the confederation were not under the direct rule of Ifat. Each of the units jealously guarded its independence. In other words, the idea of uniting the Muslim states may have first started in Zeila. However, it was in Ifat that this idea was implemented for the first time. Situated at the crossroads of commercial routes, at which foreign and local goods were exchanged, and above all, for its control of the port of Zeila, it was this exceptionally privileged position for which Ifat's leadership might have been accepted voluntarily. But her rulers did not have political supremacy.¹

It was against this fragile Muslim alliance that the full weight of the monolithic Christian state was directed from the start. The Amharas, powerful in war, quick to defend themselves, jealous of their rights, suspicious of Muslim intentions, were seldom defeated in outright battle by Ifat. Weakened by internal succession struggles² and pushed by Ifat's initial onslaught, they seem to have retreated to their inaccessible homeland, settled the question of succession, nursed their wounds, recouped their losses and returned to face the challenge of the Muslims under their brilliant leader, Amda-Siyon (1314-1344).

The story of this first major struggle between the Muslims and Christians was told by two educated men of the day, one Christian and the other Muslim. The richest and the most comprehensive record was made by the anonymous author of The Glorious Victories of Amda-Siyon. In every sense this was a masterpiece of historical chronicling. The author, who seems to have been well-educated, presents his stories in animated narrative and illustrates them with historical examples from the Bible.³ From this it appears that the Christian kingdom which produced this historian capable of describing events as they were unfolding themselves, enjoyed a rich cultural life. There is much truth in the assertion of various scholars that the change of the dynasty was accompanied by a literary renaissance.⁴ We are indebted to this

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1. 'Al-Umari, "Masalikal-Absar fi Mamalik el Amsar, pp. 5, 19; see also Tadesse Tamrat, Church and State ..., pp. 84-85 and passim.
 2. Ibid., p. 72.
 3. The Glorious Victories of Amda-Siyon, King of Ethiopia, p. 55 and passim.
 4. See for example, D.N. Levine, Greater Ethiopia ..., p. 130; J.S. Trimingham, Islam in Ethiopia, (London : 1968), p. 65.

chronicler also for his description of the undeclared but enduring underlying economic motives behind the Muslim-Christian struggle.

The Christian king, Amda-Siyon, not only wanted to monopolize the commerce, the principal source of strength for the Muslim leaders, but also wanted to deprive the Muslim leaders of essential commodities such as imported iron weapons. However, the Muslim rulers, whose whole wealth was derived from the lucrative trade, and who were notoriously addicted to refined and "effeminate luxuries", could by no means dispense with the importation of costly and elegant foreign goods, and were determined to resist the king's threat to the core of their luxurious life.¹ The luxury articles which were imported and enjoyed by the Muslim rulers were envied by the rapidly expanding Christian Amhara ruling class. These foreign goods became necessary to feed the pleasures and maintain the grandeur of a kingdom, glutted to satiety with the success of conquest. The imports consisted mainly of silk and fine dresses, iron weapons, spices and a few luxury items, which the king distributed to raise the morale of his best warriors.²

The second source of our information for the first major Muslim-Christian struggle comes from the pen of the great Egyptian scholar al-'Umari. He reported on the basis of information he gathered from Shaikh Abdallah of Zila, the ambassador of Ifat, who went to Egypt on behalf of the Muslims to seek support from Egypt. Al-'Umari, who produced this story around 1345, described the seven Muslim states, their cooperation and competition, strength and weakness, the richness and poverty with astonishing clarity.³ The story of al-'Umari, although not as rich as that of the anonymous Christian chronicler, is quite detailed and reliable.

Before the days when Amda-Siyon sought to add to his triumphs the conquest of the Muslim states, the latter were already the centres of commerce and highly prosperous regions. Ifat, Dawaro, Arababni,

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1. See for example al-'Umari, Masalik al-Absar fi Mamalik el Amsar, pp. 1-3; Maqrizi, The book of the true knowledge of the history of the kings in Abyssinia, p. 8; Cerulli, Studi Etiopici : la lingua e la storia di Harar, (Roma : 1936), vol. I, pp. 17-18.
 2. The Glorious Victories of Amda-Siyon, p. 90.
 3. al-'Umari, ibid., pp. 1-3 et passim.

Sharka, and Darah specialised in trade and agriculture. Bali specialised in the spice trade, the weaving of cotton cloth, industry and agriculture. Hadiya, the most powerful, with its forty thousand cavalry and twice that number of foot soldiers, specialised in the castration of eunuch slaves and in agriculture.¹

However, although commerce persisted between the Christian and Muslim communities for mutual benefit, it never enjoyed a long period of peaceful development. Commerce at one and the same time played a contradictory role. On the one hand, the necessity for the exchange of goods and services not available in one community gave respite to warfare and an impetus to peace and co-existence. From time to time the new desire and increasing ardour for commercial enterprise thus engendered tended gradually to soften the feelings of alienation which had grown up between the two communities. The channels of commercial intercourse between them were laid open by the feeling of co-existence, and under the auspices of Muslim merchants the trade of the Muslim states benefited these states, and diffused its influence over the Christian kingdom in the form of tribute, taxation and gifts. The last point is particularly important and needs a little more explanation. The exchange of gifts between the Christian kings and Muslim rulers which seem to have been initiated by Muslim Shawa, continued to serve as one means of acquiring goods not available locally. The alternative means was war. The defeat and conquest of another realm provided booty not only for the leader but also for his followers. This forceable seizure of goods from outsiders was not the rule, but was frequently resorted to in their relations. The failure on the part of the Muslim rulers to give gifts to the Christian king was the occasion for war. Thus declares The Glorious Victories of Amda-Siyon :

... If at first you had come to me with your father and made full submission, by means of gold, silver and fine clothing, there would have been friendship between me and you.²

As can be seen, gifts could be given not only to maintain peace and insure loyalty and submission with a powerful neighbour, but also to provide a flow of much needed goods between the two communities. No one gave anything "without proper recompense"; Muslim merchants gave gifts to Christian kings in return for protection, while resident in

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1. Al-'Umari, Masalik ... , p. 17; see also, Magrizi, The book of the true knowledge, pp. 9-10.
 2. The Glorious Victories of Amda-Siyon, p. 101.

the Christian kingdom. The Muslim rulers gave gifts to maintain friendly relations and avoid the anger of the Christian kings. Gift giving, which was both the cause for war and the key to peace, was only one important element in the large trade between the Muslims and Christians. Both seem to have been inseparably linked. Commerce affected a wider circle of the two communities.

In fact, it was the commerce and the commercial routes that made Ifat the meeting place of two competing ideological systems. Each system wanted to expand at the expense of the other. The ideological crux of the struggle between the Muslims and the Christians could be summed up in brief. Each wanted to win this lucrative area in the name of their God, for their followers. Each condemned the other as "infidels", and each invoked the help of God for its just cause.¹

The need to maintain commercial links in time established a modus vivendi of ideological co-existence, which did not preclude stepping into the activities of winning supporters from the camp of the other, which in turn was the cause for the drawing of swords in the name of God, spreading the word of God and destroying the force of evil. "... If you have killed ten Christians, then I will kill among your side a thousand Muslims, and if you kill a thousand, then I will kill many thousands."² This inaugurated that particularly repetitive cycle of struggle which characterised Muslim Christian relations in the first half of the fourteenth century.

Besides what has been said so far, some of the practices associated with commerce on the other hand played a negative role that destroyed the basis of co-existence. We have already said the desire and increasing ardour for commercial enterprise tended to soften the feelings of alienation which had grown up between the Muslims and Christians. However, the unequal benefit derived from the commerce and the huge profit that went to the Christian kings in the forms of gifts, poll taxes, tributes and sometimes war booty, generated a feeling of resentment among the Muslim merchants and the rulers, who saw the various restrictions on commerce and the heavy gifts and tributes as an unbearable burden.

1. Both sides in the struggle believed that God was on their side. Both attributed their victory to His kindness and their defeat to their sin and His lesson to repent. Despite their unshakeable belief in the justness of their cause before their God, both knew the effective role swords, cavalry and training played in the war.

2. The Glorious Victories of Amda-Siyon, p. 57.

The bitter economic feeling was looked upon from the point of view of religious domination, in which it found its purest expression as the struggle between Islam and Christianity. As the source of injustice and oppression, it was a religious duty for the Muslims to fight against the Christians. The mantle of leading this "just" resistance against the Christians fell on Ifat, the leader of the Zeila confederation, the great benefactor of the lucrative trade in the region. Ever since Ifat took this high responsibility on her self, the rulers of this dynasty regarded themselves and were regarded by other Muslims as the leaders of Islam in the Horn of Africa, bound to liberate their co-religionists from the yoke of the "infidels".

Finally, despite the mutual need for the continual commerce, the leaders of the two communities were not able to establish an atmosphere in which this could be ensured. In the long run it was the absence of peace for the prosperity of commerce that seems to have retarded the development of urban cultures in the troubled central highlands. It was only in Aksum, Harar, and later Gondar, where commerce persisted for a long time, that we find some sort of urban culture in what is today the Ethiopian region. In the short run, it was the attempt of Amda-Siyon to monopolize the sources of wealth that triggered off the following intensive campaign.

What follows is the summary of the struggle between the Muslims and Christians from the various sources. From all accounts it appears that Amda-Siyon was a military genius who created a strong striking force that revolutionized warfare in the region.¹ He seems to have introduced new techniques in the organisation and training of his army, which excelled the Muslims in training and weapons as well as in size. He divided his army into the right wing, the left wing, the advance guard and the rear guard. The crack troops of his army were the cavalry, and the bulk of his army was composed of the infantry with "the strong legs trained for war".² The nucleus of his crack force, which was battle tested was especially armed with imported swords.³ This type of army

1. See for example, Tadesse Tamrat, Church and State ..., pp. 89-94; The Glorious Victories ..., p. 82; al- Umari, Masalik ..., pp. 23-26; J. Perruchon, "Histoire des guerres d'Amda-Seyon roi d'Ethiopie" in Journal Asiatique, (J.A.) Ser. 8, xiv (1889), pp. 293, 382-3, 399.

2. The Glorious Victories ..., p. 82.

3. Tadesse Tamrat, Church and State ..., p. 94.

truly seems to have revolutionized the conduct of war. Besides this body of invincible crack troops, a large part of his force was armed with locally produced swords and knives, bows and arrows, spears, sticks, slings and stones. The king seems to have used his huge wealth for the development of his war machine. The booty from the war was distributed according to the ranks of his warriors. His generosity in decorating brave soldiers in gold, silver and fine clothes, his supreme bravery and courage which was proverbial, his soul-searching eloquence which inspired his soldiers and heightened their preparedness for fighting, his presence in the vanguard of any attack, his choice of the battle-ground and the moment, his initiative in adapting strategies and tactics that best suited the situation and the time, the element of surprise attack which he effectively employed simultaneously from different directions, his benevolence to those enemies who submitted and accepted his overlordship, all help to account for the creation of an exceptionally efficient striking force. Such was the terrible force which in 1329 Amda-Siyon loosed on the weak and unprepared Muslims, and he added to its tactical efficiency the element of surprise, with which he devastated the enemies one by one. He opened the campaign with Damot and Hadiya. Damot, the non-Muslim gold-producing state in the region, Hadiya, a rich and powerful Muslim state with about forty thousand cavalry, and twice that number of infantry.¹ To ensure the continuity of the fruit of his conquest and minimise the danger from the conquered people, Amda-Siyon prohibited his conquered subjects from carrying offensive weapons and from riding bridled horses.²

Having secured the wealth of Damot, and immobilized the military resources of Hadiya, Amda-Siyon turned to Ifat and her allies. The Muslim league which was hastily formed against the Christian king, was caught unprepared. The news of the formation of the league leaked out probably from merchants who may have served the king as secret agents. The members of the league were routed separately. Each defeat was accompanied by the most huge and dreadful massacre the region had ever seen. The degree to which Amda-Siyon subjected the conquered people is

1. Al-'Umari, Masalik ... , pp. 15-17.

2. Ulrich Braukämper, "Islamic principalities in southeast Ethiopia ...", in Ethiopianist notes, vol. I, no. 2, p. 7.

expressed in the soldiers song in his honour, "Whose face have you not disfigured? Whose wife and children have you not captured?"¹ And probably so it was. These devastating victories settled the crucial question as to which of the powers, Christian or Muslim, was to dominate the southern region for the next two centuries. The glorious victories of Amda-Siyon fastened the Amhara yoke upon the Muslim neck. It made the southern region the nerve centre of Ethiopian history. Henceforth for the next two centuries, the southern region remained the source from which the stream of history flowed in different channels. In short, the wars of Amda-Siyon made the Amharas the masters of the region. And from then on there gleams around the name Amhara that halo which belongs to the great conquering nations. However, in the long run these victories failed to achieve the desired end. The Amharas failed to impose their religion and language on the bulk of the conquered population. The campaigns of Amda-Siyon created an empire, but they did not lay a proper foundation for the creation of a nation. In no concrete manner was there a creative marriage of cultures, a passage of ideas, an equal sharing of wealth. To the Christians the conquest meant constant enrichment. To the Muslims it meant constant destruction, pillaging and poverty. The destruction caused strong evil. It produced among the Muslims a deep-rooted eagerness for revenge which kept the spirit of Muslim resistance alive up to the beginning of the sixteenth century.

But in the short run it met with spectacular success. If Yikunno-Amlak was the founder of a new dynasty in 1270, Amda-Siyon was the founder of a powerful empire by his victories. With the huge war booty and the war machine which he developed, hardened and battle-tested in the south, he crushed the rebellion not only in Tigray,² but also defeated the Beta Israel (Falasha) in their homeland in the Gondar area, establishing a strong Christian foothold in the region.³

Besides laying the foundation for the empire, the campaigns of Amda-Siyon seem to have altered radically the pattern of ethnic

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1. The Glorious Victories ... , p. 129
 2. Tadesse Tamrat, Church and State ... , pp. 73-4.
 3. James Arthur Quirin, "The Beta Israel (Felash) in Ethiopian History; caste formation and culture change, 1270-1868", Ph.D. university of Minnesota, 1977, pp. 54-6.

distribution in the south. The struggle between the Christians and Muslims seems to have set in motion a process that probably altered the pattern of population in the region. This assumption is permissible when one considers the profound change in ethnic distribution following the wars of the sixteenth century. It is true that the conquest of Amda-Siyon was not as destructive to the Muslims as that of Imam Ahmad to the Christians. However, the wars of Amda-Siyon were destructive on a scale hitherto unknown amongst the peoples of the region.¹ The wars were accompanied by an appalling carnage and destruction, which probably sent tribes and groups fleeing from the storm centre, abandoning their property and territory, to seek refuge in difficult areas where geographic features held out hope of asylum. Thus the vast displacement of people that usually accompanied the expansion of the Christian kingdom² seems to have truly altered the pattern of ethnic distribution during the reign of Amda-Siyon. There are a number of indications which, beyond a shadow of doubt, establish that some peoples, including some Oromo groups who seem to have arrived earlier in the region, were forced to flee from the storm centre. Here we mention a few indicators, only from the side of the Oromo. These indicators are hints in the royal Christian chronicles, strong Amhara oral traditions, Oromo place names in the region, the formation of the core of the Oromo calendar, the Qallu institution, some of the structure of the Gada system which suggest recent adoption, and a number of other practices associated with the Oromo. All these will be discussed in their proper places. However, here it should suffice to say that these indications point to a concrete historical circumstance that took place in the pattern of ethnic distribution during the reign of Amda-Siyon in the southern region.

Besides this, the powerful empire solidly established by Amda-Siyon seems to have acted as a powerful dam that checked the movements of pastoralists from the southern to the central highlands. The establishment of a number of Christian military colonies in Bali, Dawaro, Hadiya, Fatagar, Waj and other areas were meant not only to prevent raids

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1. Takla Sadiq Makurya, Ya Grañ Ahmad Warara, pp. preface iv, 708 and passim.
 2. Taddesse Tamrat, Church and State ... , p. 150, n.1.

by the pastoralists, as we are told to believe,¹ but also to prevent local rebellions and to stop large scale movements of population, including the Oromo pastoralists.

The Struggle between the Christian kingdom and the Adal Sultanate up to 1470s

Amda-Siyon, who through his energetic and brilliant victories created an empire, was able to control all the strategic trade routes between the rich interior and the coast. He seems to have fully participated in and controlled the lucrative trade, adding glamour and wealth to his power.² However, Amda-Siyon did not go as far as appointing Christians to rule the conquered Muslim areas. He kept in power the Muslim rulers who recognized his undisputed overlordship.³ In this policy he succeeded in creating an unbridgeable rift between commercial interest and Islamic militancy within the conquered Muslim areas. This policy was fully exploited by his successors. In the conquered Muslim states, the rulers had to struggle not only against the monolithic Christian power, but also within the sections of the royal family and merchants who saw their salvation in maintaining peaceful relations with the Christian emperors. The section of the local ruling houses who identified themselves with the cause of the merchants realized that the prosperity stemmed from the peace guaranteed by their Christian overlords. This element realized the weakness of their own states, and the strength of their enemy. They realized the apparent disunity of interests among their peoples and a solid unity of Christian interest represented by the monarchy. This view was opposed by the elements who raised the slogans of "holy" war against the "infidels" and condemned all cooperation with the enemy.⁴ The former elements recognized the need for compromise - a compromise which was not opportunistic in character, but pragmatic and dictated by the need for self-preservation. The Amhara emperors who succeeded Amda-Siyon (Sayfa-Arad, 1344-1371; Niwaya-Maryam 1371-1380) exploited this apparent weakness of Muslim leadership.⁵

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1. See Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia and the Christian kingdom, 1508-1708 ...", pp. 149-150.
 2. Taddesse Tamrat, Church and State ... , pp. 80-89.
 3. J. Perruchon, Les Chroniques de Zar'a Ya'eqob et de Ba'eda Maryam, (Paris : 1893), p. 304.
 4. *Infra*, p. 18.
 5. Taddesse Tamrat, Church and State ... , pp. 145-149.

The repeated defeats that exhausted the material and human resources of Ifat, and the intervention of the Christian emperors in the local affairs sharpened the ideological struggle between the element that stood for compromise and that opposed to it. Around 1370, the militant revolutionaries who adamantly opposed any form of cooperation with the Christian rulers, emerged victorious by crushing the collaborators. The militant party that was headed by Haq-ad-din I not only initiated the "holy" war against the Christians but also transferred the centre of power to Adal, with its capital at Wahal in the lowlands. This was the most dramatic measure taken to revolutionize the spirit of Islamic militancy. It was a real turning point in the Muslim Christian struggle in the Horn of Africa. A turning point for two basic reasons. First, although the Christian emperors repeatedly inflicted crushing defeats on Adal in the latter's own territory, the former were never able to make Adal part of the medieval Christian empire.¹ Secondly, after the transfer of Muslim power from Ifat to Adal, it was Adal, though weak and the victim of her own aggression, which was on the offensive. The mighty Christian empire was on the defensive. In this sense the brilliant victories of Amda-Siyon were not repeated by his successors.

During the next Christian emperor's reign, that of Dawit (1380-1412) the brilliant Adal leader Sa'ad-Din (1374-1402/3) won no less than twenty ephemeral victories.² Sa'ad-Din's long and elusive campaigns were directed not only against the "infidels" (as the Christians and pagans were called in Muslim literature), but also against the Muslim collaborators with the Christian emperors. The struggle had now taken a true appearance of Jihadic war. Thus the local Muslim rulers of Dawaro, Hadiya and Bali were attacked and looted.

... He fought against Amano, the Christian king's governor of Hadiya ... attacked Zalan, and took from there so much booty that the portion allotted the Sultan amounted to 40,000 heads of cattle,³ all of which indeed he distributed among the poor and needy.

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1. Taddesse Tamrat, Church and State ..., p. 154.
 2. Ibn Khaldun, Histoire des Berbères et des dynasties Musulmanes de l'Afrique septentrionale, tr. de Slane, new edition, Casanova, vol. ii, (Paris : 1927), p. 108; see also, Maqrizi, "The book of true knowledge ...", p. 22; E. Cerulli, "Documenti arabi ...", Real Accademia Nazionale, p. 46; J.S. Trimingham, Islam in Ethiopia, p. 74.
 3. Maqrizi, ibid., pp. 14-16.

A recent Arabic book,¹ which describes the campaigns of sultan Sa'ad-Din makes an interesting reference to some Oromo groups in Bali and Dawaro, which seem worth mentioning at this point. In Chapter Eight of this book, Shaikh Ahmad Abdullahi Rirash, gives the military exploits of the sultan at length. The military aspect of Sa'ad-Din's struggle are already known to history, and we do not need to repeat them here. What is new in this Arabic source is the war the sultan is supposed to have led against some Oromo groups. From the topography of the expeditions and some practices depicted in this book, the bulk of Sa'ad-Din's campaigns against the "pagans" was directed against the pagan, or not fully islamised, Somali tribes in the territory of Adal, and particularly around the present area of Dire Dawa, all along the old commercial route. In the campaigns the sultan is supposed to have led in Dawaro and Bali, it appears from ethnic names and general description of their practices that he might have fought with some Oromo groups. The author mentioned Hirya Galla against whom sultan Sa'ad-Din fought. Hirya (age-mate) was the famous Oromo fighting unit which will be discussed in the next chapter. There are two other important points which should be mentioned here. The first is the name Galla itself, and the second is about the supposed leader of Hirya. From this report it appears that by the second half of the fourteenth century, the name Galla had already entered even Arabic literature. The importance of this point will become clearer further in the discussion,² and here it should suffice to concentrate on the second point. According to this source the Hirya Galla against which Sa'ad-Din fought had a leader called Bori. The latter is referred to as a king, but this should not be taken literally and perhaps it means a military leader who fought against the sultan. The appearance of the name Bori as a "king" or a leader of an Oromo group is a point of profound historical significance. Bori, which means "the direction of sun rise" or east is here represented as a real historical figure. The reference here is not to an individual, but to a group that migrated in the direction of the east. As we shall see in the next chapter,³ a section of the Oromo people migrated in the direction of the sunrise, from their original homeland, while the other section migrated in the

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1. Shaikh Ahmad Abdullahi Rirash, Kashf as Sudul can Tarikh as-Sumal, wa Hamalikahum as-Sabca, ("The uncovering of Somali history and their seven kingdoms"), Mogadishu : 1974, pp. 36-67. (Hereafter cited as the "uncovering of Somali history"). I am deeply indebted to Mohammed Ahmad Abdullahi Rirash, the younger brother of the Shaikh, for helping me in the translation of the Arabic material.
 2. *Infra*, pp. 39-43.
 3. See the next chapter, pp. 71-73.

direction of sunset. An important conclusion flows from this information. By the second half of the fourteenth century the Oromo people were already divided into two exogamous moieties known as Barentu and Borana. The Barentu group migrated in the "direction of the sunrise", while the other group went in the opposite direction. It was a section of the Barentu group that the sultan must have encountered in one of his campaigns in the region. The same source mentions several place names in Bali which are unmistakably of Oromo origin such as karra Bala (the wide door), Dar Labu (the place of proclamation) and a number of others. Ramis, a tributary of the Wabi Shabelle, where according to the Harar manuscript,¹ an Oromo group lived in the fourteenth century, is also mentioned.²

We continue with our discussion on the struggle between the Muslims and the Christians in the region. Emperor Dawit, who was alarmed at the rising success of Sultan Sa'ad-Din, sent a very strong expedition that hotly pursued and killed the great Muslim leader in Zeila in 1402/3, immortalizing his name as the martyr of Islam.³ Hereafter Adal took the prestigious and "holy" name of "the land of Sa'ad-Din". And his saintly name imbued the Adal dynasty with a strong aura of respect, and its kings were regarded as saints by all Muslims.⁴ This crushing defeat not only temporarily halted the Muslim attacks on the Christian empire, but also forced them once again to change their capital from Wahal to Dakar some 70 kilometres east of Harar.

The new centre of power had similarity and differences with the old state of Ifat. Similarity because, like Ifat, Dakar was located at a strategic position along the caravan routes between Zeila and the interior. In fact, Dakar was the meeting-place of three caravan routes : the one from Harar via Dakar to Zeila and Berbera, the second from Ogaden via Dakar to Harar, and the third from the hinterland of the Wabi Shebelle via Dakar to the ports. As the capital, it was an emporium and a centre of exchange for the produce of the nomads, such as various kinds of myrrh and frankincense, ostrich feathers, ivory and all kinds

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1. Ewald Wagner, tr. and ed. Legende und Geschichte der Fath Madinat Harar von Yahâ Nasrallah, (The conquest of Harar), (Wiesbaden : 1978), pp. 120-121, the Arabic text. (Hereafter Yahya Nasrallah and cited as Fath Madinat Harar).
 2. Shaikh A.A. Rirash, The uncovering of Somali History, pp. 36-67.
 3. Maqrizi, "The book of the true knowledge ...", pp. 17-18.
 4. Alvares, The Prester John of the Indies, vol. ii., p. 408.

of animals and the produce of the hinterland such as grain, gold, and slaves were exchanged for all kinds of imported foreign products. The historical monuments of Dakar bear eloquent testimony to her commercial prosperity.¹ There was another similarity and difference between Ifat and Dakar at a different level. Similarity, because both Ifat and Dakar had sedentary and nomadic populations. Ifat had the ardent Muslim Argobba population, which seems to have formed the core of the striking force. The Semitic speaking sedentary Argobba, who seem to have provided political and military leadership in the formation of the Muslim Shawan state in the tenth century, became the dominant sedentary group after Ifat replaced Shawa.² The bulk of Ifat's population consisted of Cushitic-speaking nomads like the Warjeh, Gobal and Zallan. Dakar had also both sedentary and nomadic populations. The sedentary population was composed of the Semitic-speaking Harla and Adare and the nomadic population was composed of Somali and others. Unlike in Ifat, the sedentary agricultural population did not appear prominent either in the military leadership or the bulk of the fighting force. In fact, the Adal dynasty at Dakar depended on the nomadic Somali population for their army. A section of the sedentary population was engaged in commerce. The commercial prosperity at Dakar itself seems to have undermined the militancy of some members of the royal family. From the chronicle of the Walasma dynasty published by Cerulli and the history of Maqrizi, it appears that there was an element within the ruling circle which expressed a feeling of tiredness with the struggle against the Christian kingdom. This element showed a tendency to enjoy the fruit of the new wealth without the risk of going to war. Without allowing for this tendency, it is very difficult to account for the murder of Jamal-ad-Din in 1433. This sultan is described in these sources as "the best of kings of his age, pious, prudent, brave, energetic, terrible to enemies", and he repeatedly defeated the Christian army.³

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1. R.A. Azais and R. Chambard, Cinq Années de Recherches Archéologiques en Ethiopie province du Harar et Ethiopie Méridionale (Paris : 1931), pp. 23-24; see also Cerulli, "Documenti Arabi ...", Real Accademia ... p. 39.
 2. Now what remains of the Argobba people are found "in some parts of Shawan escarpment east of Ankobar, and in some enclaves in northern Arsi, Charachar and the region of Bisidimo near Harar". Ulrich Braukämper, "Islamic principalities ...", Ethiopianist notes, vol. 1, p. 24.
 3. Maqrizi, "The book of the true knowledge ...", pp. 22-25; Cerulli, "Documenti Arabi ...", Real Accademia ..., p. 47.

It appears the conspirators were overwhelmed by the militant party before they seized power and the militants again held the reins of power in Dakar. Unfortunately for the leader of the militant party, Ahmad Badlay (1433-1445), the Christian throne was occupied by its ablest and most scholarly emperor, Zara Ya'eqob (1434-1468). The Adal offensive and initial success was cut short when in 1445 Zara Ya'eqob defeated and killed Ahmad Badlay in Dawaro, at the battle of Aifars. Badlay's remains were dismembered and sent to different provinces. His property and that of his wife, including his robes of all colours, were shared among various monasteries.¹ Despite his brilliant victory, Zara Ya'eqob did not try to include Adal within the Christian kingdom. He considered Adal as the land of the Muslims outside the Christian boundary. Adal was an independent and troublesome neighbour, the proximity of which troubled all the medieval Christian emperors, including Zara Ya'eqob.² For the next half a century the Adal question dominated the Christian royal court. The question was not whether to colonize Adal, but how to contain or neutralize her attacks. In short, one fact about Adal well understood by the Christian emperors was that it was an independent troublesome neighbour which needed to be contained or neutralised by pre-emptive strikes. This fact of Adal's independence has been explained by reference to the inhospitable lowland which the Christians abhorred so much.³ Historical evidence belies this conclusion. The real reason for the independence of Adal was that it had strong striking power and could defend its own territory. So it is not an exaggeration if we say that it was the military factor, time and again, which proved decisive and prevented Adal from becoming part of the medieval Christian empire.

Zara Ya'eqob turned away from the policy of expansion to that of consolidating what had been won so far. He organised the administration of his empire by appointing his relatives and daughters to the highest posts. He initiated the policy of appointing Christians in the conquered Muslim countries. Besides settling military colonists in the defeated Muslim territories, he instituted the practice of marrying Hadiya princesses, a practice which was deeply deplored by the Muslims.⁴ Above

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1. J. Perruchon, Les chroniques de Zar'a Ya'eqob et de Ba'eda Maryam, pp. 65-66, 89-91.
 2. ibid., pp. 45-46.
 3. Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia and the Christian kingdom ...", pp. 40, 124.
 4. Arab Faqih, Futuh al Habasha, p. 372.

all Zara Ya'eqob was a great religious reformer. Under him the expansion of Christianity was encouraged, the quality of the religious life improved, religious literature reached its zenith with the emperor at the head of this current.¹

The next Christian emperor, Baeda Maryam (1468-1478), opened his reign by obtaining the submission of Sultan Muhammed (1445-1471/2), the son of Ahmad Badlay. Encouraged by this turn of events, Baeda Maryam sent two pre-emptive expeditions into the heart of Adal, which seem to have been very successful. The third expedition met with disaster in 1474.² The disastrous defeat of the Christian army not only raised the morale of the Muslims and rekindled Adal's spirit of offensive against the Christians, but also demonstrated the weakness of the Christian army, behind the facade of invincibility.

The next Christian emperor, Eskender (1478-1494), tried to reverse the irreversible military situation. He even led a successful expedition against Adal and burnt the capital, Dakar, entirely. But on his long return his force was decimated by the Adal army, which harassed his soldiers from all sides. The king himself was later killed by an arrow of the Maya.³

The Christian emperor, Naod (1494-1508), was unable to send a pre-emptive expedition to Adal, and lost his life while attempting to repulse a Muslim offensive. The Christian kingdom was not only forced to defend itself within its own territory, but became the victim of continuous Muslim offensives. For the next twenty-six years the Muslims led annual punitive raids and looting expeditions deep into the kingdom.⁴ However, these Muslim victories were not accompanied by settlement. The warfare was more of a border incursion with the motive of gaining booty.

Finally, before we end this section let us summarise what has transpired so far about the struggle between the Christians and the Muslims.

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1. Tadesse Tamrat, Church and state ..., pp. 206-247
 2. J. Perruchon, Les Chroniques ..., pp. 112, 152, 159, 165-167, 180-182; Idem, "Histoire d'Eskender, d'Amda-Siyon II et de Na'od, rois d'Ethiopie" in Journal Asiatique, Ser. 9, iii (1894), p. 362.
 3. J. Perruchon, "Histoire d'Eskender..." in JA, pp. 12-13, 45.
 4. Alvares, The Prester John ..., vol. ii, p. 411.

For about two centuries, the Christians and Muslims knew a long period of vacillating friendship and hostility, good and bad, profit and loss, with the commerce of the two communities being interwoven. In matters of trade the Muslims were allowed to travel anywhere in the Christian kingdom so long as they gave gifts to the king and paid the necessary tribute, and they were usually allowed to practice their religion. In their own territories, the Muslims were at liberty from all the exactions of the Christian kingdom, as long as the locally appointed Muslim leader paid annual tribute to the emperor. Failing to pay tribute was tantamount to rebellion, which had to be crushed with all severity, with large scale human and material destruction. The bulk of commerce was conducted by the Muslim merchants. The lion's share of the profit went to the Christian kingdom. The unequal distribution of the profit, the memories of their former independence, the exactions and the periodic looting of the Christian soldier, the unyielding struggle of Adal against the Christian kingdom - all kept the spirit of resistance only just below the surface, even within the area which became part of the medieval Christian empire. The Christian kingdom which flew the conquering flag for two centuries wanted to maintain the flow of Muslim tribute, while Adal wanted to replace the conquering Christian cross by the crescent of Islam. The Muslims of the conquered territories wanted to be free of all flags and to have profitable commercial intercourse with both at best, while at worst they were ready to accept the domination of Adal, a co-religionist, and be free from the exactions of Christian emperors and the pillaging of their soldiers. The linking thread throughout the Christian Muslim struggle was not religious persecution but economic exploitation, and political oppression. Hence, the relation between the Christians and Muslims during these two centuries must be seen as an episode of economic and political struggle, though a major episode that was huge in its consequences.

The Rise of a new Muslim power in Harar

It is ironic that at the very time when the initiative had passed from the hand of Christian emperors to the hand of Adal sultans, effective power started slipping out of the hands of the dynasty that had borne the brunt of the struggle against the Christians. Gradually power passed into the hands of the landed Harari nobility, who championed the cause of Islam. This started in the second half of the fifteenth century.

Following the defeat and death of Ahmad Badlay in 1445, in Dawaro, the next Sultan of Adal, Muhammed Ibn Badlay, initiated an entirely new pragmatic but dangerous policy. It was pragmatic, in that the Sultan submitted to Baeda Maryam and started paying annual tribute with which he secured peace. It was dangerous, because the policy compromised the independence of Adal for the first time.¹ This policy provided the dynasty with a breathing space in which to recuperate. But it provided a powerful psychological and political weapon to the internal opposition. The zealots adamantly opposed paying tribute to the Christians, and the landed nobility sought more power in their own provinces. The nobility challenged the authority of the Sultan, whose power base depended on the nomadic population. In other words, the landed nobility under the banner of Islam presented itself as supporting the interest of the Muslims, by which it meant that of the sedentary agriculturalists, while attacking the dynasty for not doing much. Thus the Harari (Adare and Harla) landed nobility initiated their own aggressive policy towards the Christian kingdom, the policy nourished by Islam, and aimed at diffusing tension between the sedentary and nomadic communities of Harar. Among the generation of the new leadership was Amir Mahfuz (1490-1516), the hereditary governor of Harar and Zeila, the de facto governor of Adal state, who led annual frontier raids against the Christian kingdom for twenty-six years.² Mahfuz's repeated success alarmed the Christian emperor Libna Dingil (1508-1540), so much that he struck up an alliance with Portugal, the Christian power of the day, the mistress of the Indian ocean.³ The Christian kingdom's pressing security interest and the global economic and military interest of the Portuguese together created an alliance which in a few decades saved Christianity from extinction.

In Harar Mahfuz relegated the role of the Sultan to that of a nominal ruler and did not himself aspire to use this prestigious title. The relationship is described aptly by Arab Faqih, the historian of the Muslim conquest :

... It was the custom in the country of Sad-ad-Din that every Amir had power to prosecute or withhold action to carry out

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1. J. Perruchon, Les Chroniques ... , p. 131.
 2. Alvares, The Prester John ... , vol. ii, p. 411.
 3. ibid, pp. 411-415, 479-481; see also Sergew Hable-Sellassie, "The Geez letters of Queen Eleni and Libne Dingil to John King of Portugal", in IV Congresso internazionale de studi Etiopici, (Roma : 1974), I, pp. 547-566.

raids, and to make holy war. Most of the soldiers were under him and the Sultan had nothing but his share of the taxes.¹

Mahfuz seems to have shared his war booty not only with his nominal master in Dakar, but also with his co-religionist, the ruler of Yemen, who in return provided him with the green standard for Jihad and with the cadres who ignited the ideological fire of the great war.² Mahfuz's repeated victories spread his fame far and wide. He was soon elevated from an Amir to an Imam.³

While Mahfuz was at the height of his power, he had two notable hereditary aristocrats serving under him, the governor of Hubat, Garad Abun and the governor of Sim, Garad Ibrahim bin Al Ghazi. Abun was the uncle of Mahfuz,⁴ while Garad Ibrahim was the confidant of Abun. These two aristocrats were both members of the Harla hereditary landed nobility.⁵ While the rising tide of Muslim nationalism represented by Mahfuz was bringing together different groups under the militant banner of Jihad against the Christian kingdom, a military genius was born to Garad Ibrahim al Ghazi.⁶ The exact date of Ahmad's birth is not known but was probably

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1. Arab Faqih, Futuh-al-Habasha, pp. 12-13; translation by Trimmingham, Islam in Ethiopia, p. 80.
 2. Alvares, The Prester John ..., vol. ii, pp. 411-412.
 3. Arab Faqih, ibid., p. 479.
 4. Robert Ferry, "Quelques hypothèses sur les origines des conquêtes Musulmanes en Abyssinie au xvi siècle", in Cahiers d'études Africaines, vol. ii, (Paris : 1961), p. 32.
 5. In the past scholars without exception have assumed that Imam Ahmad was a Somali. But Futuh al-Habash makes it abundantly clear that he was Harla. There are also other internal pieces of evidence which show that he was not a Somali. However, since Islam was the fountain head of Muslim nationalism in the sixteenth century, the Imam was also a great national hero for the Somali.
 6. The name of his mother is not mentioned in Arabic sources. According to one Christian chronicle, she was called Shamshiy. Her sister was the wife of Sultan Muhammed, the hereditary chief of all the Harla people. All this indicates that the Imam Ahmad not only belonged to the sedentary aristocracy but was probably related to the Harla dynasty. See Takla Sadiq Makurya, Ya Graf Ahmad Warara, pp. 175-176; see also Futuh al-Habash, pp. 73, 111, 118.

in 1506. Ahmad had two brothers¹ and three sisters. Of the latter, Ferdousa was married to Garad Mattan b. Othman,² the hereditary chief of the Giri Somali. The second sister, Munisa, was married to Garad Kamil, an important Adare nobleman, who was within the inner council of the Imam. His third sister, whose name is not mentioned in our source, was married to Amir Mujahid b. Ali, the hereditary chief of the Adare people, a celebrated cavalry general in the Imam's army and the father of Amir Nur (1552-1567), the second successor of Imam Ahmad.³ Adole, the slave of Garad Ibrahim looked after the well-being of his master's child. Adole's association with Ahmad at this early stage in his life might have created a powerful emotional tie, something like a father-son relationship, between the two. Adole, one of the best generals of the Imam, faithfully championed the cause of Ahmad, while Ahmad trusted him and showered the highest honours on him. As can be seen from the brief description of Ahmad's relations, it is understandable that the key figures in the Jihadic struggle were closely tied to his family.

After the death of his father sometime in the 1510s, Ahmad was closely tied to Garad Abun, who regarded him as his own son. Ahmad served as a cavalry soldier in his army. Three things seem to have influenced Ahmad's future career : first the power struggle between the Walasma sultans and the hereditary Harla and Adare nobility, second the military experience he gained while serving under Abun, and third the political experience Ahmad gained during these unsettled years.

The Christian emperor, Libna Dingil, succeeded in defeating and killing Mahfuz in 1516, in what was to be his first and last victory against the Muslims. The death of Mahfuz not only deprived the Harari nobility of its ablest general, who could rally the various groups around himself, but also opened the way for an intensive power struggle. Sultan

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1. His elder brother was named Abun, and he succeeded his father as the Garad of Sim. After the death of Garad Ibrahim, his son Abun continued to lead the Sim contingent force under Mahfuz, until he was killed in one of Mahfuz's annual raids into the Christian kingdom before 1516. The second brother, Muhammed, seems to have been younger than Ahmad. We say younger because it was Ahmad and not Muhammed who succeeded as the Garad of Sim after the death of Abun, the elder brother. It was only after Ahmad became Amir that Muhammed became the Garad of Sim.
 2. On Garad Mattan see below.
 3. Arab Faqih, Futuh al-Habasha, pp. 48, 72-75, 163-164 and passim.

Muhammed ibn Azur (1487-1517), who was the nominal head of state under Mahfuz, was executed by his own general in 1517, and the general himself was executed a year later. During the next two years, four prominent men contended for and lost their heads in the struggle for power. Garad Abun emerged victorious in 1520. It was during Abun's struggle for power that Ahmad demonstrated his courage, intelligence and military leadership. Garad Abun rewarded him in two ways. First, Abun arranged the marriage of Ahmad's sister Ferdouse to Garad Mattan, the powerful Giri Somali chief. This marriage cemented the bond between the powerful Somali tribe and the cause for which the Imam stood. Garad Mattan, besides being one of Ahmad's top generals, served him with a loyalty bordering almost on worship. It was probably for this special connection between the Somali leader and the Imam that Somali oral tradition unanimously claims that the Imam was a Somali. Secondly, it also appears that it was Abun who was astonished by the military valour of Ahmad,¹ who arranged Ahmad's marriage with the late Mahfuz's youngest daughter, Baitya del Wambara.² By this marriage Ahmad established not only formal alliance with the supporters of the late leader, but also inherited his mantle to continue with the jihadic tradition of his father-in-law.

In 1520, when Garad Abun made himself the undisputed leader in Harar, Abu Bakar, one of the sons of the Sultan executed in 1517, also made himself the new Sultan in Dakar. Abu Bakar was an ambitious self-made man who was not ready to accept a nominal authority. He wanted to have a real power and decided to fight for it. Accordingly, he marched on Harar with full strength at the time when Abun was unsuspecting, and forced him to submission. Abu Bakar immediately followed his easily won victory with the transfer of the capital of the Adal dynasty from Dakar to Harar. The transfer of the capital to Harar stirred up strong feelings against the dynasty that were fuelled by the propaganda of the opposition. People rose up against the abuses of Adal officials, the laxity of morals among the higher class, and the lawlessness along the caravan routes. Although Garad Abun and Sultan Abu Bakar were from the same class, in the eyes of the pious they represented two interests and

1. Arab Faqih, Futuh al-Habasha, p. 13.

2. Robert Ferry, "Quelques hypothèses ...", in Cahiers d'études Africaines, p. 32.

served two different masters. This explains why Arab Faqih passed widely differing judgements on Harar under two periods - the period when the city was under Abun and when it was under Abu Bakar. No louder praise of Harar under Abun can be found than in Futuh al-Habasha.

... He established law and order affirming the right and forbidding the wrong. He exterminated highway robbers, forbade drinking, carousals, gambling, and dancing with drums, in consequence of which the country prospered. He loved the Ashraf (descendants of the prophet) various converts, dervishes and shaikhs. He really controlled the country and cared for his subjects.¹

Arab Faqih finds nothing praiseworthy in Sultan Abu Bakar. To him the Sultan was an enemy of God and the Muslims. Under him Harar and the whole surrounding country was abandoned to dancing, incessant drunkenness and moral decadence.

... He ruined the country; highway robbery and drunken carousals reappeared. In his time his subjects used to hold up travellers and plunder them. Vices reappeared and no-one in his time could get restitution for injustices.²

In 1525, Garad Abun rebelled against Abu Bakar and went to Zeila with a section of his forces. The Sultan followed him to Zeila, with his Somali force, and managed to kill the rebellious leader. For the militant party Garad Abun was the martyr.³ The Sultan also inflicted severe punishment upon the followers of Abun. His expropriation of the property of the dead leader, and his ill treatment of his relations displeased different sections of Muslim society. Every step taken by the Sultan against the supporters of Abun must have turned people, doubtful about his sincerity, towards Islam. The atmosphere was surcharged with hatred and sedition. The Sultan was now an isolated man whose views were disliked and opposed probably by the majority of the Harla and Adare people. On his return to Harar, the Sultan tried to disarm the force Abun left behind. A section of the force loyal to Abun led by Garad Ahmad rebelled and took refuge in Hubat, the heartland of the Harla people. This opened a period of intense political struggle between Ahmad and the

1. Arab Faqih, Futuh al-Habasha, pp. 13-14; trans. by Trimmingham, Islam in Ethiopia, pp. 84-85.

2. ibid.

3. Arab Faqih, ibid., pp. 14-15.

Sultan. Garad Ahmad had none of the military forces which the Sultan had at his disposal. He had to create his own which he did so well that the courage and discipline of his followers became proverbial.¹ This explains why the Sultan was unable effectively to challenge the seventy or so cavalry with whom Ahmad opened the campaign. Ahmad defeated the Sultan in the field. Now it was the turn of Sultan Abu Bakar to take refuge in Ogaden with the Somali nomads. Ahmad did not follow him. After raising another large body of Somali followers, Abu Bakar met Ahmad for the second time. It was an indecisive clash that only forced the Sultan to retreat and Ahmad remained in Hubat virtually an independent rebel governor of this famous province.

At this juncture in the struggles a new event boosted both the morale and the fighting capacity of Garad Ahmad. Dagelahn, the Christian general, Libna Dingil's son-in-law and governor of Bali, attacked Harar.² Ahmad patiently waited until the withdrawing Christian force reached Hubat. Then he divided his army into three wings and met the Christian force at Akam, where he routed them. The prize of this victory was some sixty horses and 400 men.³ Ahmad's victory not only strengthened his fighting capacity, but also spread his fame far and wide. It also opened the chapter of his victory over the Christians, which was closed only by his death in 1543. Compared with the future huge ones, this was only a small defeat for the Christians. However, the lightning attack with which he unnerved his opponents, the panic and the total disarray that overtook the Christian army set the pattern for the future defeats.⁴

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1. Among others see, J. Davis, "The 16th century Jihad in Ethiopia and the impact on its culture" in JHSN, part I (1960-63), pp. 570-571; Charles F. Rey, The Romance of the Portuguese in Abyssinia (London : 1929), p. 120; R. Ferry, "Quelques hypothèses ...", pp. 24-37; J.S. Trimmingham, Islam in Ethiopia, pp. 84, 91; Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia ...", pp. 134-137; Takla Sadiq Makurya, Ya Gran Ahmad Warara, pp. 283-287.
 2. Arab Faqih, Futuh al-Habasha, pp. 15-19; see also, Trimmingham Islam in Ethiopia, p. 86; J. Davis, "The 16th century Jihad ...", p. 572; Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia ...", p. 133.
 3. The Christian force took numerous captives including the mother of Abu Bakar Katchemu, the brilliant general of Ahmad. On their way back the Christians fell into Ahmad's trap. Hubat was Ahmad's real power base, the land of his youth where he knew the hills, the mountains, rivers, terrain and the different places where cavalry and infantry can be employed simultaneously.
 4. E.A.W. Budge, A History of Ethiopia : Nubia and Abyssinia, vols. I and II, p. 328.

Sultan Abu Bakar, who was equally surprised by Ahmad's resounding victory, marched on Hubat with his large Somali following and besieged Ahmad, unprepared and in a mountain encampment in the region of Gara Multa. The sultan besieged Ahmad and his small force for ten days, when he hoped to starve them. However, at this critical moment, the shaikhs of Harar intervened and reconciled the two leaders.¹ For the first time Ahmad fully recognised the authority of the Sultan. The latter in turn confirmed Ahmad's hereditary governorship over Sim with the title of Amir. The Sultan returned to Harar with full authority and Ahmad to Sim with the new title. However, the new arrangement did not last long, since the Sultan was still frightened by the rising popularity of Ahmad. When Amir Ahmad brought the annual tribute to Harar, the Sultan disarmed his men, but again Ahmad escaped from the trap and took refuge in Hubat. Ahmad soon raised a new force. This time all that he had to do was to reduce the towns, a problem successfully solved even by small bodies of troops. Ahmad turned the country-side against the Sultan by keeping the tax of the agricultural regions to himself and depriving the Sultan of a rich source of income. Sultan Abu Bakar, unconvinced by the past defeats, unrepentant for his mistakes, marched on Hubat. But he was soon forced to retreat and Ahmad followed and defeated him. The sultan again took refuge among the Somali nomads in the Ogaden while Amir Ahmad entered Harar triumphantly.

Following the next round of inconclusive fighting, the Harari religious men again reconciled the two leaders. Ahmad accepted the authority of the Sultan and returned to Sim, while the defeated Sultan returned to Harar as a victor. One wonders why Ahmad accepted this arrangement, which did not alter his political position. If we trust our main source (Futuh al-Habasha), it was the Sultan who had initiated the hostilities and who had lost the fight. But now he returned to Harar as a real victor. Again, if we trust this source, should this be taken as a sign of the utmost confidence in his ability and strength, or as an intentional humility on the part of Ahmad? Was it a part of psychological warfare, a tactic intended to demonstrate that it was the Sultan and not he who was responsible for the shedding of Muslim blood? Whatever

1. C. Nerazzini, La conquista musulmana dell' Etiopia nel secolo xvi, (Tradizione di un manoscritto arabo), (Roma : 1891), pp. 3-4.

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 it may have been, this arrangement did not last long. When Amir Ahmad invaded Dawaro and returned to Harar with huge booty, the two leaders quarrelled over the use to be made of this windfall. Amir Ahmad wanted to employ the bulk of it for importing weapons, while the Sultan opposed this. In the ensuing battle, the Sultan was killed, and thus the struggle for power came to an end. Being desirous to legalize his position and to diffuse any retaliation for killing the Sultan of the Walasma dynasty, Ahmad put on the throne Omar Din, the brother of the defunct Sultan.¹ The new Sultan was without any power but name. He was allowed to live in Harar, but under the authority of Muhammed Ibn Ibrahim, the younger brother of Ahmad, who took over the administration of Harar, after Ahmad moved deep into the Christian kingdom after 1531.²

From what has been said about the power struggle of the sixteenth century, two important but interconnected conclusions can be drawn. First, the sultans of the Walasma dynasty seem to have had their power base among the nomads. In contrast, the new generation of Harla and Adare leaders had their power base among the sedentary agriculturalists, including perhaps some sections of the Somalis who were sedentary. Secondly, besides the leadership in the jihadic war of the sixteenth century, the sedentary agriculturalists provided the overwhelming majority of the fighters. In the past scholars without exception seem to have underestimated the role played by farmers. The jihadic wars of the sixteenth century are presented as the work of the fanatic nomads. It is true that the nomads played an important part in the jihad between 1529-1531. Even then, they did not constitute half of the fighting material. After that their role in the war progressively declined. On the other hand, the farmers of Harar were engaged in the jihadic wars between 1529 and 1567 to such an extent that they were exhausted, devastated and forced to abandon their means of livelihood. The understanding of this point is very crucial for the understanding of the later catastrophies which engulfed the sedentary farming communities in Harar region.

Amir Ahmad, having removed his enemy, was soon invested with full power. The title he adopted expresses the spirit of the time. In

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1. Arab Faqih, Futuh al-Habasha, pp. 18-33; Nerazzini, La conquista musulmana ... , pp. 3-7
 2. Ibid., pp. 394-395

this he followed the example of his father-in-law. He was called Imam Ahmad al-Ghazi (the conqueror). Thus he combined in his person both religious and secular power. To the Christians and the outside world, Imam Ahmad was better known by the Amharic appellation, Ahmad Grañ (the left-handed), from his practice of using the sword with that hand. For the Somalis, for whom he is the first great national hero, he is known as Gurey (the left-handed).¹ For the Hararis, he was an Imam par excellence. As the spiritual, political and military leader of the Muslims, it was his avowed aim to replace the Christian cross with the Muslim crescent in the Horn of Africa. For this ambitious task Imam Ahmad developed a ruthlessly efficient striking force that almost succeeded in uprooting Christianity from the region. A word about this military machine is pertinent at this point.

Imam Ahmad spent several months in subjugating the surrounding Somali tribal groups through war and diplomacy, and succeeded in welding together the mutually hostile sedentaries and nomads. This he did by creating a new type of army. This army was better than any other the Muslim leaders had been able to raise in the past, because of its superior military organisation. It was divided into three main groups. The first was the Malasay.² This was the personal bodyguard of the Imam, commanded by him alone. The entire Malasay was composed of sedentary people, including the Harla and the Adare. A necessity of a common language, or closely related and mutually intelligible languages, for effective communications seems to have determined the ethnic composition of this crack force. The Malasay was well-disciplined, thoroughly trained, and above all mounted and well armed with sabres from Arabia, shields from India and swords from north Africa. Its ranks increased by the stream of Arab preachers, musketeers and mercenaries who now flocked to Harar in large numbers. The Arab preachers fuelled the ideological base for jihad, prepared written slogans on the standards carried by each wing and raised the morale of the fighters, while the firearms of the Arab mercenaries provided an additional weapon which the Muslim force had lacked in the previous wars. This crack force, with which the Imam policed the surrounding hostile tribes and attacked the Christian armies, faithfully carried out his will. All the military commanders appointed

1. Ali Abdurahman Hersi, "The Arab factor in Somali history : the origins and the development of Arab enterprise and cultural influences in the Somali peninsula", Ph.D. University of California Los Angeles, 1977, pp. 136-137.

2. Arab Faqih, Futuh al-Habasha, pp. 84, 111, 130, 185, 207, 466.

during fifteen years of jihadic war, the four wazirs and ten or so amirs, seem to have served in the Malasay before their promotion. In other words, the Muslim commanders were hand-picked men who were in most cases relatives of the Imam, trained and disciplined in his bodyguard. The Imam added to Malasay's enormous tactical efficiency an indispensable moral element by his presence at every battle field in fighting bravely in its midst, and heightening its morale by his impassioned speech.¹

The second wing of his force was composed of the Somali nomads, all commanded by Mattan, the brother-in-law of the Imam. The third wing was composed of the Afar, Harla and Adare nomads, and the sedentary agriculturists of the Adare, Harla and Argobba, and each was commanded by their hereditary leaders. The Imam held meetings with the commanders of the three wings and took a great interest in discussing military matters, listening attentively to the suggestions and recommendations of the commanders. The Imam also provided separate standards for the three wings of his force, and banners, prepared and embellished by the slogans of the celebrated shaikh Muhammed bin Ali el Marzouq, who later died in Dawaro.²

At every battle field, the three wings were arrayed in three directions : one on the right, the second on the left and the Malasay in the middle, with the Imam at their head. The Malasay provided support to both wings at the crucial moment and prevented the fighters from abandoning their field. At the same time the Malasay with its cavalry³ and the best weapons created havoc to the centre of enemy lines. Of the three wings, one was led by Adole, the famous general, the other by three top commanders including Mattan, and the third, the Malasay, by the Imam himself. We find numerous examples of this strategy at work throughout Futu al-Habasha, with the battle of Shembra Kure being the classic example.⁴

1. Arab Faqih, Futuh al-Habasha, pp. 115-116

2. Ibid., p. 171

3. It seems that the Imam provided the Malasay with the best available horses.

4. Ibid., p. 65 et passim

Such was the terrible force which about 1529 the Imam loosed on the Christian kingdom. With about 12,000 soldiers, the Imam faced the ten times greater Christian force of Libna Dingil at the battle of Shembra Kure and administered one of the most humiliating defeats the Christian emperors ever suffered at the hands of Muslim leaders.¹ Without going into the details of the jihadic wars, suffice it to mention that between 1529 and February 1543, when the Imam was killed by a Portuguese soldier,² the Christian kingdom was laid waste. Most of its military and colonial establishments in the south and south-east were dismantled. In the heart of the Christian kingdom a large section of the Christians were either "voluntarily" or forcibly converted to Islam. Of all the cultural centres, the Churches and monasteries suffered most. Some churches were looted and others burnt with their monks.

i/ At the cost of incredible human losses on both sides, Imam Ahmad succeeded in creating a bogus fabric of an empire that included most of what is today Ethiopia and northern Somalia up to Cape Gardafu,³ if not to Mogadishu. This was the first and the last forced unification of the Horn. In this vast area, especially in the central highlands, a certain administrative order was established as symbolized by the appointment of Muhammed Ibrahim, the brother of the Imam in Harar region, of Wazir Adole, at first in Bali and later as the supreme commander and administrator of the whole south and central part of the Christian kingdom, of Amir Husayn bin Abu Bakar Gatouri for Dawaro, and of Wazir Abbas, the uncle of the Imam, as the overall commander and administrator of the northern section, including the Red Sea region of Eritrea.⁴ We say bogus fabric of an empire, because it disintegrated rapidly and unceremoniously, as it was erected hastily. By 1535, the military superiority of the Imam had already started to decline. By then Adole, his ablest wazir and loyal servant, Herby Muhammed, a very young and very able nephew of the Imam, had been killed by the Christians. The plague and famine of 1535 in Tigray wiped out over half of the forces with which he had started the invasion. Among those carried away by this plague and famine

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1. Despite the incredible disaster and the shattered morale in many places, the Christians put up a very energetic resistance and even succeeded in repelling the Muslims in different places.
 2. R.S. Whiteway, ed., The Portuguese expedition to Abyssinia in 1541-1543, as narrated by Caslanhaso, (London : 1902), pp. 79-84.
 3. Arab Faqih, Futuh al-Habasha, pp. 119-120.
 4. Ibid., pp. 395-396 and passim.

were Ahmad Nagash, the Imam's first son, and a number of other prominent leaders. Eight years later the Imam himself was killed, the Muslim force devastated and scattered and the empire disappeared.

A major consequence of the jihad was that both the Christians and the Muslims devastated each other. With the appalling massacre and destruction on both sides went the fall and destruction of both their defence systems. The Christian military colonists in the southern region were broken up, most of the men either killed, sold into slavery or fled the region. All semblance of defence and authority disappeared. The no-mans-land between them was emptied of its inhabitants, who fled from the storm centre to seek refuge in an inaccessible mountainous area. It is not so much that as so many scholars have presumed "the so-called Galla invasion" destroyed both kingdoms, as that the kingdoms so battered each other that the way was made clear for surges of advance by the Oromo pastoralists. In other words, scholars seem to forget that the sedentary communities on both sides destroyed each other and by so doing destroyed the very dam that had checked the migration of the pastoral Oromo for many centuries. The sedentary agricultural Oromo who already lived in the Christian and the Muslim areas lost their identity in the jihadic struggle. Hence, according to the general view of historians, no section of this people played an integral part in the struggle for mutual destruction in the Horn. But the monumental book of Arab Faqih makes it abundantly clear that some sections of the Oromo people who lived in the hotly contested areas suffered severely from the jihadic war.¹ This will be discussed below in the last section of this chapter.

Some evidence for the presence of some Oromo groups within the Christian areas long before the sixteenth century migration of pastoral Oromo.

Careful and detailed researches into the history of the peoples of southern Ethiopia have only just begun, and the need to go deeper in time and undertake fieldwork where that is possible has become steadily clearer to the scholars in the field.² However, the identity of the peoples who inhabited Shawa and the area south of it is not yet established

1. Arab Faqih, Futuh al-Habasha, pp. 135-137.

2. Ulrich Braukämper, "Islamic principalities ...", in Ethiopianist notes, vol. I, no. ii, pp. 30-35; Geschichte der Hadiya Süd-Athopiens, (Wiesbaden : 1980), pp. 97-130.

apart from the general attempts to categorise them under a few headings such as "Sidama"¹ or "Sidama Afar and Semitic military colonies",² or Hadiya both Cushitic and Semitic.³ Scholars have not so far considered seriously that some Oromo groups could have been within the said region, either before or during the fourteenth century. Part of the explanation for this is to be found in the old theory which claims that the Oromo people arrived in the Christian kingdom in the middle of the sixteenth century. Although the incorrectness of the theory has already been demonstrated,⁴ some scholars have continued to accept that the Oromo arrived in the Christian kingdom only in 1522. It is hard to grasp the reason why scholars look at the dynamic of population movement as the phenomena of one century or why this movement could only be from south to north and not vice versa.

Much that has been written about the early history of the peoples of southern Ethiopia seems to be conjecture. Until it is explored, where that is possible, as it has been explored for northern Ethiopia, the early history of several Ethiopian peoples will remain obscure and a student in the field will have to pick his way warily among the debris of half-erected and half demolished hypotheses which the historian without the effective use of various oral traditions and linguistic evidences and social practices can neither complete nor raze to the ground. We feel compelled to propose a new interpretation of the rich written Amhara oral tradition and religious literature, even though that interpretation does not have the support of the scholarly works hitherto undertaken. We believe that in the main this story is correct, despite the fact that previous scholars support us only in part and in some cases appear violently to contradict us.

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1. E. Cerulli, Studi etiopici II : La lingua e la storia dei Sidamo, (Roma : 1938), p. 32; see also Tadesse Tamrat, Church and State ... p. 6.
 2. Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia and the Christian kingdom ...", p. 44-45.
 3. Ulrich Braukämper, "Islamic principalities ..." in Ethiopianist Notes, vol. i, pp. 17-47, vol. ii, pp. 1-30
 4. Merid Wolde Aregay, ibid., p. 152.
 5. Ulrich Braukämper, ibid.

With the sources at our disposal, it is not easy to define the extent of the presence of Oromo sedentary groups in the central highlands of the Christian kingdom before the sixteenth century migration of pastoral Oromo. But some estimate can be attempted. As the following discussion will show, the region north and west of what is today Shawa province seems to have been shielded from the Oromo penetration before the second half of the sixteenth century. However, the region in and south of Shawa seems to have been subject to Oromo penetration long before the sixteenth century.¹ The northward flow of Oromo penetration seems to have been checked in the fourteenth century, by the southward expansion of the Christian kingdom and the organisation of regular garrisons along the frontiers. Even so, however, some northward drift of Oromo population seems to have continued, so that some parts of historical Shawa, Ifat, Waj, Hadiya, Dawaro, Bali and other provinces may have become populated by Oromo-speaking groups which had mixed in some degree with other Cushitic-speaking groups, probably even giving rise in certain instances to separate tribal aggregations. Later, in the sixteenth century, Oromo immigrants thus found that a broad framework of Oromo culture had already been established, and this was subsequently further built upon and consolidated by massive migration of Pastoral Oromo. It seems there is much truth in the remarks made by Darrell Bates some years ago.

The fighting between the Abyssinian Christians and the Muslims did not end with Granye's defeat by the Portuguese, and it was for many years a recurring feature of the Abyssinian scene. The Galla peoples of the southern and western highlands watched this struggle with interest. They had suffered in their time from both parties, and were waiting in the wings for opportunities to exact revenge and to recover lands which had been taken from them. The Galla were a very ancient race, the indigenous stock, perhaps, on which most other peoples in this part of eastern Africa had been grafted.²

The rest of this section will attempt to substantiate the over-simplified generalisation, which asserts that the southward expansion of the Christian kingdom seems to have checked the northward flow of Oromo penetration.

1. *Infra*, pp. 51-68.

2. Darrell Bates, The Abyssinian Difficulty : The Emperor Theodorus and the Magdala campaign 1867-1868, (Oxford : 1979), p. 7.

The term "Galla" has been used in Christian literature since the fourteenth century. However, as we shall see in the third chapter,¹ it was widely used in the fifteenth century. The designation "Galla" appears for the first time in a written form in European sources, on the map made for Prince Henry the Navigator by Fra Mauro. This map which was completed in 1460 :

... embodied the best and most up-to-date information about Africa which was available in Venice in the years preceding its completion on 26 August 1460. The Ethiopian portion is particularly good; it is more accurate than Egyptus Novelo² and was based upon maps drawn for him by religious persons born in Ethiopia.³

Fra Mauro's map contains an indispensable piece of information which throws much light on early Oromo history. His information not only locates the Oromo people just south of the Christian kingdom, but also gives concrete historical validity or evidence to the numerous Amhara written and oral traditions to be discussed shortly.

... Mauro completed his map ... using information he obtained from Ethiopian monks who had come to attend the Council of Florence. The monks came to Italy in 1441 and, as they had been living in Jerusalem for some time, the information they gave to Mauro could be on developments which had occurred much earlier. Mauro's map shows a river to which he gave the two names of Xebe and Galla. The part Galla, which is the lower course of Mauro's river is placed directly below the river Auasi and the province of Vaidi, namely south of Awash and Waj. Kammerer has identified the Galla river with the Omo, while Crawford thinks it is one of the tributaries of the Gibe. From its direction of flow and its position in relation to the Awash and Waj, the most likely identification is with the Ganale Doria, since the Wabi is named elsewhere on the map.⁴

All the three identifications especially the last one, extend the river several hundred kilometres to the south, which is very unlikely. First and foremost, Fra Mauro's river is the last major river south of the Christian kingdom, which flows into the Indian ocean. The source of this river and its course corresponds almost exactly with the source and

1. *Infra*, pp. 152-3.

2. Egyptus Novelo map was completed in 1454.

3. O.G.S. Crawford, Ethiopian Itineraries circa 1400-1524, (Cambridge : 1958), p. 16.

4. Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia ... ", pp. 148-149.

course of the Wabi Shebelle river. What is more, Wabi is marked on Mauro's map as a small river in the eastern parts of the Horn which empties itself into the Red Sea. This excludes it from being the real Wabi Shebelle. To all intents and purposes the Galla river could only be identified with the headwaters of the Wabi Shebelle. The reason for this will become clearer through the following discussion, which concentrates around or in the vicinity of the headwaters of the Wabi Shebelle. Secondly, though Kammerer has identified the upper course of the Galla river with the Omo, which is missing from Mauro's map, he has actually placed the lower course of the Galla river on the real course of the Wabi Shebelle river.¹ By so doing Kammerer has unintentionally identified the Galla river with the Wabi Shebelle. According to P. Zurila, Fra Mauro separates the Christian kingdom from the land of the Oromo, by mountains, fortresses and the Galla river itself.² By placing the Oromo territory in a mountainous region Mauro is providing us with striking confirmation about one aspect of Oromo history, their "original homeland". The implication of his information will become clearer in the next chapter,³ here it should suffice to say that as we know from other sources⁴, Mauro also confirms that the highlands of the middle south were the original home of the Oromo people.

As we shall soon see, the Galla river of Mauro's map is also at the very centre of an important Amhara tradition. This river is supposed to be the natural boundary between the Christian kingdom and what Almeida called "the original home and the fatherland of the Galla".⁵ The two Christian monks who participated in the council of Florence in 1441,⁶ and supplied the vital information to Mauro, may have known the name Galla either through the Orthodox church literature of the earlier time, or they may have had first hand knowledge of it themselves. Whatever

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1. Albert Kammerer, La Mer Rouge l'Abyssinie et l'Arabie depuis l'antiquité, Tome Premier, Troisième partie, (Cairo : 1929), p. 377.
 2. Placido Zurila, Il Mappamondo di Fra Mauro Comaldolese, (Venice : 1806), p. 136.
 3. *Infra*, pp. 84-9.
 4. See among others, E. Haberland, Galla Sud-Ethiopiens (Stuttgart : 1963), p. 772.
 5. Almeida in Some Records of Ethiopia 1593-1646, trans. eds. F. Beckingham and G.W.B. Huntingford, (London : 1954), pp. 133-134.
 6. Girma Beshah, and Merid Wolde Aregay, The question of the union of the churches in Luso-Ethiopian relations (1500-1632), (Lisbon : 1964), p. 16; see also, O.G.S. Crawford, Ethiopian Itineraries, 1400-1524, p. 10.

the source, the information Mauro received from them concerned developments which had occurred much earlier. The appearance of this name on the supposed boundary, is important in two ways, In the first place, it provides strong historical evidence that some Oromo people may have lived in this area before the supposed boundary became part of the Christian kingdom through the conquests of the Christian emperors. Besides, a natural boundary presupposes some kind of contact, be it peaceful exchange or conflict, or both, between the peoples of the two neighbouring countries. Second and most important, the appearance of the name Galla on Mauro's map gives definitive historical validity to the numerous Amhara written and oral traditions.

A few remarks are required before we embark on the description of these traditions. Scholarly work so far undertaken by both Ethiopian and Europeans alike has neglected to take these traditions into account. It appears that a critical re-reading of the early Christian literature can on occasion prove revealing, both in what is included and perhaps misinterpreted, and what is unconsciously ignored. A great task lies before future scholars, when they have re-examined the Christian literature and subjected it to scientific examination. Serious attention needs to be paid to the rich religious literature. Our emphasis stems from the belief that, so far, these sources have not been carefully consulted as far as the history of some Cushitic-speaking peoples, including the Oromo, are concerned.

C. Beke, while trying to find the etymology of the term Galla, came across a tradition which says that the name is taken from the river in Guraghe, province in the south west of Shawa, on the banks of which river a great battle is said to have been fought between them and the Abyssinians.¹ The connection between the term Galla and a river is very important, partly because almost all Oromo, including even those in Kenya, claim that their ancestors crossed a river Gallana, and partly because one Amhara tradition categorically asserts that the Oromo got the name Galla from the name of the river of their country Gallana.² On April 18, 1840, the missionary Krapf, reported a detailed version of the same tradition :

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1. C. Beke, "On the origin of the Gallas" in the report of the British Association for the advancement of Science, (London : 1848), p. 3.
 2. Asma Giyorgis, "Ya Galla Tarik", p. 39.

A Debtera afterward came and spoke about the origin of the Gallas. He said that the mother of the Gallas had been a woizoro (lady) of the Abyssinian kings when they resided on the mountain Entoto, in the neighbourhood of Gurague - that the lady was given in a marriage to slave from the south of Gurague, by whom she had seven sons, who were educated in their father's language and custom, as well as in his business, which was that of a herdsman - that the sons became great robbers, having gathered many people with them ... That when they thought they were strong enough, they began to fight with the Abyssinians, and frequently vanquished them, particularly on one occasion near the river Gala, in Gurague; and hence they have been called Gallas to the present day ... All this is written in a small treatise, of which I have procured a copy. This account of the origin of the Gallas I think is very probable.¹

The question that cannot be answered with certainty concerns the date of the supposed battle between the Christians and the Oromo. Was it during the reign of Amda-Siyon? or was it later, or even earlier? The Christian traditions are unanimous in asserting that it was during the reign of this warrior king. There are many sources for these traditions. But, when reduced to the essentials, all seem to come from the same source which is most likely, the first. In other words, the traditions given in these sources differ in form, but they are very similar in content. A linking thread runs through all of them. There was a terrible famine during the reign of Amda-Siyon. At that time there was a lady who was starving in Fatagar. A certain Christian commander of Dawaro and Katata had a slave named Lalo, who was his cattle keeper. The hungry lady went to Lalo, who made her his wife, and they produced seven children. When these children grew up, they became soldiers or good fighters and started robbing the property of others. The people complained to the commander of Dawaro and Katata, who fought and drove Lalo and his children to the Galla forest.²

This tradition is very similar to the one already cited above. Both seem to have come from the same source. The earlier version was already available by 1840, while the latter version according to Asma,

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1. Isenberg and Krapf, The Journal of C.W. Isenberg and J.L. Krapf detailing their proceedings in the kingdom of Shoa and journeys in other parts of Abyssinia in the years 1839-1842, London, 1968., p. 25
 2. Manuscripts Ethiopiens, Bibliothèque National (Paris), no. 249, pp. 1-47. Gebra Sellassie, Tarika Zemen ze dagmawe Menelik, Nigusa Nagast ze Ityopya, (The Chronicle of the reign of Emperor Menelik), the Amharic edition (Addis Ababa : 1965), pp. 29-31.

was brought to Emperor Menelik, by a certain monk named Abba Balyneh.¹ It appears that the original manuscript was kept in the island of Lake Zeway, where other Christian manuscripts escaped Muslim destruction in the first half of the sixteenth century. From this it follows that, if not the whole story, at least some parts of it were written either before the jihadic wars or during it or even shortly after it, when the story of Imam Ahmad's destruction was still hot and all possible explanations for his success were enumerated. The main thrust of the second version of this tradition is that Ahmad Grañ defeated the Christians by the wrath of God, because King Libna Dingil was lax in his religion and had adopted certain pagan Galla traditions. Though this part reads very much like post facto pious explanation for the Christian's defeat, the part that deals with the Oromo history tells about the developments that took place much earlier. On the surface, the tradition is no more than a legend. However, under the legendary cloak, it refers to a certain historical reality. A number of interesting points can be raised. The first point is about the Galla forest itself. From the topographical description of the tradition, which especially mentions Dawaro, it appears that the Galla forest was in the direction of the Galla river of Mauro's map, and the earlier cited tradition. Probably both names may refer to the same region. Also, from the topographical description of Amda-Siyon's 1329 campaign, a land called Gala is mentioned within or near Dawaro, and certainly near the river Awash at one point.² It appears that Gala was also in the vicinity of the Galla river and Galla forest.

Secondly, the marriage between the slave Lalo and the Amhara lady seems to suggest a contact, probably a long one, between some Oromo groups

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1. Asma Giyorgis, "Ya Galla Tarik", pp. 3-5; see also Takla Sadiq Makurya, Ya Grañ Ahmad Warara, pp. 803-804, who states that "there is no doubt that some Oromo groups lived within the Christian kingdom during the reign of Amda-Siyon". In fact he strongly implies that it was the Christian defence establishment which checked a large scale Oromo migration before the jihad of Imam Ahmad cleared the way for them. Though from another angle Tadesse Tamrat, Church and State ..., p. 301, arrives at the same conclusion when he states "Christian Ethiopia was never the same again after the wars of Ahmad Gragn. Indeed, many of the difficulties which befell the Christian kingdom in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries can be attributed, directly or indirectly to the disastrous effects of the Muslim wars. The Galla expansion could never be contained in the sixteenth century largely because Ahmad Gragn's forces had effectively disrupted the system of frontier defence of the medieval Christian empire".
 2. The Glorious Victories of Amda-Siyon, pp. 34, 36. 67.

and the Amhara. Which was this Oromo group? In this tradition Lalo is presented as the father of seven children. In Oromo oral tradition and genealogy Lalo is also the eponym of the founder of the Lalo tribe, a large and powerful group, which was part of the Barentu confederacy. The Lalo group is still an important Oromo tribe in Wallega, Jimma and Illu Abba Bor. Could it be that this Amhara tradition refers to a historical contact between the Lalo group and the Amhara in Dawaro? Finally, according to another tradition reported by Conti-Rossini, the Wallo Oromo are descended from the seven sons of a certain Lalo from Dawaro. Lalo, according to this tradition, was the founder of the nation, at "their place of origin in Dawaro."¹

According to one Amhara tradition of later origin, Lalo was one of the three founders of Manz. The other two were Mama and Gera. "Although their deeds are recorded in the form of legends, Mama, Lalo and Gera were historical personages. They appear to have lived in the latter part of the seventeenth century."² This Lalo of Manz tradition, who lived in the latter part of the seventeenth century, is quite distinct and different from the Lalo about whom Azaj Tino ("chief steward" Takla Sellase), wrote in the first quarter of the seventeenth century. Tino,³ one of the writers of Emperor Susenyos's chronicle, appears to have known the Oromo society, its language and culture. It appears that Tino gathered much oral tradition from the numerous Oromo soldiers at the court of Susenyos. Accordingly Tino's presentation of Oromo history is unique. Tino does not set Oromo origin outside of the Christian kingdom. He makes Lalo their father and Dawaro his original home. It was on the basis of Tino's history that Alaka Taye, a leading traditional historian, made a very interesting conclusion concerning early Oromo history, about sixty years ago. Although Taye has been described by Tadesse Tamrat as "the father of Ethiopian history"⁴, ironically no historian has so far paid any attention to his version of Oromo history. However, the one unique exception

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1. Conti-Rossini, "Domenico Brielli-Ricordi storiei de wallo", in Studi etiopici raccolta da c. Conti-Rossini, (Roma : 1945), p. 87.
 2. D.N. Levine, Wax and Gold Tradition and innovation in Ethiopian culture, (Chicago : 1972), p. 31.
 3. *Infra*, p. 269.
 4. Tadesse Tamrat, in his introduction to the new edition of Alaka Taye's Ya Ityopya Hizeb Tarik, (History of the Ethiopian people), (Addis Ababa : 1971/2), p. 9. (Hereafter Alaka Taye, and cited as Ya Ityopya Hizeb Tarik). It is surprising that Tadesse Tamrat in a major study, Church and State in Ethiopia 1270-1527, covers the history of the Oromo people within his period with one footnote, see p. 150, no. 1, and also his map on 298.

is Takla Sadiq Makurya, who says essentially that Alaka Taye's version of Oromo history is correct.¹ According to Taye, the Oromo people did not arrive in the Christian kingdom during the reign of Amda-Siyon, as Asma Giyorgis claims in his Ya Galla Tarik. But they arrived in the kingdom in the tenth year of the first Zagwe king, viz, Mera Takla-Haymanot, whose accession to the throne seems to have marked the culmination of the long Aksumite decline. According to this version around the middle of the twelfth century, some Oromo groups were already living in the Christian kingdom. What is very striking about this assertion is the fact that the author claims to have used the ancient manuscript written by Azaj Tino. The latter in turn seems to have depended for his information on earlier work. Taye says, "Europeans have written about the Galla by a reasonable conjecture. But I have used the manuscript of Azaj Tino."² This claim cannot easily be dismissed as irrelevant, for the simple reason that so far traditional Christian sources have not been carefully consulted as far as the presence of some Oromo groups in the Christian kingdom before the sixteenth century is concerned. Numerous written and oral Amhara traditions have been either neglected or were used only where they supported the late coming of the Oromo. This imbalance, we believe, has to be redressed, and it is precisely for this reason that Taye's version of Oromo history during the Zagwe period is mentioned here. By so doing we are not implying that Taye's version is correct. Far from it. Until it is supported by other solid evidence Taye's assertion will remain what it is. But all the same it has to receive the attention of historians in the field. Here we merely add the items relating to the Zagwe period, which have some relevance to the Oromo question and show that Taye's assertion perhaps holds some grain of truth.

The first piece of relevant information is contained in The Book of the mysteries of Heaven and Earth, believed to have been composed by Bĕhayĕ-Mikā'el.³ According to Budge, nothing is known about the

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1. Takla Sadiq Makurya, Ya Grañ Ahmad Warara, pp. 802-803.
 2. Alaka Taye, Ya Ityopya, pp. 36-37; see also Asma Giyorgis, "Ya Galla Tarik", pp. 3-4.
 3. Bĕhayĕ-Mikā'el, Mĕshafĕ Mistirata"-Samay Wamidr was first translated in part by J. Perruchon in Patrologia Orientalis, i, (1904), pp. 1-97. In 1935 it was edited and translated in full by E.A.W. Budge in his The Book of the Mysteries of Heaven and Earth, (London : 1935).

author. " ... In a general manner his work suggests that it was the product of the fifteenth century, although parts of it may be older."¹ It is the older parts of this work which concern us here and which may have come from the work of " ... the famous monk of the same name, who flourished in the thirteenth century, who was believed to have received many remarkable revelations".² Among other things, this book mentions thirty names of people and countries, whom the author calls "the children of Ham and their habitations". Among the countries mentioned are Shawa, Angot, Enderta, Beguna and Bali. Among the names of people mentioned are the Zagwe, perhaps the then ruling dynasty, the Habash, that is the people of Tigrai, the Saho, the Danakale (the Muslim people of the lowland who call themselves Afar), and Libi or Liba, which J. Perruchon, R. Basset and E.A.W. Budge have identified with Liban, a very powerful and widely scattered Oromo group, whose clan name is found almost all over Oromo territory.³ What is even more interesting is that in the same book, the term Galan is mentioned as a name of an individual. As we shall soon see, Galan was the name of an important Oromo clan, who formed the vanguard party of the earlier phase of the migration, before the fourteenth century.⁴ Finally, in the same book, there is also a striking statement that strongly implies the migration of the people called Galle.⁵ Who could this Galle be? Our source does not answer. Could Galle be the earlier form in which the term Galla came to the literature? It is tempting to suggest that. However, in the absence of any bona fide evidence we refrain from pushing the argument.

The point which is particularly interesting in the above-mentioned Amhara tradition is about the famine during the reign of Amda-Siyon. The cause, duration and intensity of the famine are not known. Coming as

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1. E.A.W. Budge, The Book of the Mysteries, p. xix (introduction)
 2. Ibid.
 3. Ibid., pp. 31-32; see also J. Halévy, "Notes pour l'histoire d'Ethiopie le pays de Zague" in Revue Semitique (1897), pp. 275-284; see also R. Basset, Etudes sur l'histoire d'Ethiopie, (Paris : 1882), (Extract JA. ser. 7., vol. xvii, 1881), note 233.
 4. Infra, p. 50.
 5. J. Halévy, ibid. Budge, ibid., p. 27.

it did, probably at the time when a colossal upheaval was taking place owing to the struggle between the Christians and Muslims, it must have been severe, probably forcing some people to abandon their land and move to other areas in search of food and safety. The earlier-cited Amhara tradition unanimously asserts that the Christian governor of Katata and Dawaro drove away the rebellious and uncontrollable "children" of Ialo. This tradition perhaps reflects the actual flight of some Oromo groups from Dawaro during the reign of Amda-Siyon. We say this for many reasons, chief amongst which the following is the most important. There is some evidence to show that some Oromo groups may have lived in the storm centre, during the reign of Amda-Siyon.

The Orthodox Church literature, which seems to have flourished during the reign of Amda-Siyon, provides us with bits and pieces of evidence which, when taken together, add up to prove the presence of some Oromo groups in the region of Katata and Grarya. We consider below the hagiographical traditions of three saints who lived in the fourteenth century.

St. Takla Haymanot (c. 1215-1315) was related to Yikunno Amlak, the founder of the Amhara dynasty in 1270. This great Saint of the Orthodox Church seems to have received the best of religious educations in Amhara and Tigray and to have returned to his native land of Silalish, from where he launched his evangelical mission. Before his final settlement at Grarya, where he founded the famous monastery of Debra Abo (later renamed Debra Libanos), he seems to have moved from place to place in Christian Shawa, between Silalisha and Grarya. Many place names of the topography of his mission seem of Oromo origin. These include Grarya and Katata, the latter a pagan cult centre where he is supposed to have baptized many people in a river called Meesot. The name of this river and the adjacent country Bera also seem to be of Oromo origin.¹ What is more, the pagan practices of the people converted at Katata, who worshipped a sycamore (oda) tree,² is very similar to the practice of pagan Oromo.³

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1. See for example, G.W.B. Huntingford, "Historical Geography of Ethiopia from 1st century A.D. to 1701", (1969), unpub. manuscript at SOAS, p. 67.
 2. The role of oda in the Gada system and Oromo religion will be discussed in the next chapter, see p. 128.
 3. E.A.W. Budge, Life and miracles of Takla Haymanot, (London : 1906), pp. 76-86; Tadesse Tamrat, Church and State ..., pp. 160-174.

We have already referred to the Amhara tradition which claims that the governor of Dawaro and Katata drove away some unruly Oromo groups from the region. It was in the same region that on 21 May 1840 Krapf heard a tradition which claims that St. Takla Haymanot saved himself from "the inroad of the Gallas"¹ by hiding up a tree. It is true that one cannot take a few place names and pagan practices as the definitive proof for the presence of some Oromo elements in the region, since other Cushitic-speaking people(s) may have lived in these also. However, what follows shows that there is more to it than a few place names and pagan practices.

The narratives of the Saint Filipo (c. 1323-1406), the third successor to Takla Haymanot at Debra Libanos, furnishes us with further unmistakable Oromo place names. When the famous Egyptian bishop Ya'eqob embarked upon his grand plan of turning Amda-Siyon's military victories into fertile ground for evangelisation of the conquered people, he divided Shawa into twelve parts among the disciples of Takla Haymanot, and urged them to preach the work of God in their various districts.² Of the twelve parts, three seem to have Oromo names, of which only Dembi is the unmistakable one. Dembi has already been correctly identified by Conti-Rossini to be a "province of Shawa north of the Awash with its capital at Rogie."³ Both the name of the province and that of the capital are still common Oromo place names. When Filipos quarreled with Amda-Siyon over the latter's moral laxity, the king exiled Filipos to Quorquora.⁴ Quorquora is the name of a big tree that produces edible wild fruits. The name of the tree is applied to the land in which it is found and it is one of the most common place names of Oromo areas.

Another of St. Takla Haymanot's disciples, Qawistos, a native of Silalish, founded a monastery at Nibge, in the neighbourhood of the Muslim state of Ifat. The narratives of the life of Qawistos furnish us with two very important Oromo clan names. This Saint is reported

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1. The Journals of C.W. Isenberg and J.L. Krapf, p. 247. Krapf adds that "... I told them that at the time of Tecla Haimanot (sic) the Gallas were not known in Abyssinia".
 2. Taddesse Tamrat, Church and State ..., pp. 174-176.
 3. Conti-Rossini, Catalogo dei nomi propri di luogo dell Etiopi, reprinted from the Atti del primo congresso geografico Italiano, (Genova : 1892), p. 407; see also Huntingford, "Historical Geography of Ethiopia", pp. 23, 82.
 4. Huntingford, Ibid., p. 82.

to have conducted extensive proselysation among the pagan people of Galan and Yaya, who worshipped the god qorke.¹ Yaya is still a name of an important Oromo clan among the Nole north of the city of Harar.

Galan is an important Oromo clan name, traditionally considered as the "first son" (Angafa) of the Karrayu, "the first son" of Barentu, the eponymous founder of the eastern Oromo confederacy. Because of the special privileges and role given to the Angafa, in Oromo society, the Galan had a unique position in the Gada system, as well as in the Qallu institution. The name Galan, appears as a clan name throughout most of the genealogies. The Italian traveller of the last century, A. Cecchi, reported a tradition which says that the Galan are the oldest Oromo clan group whose members have prestige.² Knutsson also reported the same thing.³

Yaya is an important tribal group from the Karrayu confederacy. Karrayu, according to Bahrey, is the "first son" of Barentu, and the father of six powerful tribes. In other words, Karrayu, are part of the eastern Oromo confederacy, which in turn broke into six powerful confederations.⁴ Like Galan, Karrayu appears almost all over Oromo territory either as a clan, or tribe or confederacy. In fact, Karrayu also appears among the Borana in southern Ethiopia where Galan does not appear. What is very fascinating about the Borana in the southern region is that the Karrayu clan is the largest Borana clan, and the clan of the Qallu, the hereditary religious leader. In the Borana Gada system the Karrayu clan still performs what the Galan performed among the northern Oromo before the disintegration of the system. The people of Galan and Yaya, according to Tadesse Tamrat, lived near mount Yay, somewhere east of Katata,⁵ the region where St. Takla Haymanot converted the pagan people in the river Meesot. We have underlined the word lived, because the reference is to the sedentary people, after whom these places (with their unmistakable Oromo origin) are named. The already cited Amhara

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1. Tadesse Tamrat, Church and State ... , p. 184.
 2. A. Cecchi, Da Zeila alle Frontiere del Caffa. Viaggi di Antonio Cecchi Spedizione Italiana nell'Africa equatoriale, (Roma : 1886) vol. I, p. 525.
 3. K.E. Knutsson, Authority and Change : a study of the Kallu institution among the Macha Galla of Ethiopia, (Göteborg : 1967), p. 172.
 4. Bahrey, in Some records of Ethiopia, p. 114.
 5. Tadesse Tamrat, ibid., p. 184.

tradition connects Katata, Dawaro and Lalo, the name of one of the major Oromo tribal groups. What is more, today there is a district called Yaya in Salale, the old Silalish. Salale is not only the name of an Awraja (sub province) in the north-western part of Shawa, but it is also the name of a powerful Oromo tribal group who live in the region. The change of the name Silalish to Salale is an example of the Oromo practice of taking territorial names in addition to their clan or tribal name.

Qorke is the name of an Oromo deity which dwells in sacred places, such as sycamore trees, or any big tree, or the source of a river or spring, or the centre of a deep forest. There are still a number of places by the name of qorke where traditional ceremonies are performed in the Harar region.

Finally, at the risk of sounding redundant, we would like to make some concluding remarks. First, it appears that by the time of Amda-Siyon there were some Oromo groups in Shawa. There is no doubt that Galan and Yaya were two Oromo clans who belonged to the Barentu section and were already living in the area just mentioned. In fact, according to Alaka Taye, the authoritative traditional Ethiopian historian, Amda-Siyon had settled some Oromo groups between lake Tana and Damot, where they accepted Christianity and adopted the language of the people among whom they settled.¹ We have no reason to doubt the information given by Alaka Taye, since the transfer of people from one part of the Christian kingdom to the other for military purposes was a tested policy of Amda-Siyon.² Secondly, the Galla river of Fra Mauro's map, the Galla forest of the Christian tradition and the Galla river of the Amhara tradition, were to be found in the same region near Waj and Dawaro, and the said Galla river could be possibly identified with the Wabi Shebelle river. Thirdly, it seems that during the first half of the fourteenth century the pattern of ethnic distribution appears to have been altered. Fourthly, the creation of the powerful Amhara empire seems to have checked the large scale population movements from the east to the west and more importantly from the south to the north. The military colonies settled in the southern provinces acted as a dam that checked the normal flow of population to the north.

1. Alaka Taye, Ya Ethiopia Hizab Tarik, p. 37.

2. See for example, Tadesse Tamrat, Church and State ... , p. 74, n.l.

During the fifteenth century, the Christian defence system seems to have frustrated perhaps a number of large scale pastoral Oromo movements to the north. For example, according to a tradition reported by Haberland, the northern Guji, the Allabadu Oromo pastoralists had already reached around lake Langano, by the middle of the fifteenth century. However, they were driven back from the region by the soldiers of Emperor Zara Ya'eqob.¹ Through the rest of that century the Christian defence system seems to have checked massive pastoral migration. When that military capacity of the kingdom was destroyed by the jihadic war, the dam that checked the normal flow of the Oromo pastoralists to the north exploded. The powerful flood that followed engulfed both the Christian kingdom and the Muslim Imamate of Harar.

It is difficult to define the extent of pastoral Oromo pressure on the Christian kingdom by the beginning of the tumultuous sixteenth century. The task is made more difficult by the fact that the royal chronicles of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries report every group that fought against the emperors as Muslim rebels, an expression which was even adopted by European travellers of the period. Francisco Alvarez, an intelligent observer who was in the country between 1520 and 1526, was unable to free himself from the lingering mentality of Muslim rebellion, and therefore fails to report the presence of some Oromo groups in the area he visited. He even failed to mention the Oromo attack of 1522, graphically described by Bahrey.² Alvarez probably failed to mention the Oromo pressure on the Christian kingdom for two reasons. First he did not go as far south as Bali, where the pressure of the pastoral Oromo was most strongly felt at the time. The settled, sedentary Oromo in the central and southern part of the kingdom appeared to be the obedient subjects of the Christian emperors. Secondly, while Alvarez was in Shawa, Waj and Fatagar, he stayed at the royal court, where every tribal movement or incursion by the pastoralists was reported as a Muslim rebellion, according to the formula used since the time of Amda-Siyon.³

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1. E. Haberland, Galla Süd-Ätheopiens, p. 276.
 2. Bahrey, in Some Records of Ethiopia, pp. 111-112.
 3. It must be remembered that Alvarez lived most of his years in the country in the north, far removed from the scene of the pastoral Oromo pressure.

The historian of the Jihad, Arab Faqih, makes numerous references to Oromo groups, from which two propositions may be deduced. First, that there were some Oromo groups, possibly resulting from the earlier migration to Ifat, established in Waj, Dawaro and Bali. Secondly, that these Oromo groups fought on both sides in the conflict of the sixteenth century, depending at first on their location, and that they subsequently changed sides according to the exigencies of the situation. In this they resembled the other populations in the area.

When Imam Ahmad invaded Ifat in 1531, his force came to a district called Qawat, "so excellent a land", says Arab Faqih, that it was known as a smaller Gojjam, because of the abundance of its resources.¹ This fertile land was inhabited by a sedentary people called EL-Ejju, who spoke a language different both from that of the Muslims and the Christians. After his victory, the Imam sent Kalid al-Waradi and Garad Othman ben Jawher to bring Islam to the people of Qawat. The Muslims managed to convert three of their leaders, named Hizou, Dalou and Daballa. These three leaders, we are told, accepted Islam very sincerely,² and their people followed suit. And the EL-Ejju people then furnished the Muslim force with a large contingent of cavalry and infantry. The EL-Ejju, who were recruited to the Muslim army en masse, followed the jihadic war to Beta Amhara and settled in Angot, a unique strategic position.

... The highlands of Angot which serve as a great water divide for three river systems of the central plateau of Ethiopia. Here rise the upper waters of the Tġkġzē, the Bashilo ... and numerous other rivers flowing eastwards into the basin of the Awash.³

From this strategically located region, the EL-Ejju were to dominate the history of the Gondar period for almost a century. Who were the EL-Ejju? Three views about this are presented below. According to Trimmingham :

... It is possible that the foundational element of the Yajju were 'Afar-Saho peoples who had penetrated this region both before, as well as during, the great Muslim conquest after which they were conquered by Galla. A process of mutual absorption took place, shown in hybrid tribal names

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1. Arab Faqih, Futuh-Al-Habasha, p. 355.
 2. ibid., pp. 268-269, 298, 355.
 3. Taddesse Tamrat, Church and State ... , p. 35.

like the Warra Shaikh; the Galla social and family life was profoundly modified and also their religion after they accepted Islam, but the Galla language and traditions predominated, whereby the Yajju continue to regard themselves as Galla. The Warra Shaikh family which produced Rases Gugsa and Ali, whose control over central Abyssinia strangled the empire, was the chief branch of the Yajju. It has acquired the usual legend tracing its descent back to Umar Shaikh who came from across the sea.¹

Trimingham related the Yajju (the foundational element) with Afar-Saho, primarily on two grounds. First, like Afar, the Yajju " ... wear feathers in their hair after their first killing."² As we shall see in the next chapter,³ the Oromo also wore feathers in their hair after killing. Secondly, that the Yajju "... seem to combine the agricultural and pastoral life, living by their flocks and by agriculture in which irrigation plays an important part."⁴ Once again, as we shall see in chapter six,⁵ all sedentary Oromo combined agricultural and pastoral life, living by their flocks and agriculture. In fact on the basis of these two grounds, Trimingham unintentionally makes the Yajju more closely related to the Oromo than they are to the Afar-Saho. What is more, it appears that as far as the history of the Yajju is concerned, Trimingham does not seem to have consulted what Arab Faqih has to say about the history of the El-Ejju people. Had he done that he would have realized that the El-Ejju left their country Qawat in Ifat around 1531. There is no historical evidence whatsoever to show that either the Afar or the Saho may have lived in Qawat, either before or during the jihad of Imam Ahmad. To all intents and purposes, the Yajju of Trimingham were the El-Ejju of Futih-al-Habasha, who moved to Angot around 1531.

Without actually identifying who the El-Ejju were, Merid has provided an ingenious but untenable explanation for their permanent settlement in Angot.

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1. J.S. Trimingham, Islam in Ethiopia, p. 35.
 2. Ibid., p. 195
 3. Infra, p. 126.
 4. Trimingham, ibid., p. 195.
 5. Infra, pp. 377-80.

... The Muslim peoples under Ahmad comprised ... nomads, pastoralists and agriculturists. It appears that much of the sedentary population had moved into the nearby highland province leaving to the other two sections some space in which to spread themselves. The case of El-ijju is an indication of such a movement ... The El-ijju must have moved to Angot in large numbers and the reason why they did not return to their fertile country after the collapse of Ahmad's empire must be because Muslims from across the Awash had occupied Qawat.¹

However, this explanation is untenable for two reasons. First, there is no single historical evidence to show that during the early phase of the jihad the sedentary agriculturalists from across the Awash moved to Qawat or any other place, so as to provide space for the nomads and pastoralists in which to spread themselves. Second, and even more importantly, Arab Faqih makes it abundantly clear that the El-Ejju were taken to Angot as the auxiliaries of the Muslim forces.² The real reason why the El-Ejju did not return to Qawat after the collapse of the jihad is suggested below, but here it should suffice to say that both Trimmingham and Merid did not suspect that the El-Ejju could have been the vanguard party of an Oromo group, who may have arrived in Ifat long before the sixteenth century.

According to Gebre Sellassie and Alaka Taye, the Yajju trace their family ancestor Umar Shaikh from Arabia, who came at the time of Imam Ahmad and settled in Yajju. He married many women and produced many children, so that their village became known as "Warra Shihus" ("the family of thousands").³ This view has been accepted uncritically by some scholars. Some even go further and claim that "the Galla failed to subdue or assimilate them completely and therefore the Yajju are known to the Gallas as 'warra Shaikh' ".⁴ On the part of Alaka Taye, there is an attempt to give a very ingenious explanation to the name "warra Shaikh" ("the family of Shaikh"), the appellation by which Muslim Yajju were known to non-Muslim Oromo. However, Taye unintentionally mentions a name that belies his explanation. He says the first born son of Shaikh Umar was named Wale, the commonest and most unmistakable Oromo proper name.

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1. Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia and the Christian kingdom ...", pp. 138-139.
 2. Arab Faqih, Futuh-al-Habasha, pp. 269, 291, 298, 355, 361, 382.
 3. Alaka Taye, Ya Ityopya Hizab Tarik, p. 45; see also Gebre Sellassie, Tarika Zemen ze dagmawe Menelik, Nigusa Nagast ze Ityopya, p. 198.
 4. Merid Wolde Aregay, ibid., p. 139

This, and another point to be mentioned soon, hint, if not positively affirm, that Teye is bent on establishing an acceptable genealogy for the warra Shaikh, since this people became of such importance to the Christian kingdom during the Gondarine period. If Alaka Teye makes the "founding father" of the Yajju come from Arabia, he again mentions the name of a people who are supposed to be different from the Galla. For example a certain lady of Warra Shaikh was married to the chief of Ilma Oromo (literally children of Oromo), and gave rise to the chain of leaders who dominated the politics of the Christian kingdom. The term Ilma Oromo which is only mentioned once in this book is another name for the Oromo people. Clearly the claim that the ancestor of the Yajju came from Arabia at the time of Imam Ahmad cannot be accurate. We have seen that the El-Ejju of Arab Faqih went to Angot from Ifat, during 1531 when the jihadic war reached there. The El-Ejju settled in an equally fertile area in Angot. After the failure of the jihadic adventure in 1543, they remained in their new domicile and the new Christian emperor pardoned them, as he did all who had accepted Islam; since their conversion had been skin deep, it was not a threat to the Christian kingdom. Secondly, the name Yajju is the derivation of the people Arab Faqih calls El-Ejju. Thirdly, the claim of an Arab ancestry is an innocent expression of Islamic value, which is a common phenomenon among the Muslims in north-east Africa and elsewhere. Islamized Oromo have consistently fabricated genealogies. For example, the Oromo of Wallo claim to have come from Harar following the jihadic war of Imam Ahmad.¹ In the Gibe region where Oromo kings accepted Islam only during the first half of the nineteenth century, they claimed that their ancestors were Muslims for many centuries.² Hence, it is not permissible to accept the claim that the ancestor of the Warra Shaikh came from Arabia in the sixteenth century.

The name Umar, the supposed ancestor of the Warra Shaikh in connection with the jihad of Imam Ahmad, may refer to a true historical figure. Arab Faqih refers to a number of Muslim commanders by that name,

1. G. Conti-Rossini, "Domenico Brielli - Ricordi storici di Wallo" in Studi Etiopici, p. 87.

2. Infra, p. 376.

including one brother of wazir Adole.¹ It is not far fetched to assume that the Umar who is supposed to have come from Arabia at the time of the jihad may have been one of the Muslim leaders, under whose command the EL-Ejju of Qawat went to Angot and settled there. What may have happened is that after the arrival of the pastoral Oromo in Angot in the second half of the sixteenth century, the EL-Ejju, who were probably only nominal Muslims, may have referred to themselves as Warra Shaikh, and hence they were called so by their non-Muslim Oromo neighbours to demonstrate the difference in religion between the two. We have numerous examples of this phenomena in the Gibe region as well as in Harar province. Fourth and finally, we have already mentioned the names Hizou, Dalou and Daballa as the traditional leaders of the people of the people of Qawat, who accepted Islam, after their defeat by the Muslim force. Of these three names Dalou and Daballa are still very common Oromo proper names throughout Oromo territory. If these leaders with unmistakable Oromo names submitted to the Imam and probably fought on his behalf, a written Amhara tradition claims that a certain Tullu (another most common Oromo name) was the agafri (literally an officer in the royal court), who was a brave warrior who fought for Libna Dingil against Gran. This indicates that during the jihad the Oromo fought on both sides.²

Besides what has been said above, we also find unmistakable Oromo place names in Futuh-al-Habasha, precisely in or near Qawat the land of EL-Ejju, which suggests that these people were Oromo speakers. Such place names as Genda Belo (the village of Belo) inhabited by Christians and mentioned even by the chronicle of Baeda-Maryam,³ is one example. It was in this village where the Imam astonished his commanders and followers by refusing to accept the twenty ounces of gold which the frightened inhabitants presented as a gift.⁴ Precisely in or near Qawat are also mentioned two place names Wan Jara and Ledjabh. The first is an unmistakable Oromo place name. The second has been identified by

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1. Arab Faqih, Futuh-al-Habasha, pp. 197-198, 324, 396 and passim.
 2. Takla Sadiq Makurya, Ya Grañ Ahmad Warara, p. 803.
 3. J. Perruchon, Les chroniques de Zar'a Ya'eqob et de Bae'eda Maryam, p. 182.
 4. Arab Faqih, ibid., p. 62

R. Basset as Laga Ambo (the river of mineral water in Oromiffa). Laga Ambo as a source of mineral water for cattle is one of the most popular place names throughout Oromoland. In conclusion, we may mention that the El-Ejju of Arab Faqih exists perfectly as Ijju as the name of an Oromo clan. The Yajju of the Christian literature has been derived from the Ijju of the Oromo clan. What is more, in 1843 the French traveller Antoine d'Abbadie met ras Ali, the last Yajju ruler of Gondar, and recorded the latter's long genealogy of his family, in which a certain Sibū is reported to have migrated from Walal, and to have crossed the Awash river early in their history.¹ It is a common fact that Sibū was a powerful Oromo tribe, which spread to Shawa, Wallaga and the Gibe region. From this it appears that the Ijju, whose clan name is found within the Sibū tribal genealogy, was probably the vanguard party of the Sibū tribe that arrived in Ifat much earlier than the sixteenth century.

The people known to history as Maya were known to have lived in the province of Waj and the surrounding areas. Even by the beginning of the sixteenth century Brother Thomas of Gonget reported that the people of Waj had none but a queen to govern them.² This statement should not be taken at its face value, however, because by 1523 there was no queen in Waj, since that region was an important province of the Christian kingdom. What Brother Thomas reported was probably the reminiscence of the earlier centuries. A reference is made to the city of Gada in the same report of this traveller.³ Cerulli associates this female dynasty with the queen Badit, daughter of Maya, who is recorded in an Arabic document to have died in A.D. 1063.⁴ What is interesting about this

1. Antoine d'Abbadie, F.N.A.No. 21300, folio, 796.

2. O.G.S. Crawford, Ethiopian Itineraries, c. 1400-1524, p. 81

3. Ibid., p. 115.

4. E. Cerulli, "Il Sultanato dello Scioa nel secolo secondo un nuovo documento storico", p. 12. Idem. "L'Etiopia medievale in alcuni brani di scrittori Arabi" in RSE iii (1943), p. 272. Around the middle of the 10th century, a queen is reported to have devastated the Aksumite kingdom. See for example, Ibn Haukel, Mūhammed, Configuration de la terre, tr. J.H. Kramers and G. Wiet, 2 vols. (Paris: 1964), vol. i. p. 56. This Arabic source gives her place of origin as Bani-al-Hamūya. Conti-Rossini has suggested the reading of al-Damuta for al-Hamūya because there existed a powerful kingdom of Damot that was competing with the Christian kingdom for supremacy in the region in the 13th century. Besides his interpolation of the 13th century situation backwards into the 10th century context, there are two pieces of evidence that contradict the identification of Bani-al-Hamūya with Damot. First, Bani-al-Hamūya is closer to al-maya of the Arab Faqih, or the Maya of the royal chronicles, or the Amūya of Barey, than al-Damot. Secondly, Damot was located south-west of Shawa and south of the Blue Nile.

Arabic record is the name Maya itself. We have abundant references to this martial people, who fought both against the Christians and Muslims, and at other times fought for both, depending on the exigency of the situation.¹

Opinions about the Maya vary. Braukämper relates them to the Hadiya, while Aregay makes them closely related to Zallan, another nomadic people between the Awash and the Shawan plateau. Basset thinks that the name Maya sometimes designates a military corps, since various regiments of the Christian army bore the name of the province or the region where they were raised, while Huntingford makes them a submerged class (possibly of Saho or Afar origin) who were permitted to settle in the Christian kingdom for their military service.²

Two points cannot be disputed about the Maya, who Arab Faqih calls El-Maya. First the Maya were pastoralists who lived in Waj, Fatagar and the surrounding areas, and were expert archers, who used poisoned arrows. They had no other homeland than this region, although they were taken to different places at different times and by different leaders for military service. Secondly, the Maya or El-Maya staunchly fought against any enemy that invaded their land and fought for that enemy after they were vanquished. Two of the medieval Christian emperors - Baeda Maryam and Eskender - were probably killed by the Maya, while Zara Ya'eqob was able to crush a serious rebellion in Eritrea by settling a contingent of this people there.³ In the first half of the sixteenth century, when Imam Ahmad invaded the Christian kingdom, the El-Maya fought first on the side of the Christian emperor, but after they were defeated by the Muslims they furnished the Muslim army with a large auxiliary force.⁴ When the pastoral Oromo arrived in the heart of the Maya

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1. J. Perruchon, "Histoire d'Eskender, d'Amda-Siyon et de Na'od, rois d'Ethiopie", in JA, ser. 9, t.iii (1894), p. 325; O.G.S. Crawford, Ethiopian Itineraries, p. 14; Arab Faqih, Futuh-al-Habasha, pp. 126, 191, 353 and passim; E. Cerulli, Studi Etiopici la lingua e la storia di Harar, (Roma : 1936), vol. i, p. 18.
 2. Ulrich Braukämper, "Islamic principalities in southeast Ethiopia between the 13th and 16th centuries", pp. 41-47; Merid Wolde Aregay, "Population movements as a possible factor in the Christian Muslim conflict of Medieval Ethiopia" in Symposium Leo Frobenius, (W. Germany: 1973), pp. 270-271; R. Basset, tr. & ed. Futuh-al-Habasha (Histoire dela conquet del'Abyssinie), p. 82; Huntingford, "Historical Geography ...", 293d, 293f, appendix.
 3. Tadesse Tamrat, Church and State ..., p. 260
 4. Arab Faqih, Futuh-al-Habasha, p. 94.

country in the sixteenth century, the Maya staunchly resisted them, so much so that the Oromo were able to break their resistance only by adopting ox-hide shields of body length which made their poisoned arrows useless.¹ After their defeat by the newly arrived pastoral Oromo, the Maya seem to have been absorbed by their conquerors. The question which has not yet been and probably cannot be answered with certainty is whether the Maya were the vanguard party of the Ammaya Oromo described by Bahrey, or if they had any connection with other Oromo groups for that matter. The earlier cited scholars identified the Maya on the basis of their specialization in poisoned arrows alone. This can be a clue but cannot be the only decisive evidence for their identification. We must take into account other criteria such as language, place names and other related items that shed more light on the question of their identity. Some place names in Waj reported by Arab Faqih hint that the Maya spoke a language similar to, if not identical with that of EL-Ejju. The unmistakable place names are Warra Abba, the district so fertile, says the Arab historian, that Libna Dingil called it "the paradise of the nation". Other place names such as Arakhatlo, Qorqora are unmistakably Oromo.² What is more, Arab Faqih makes a clear reference to a strong alliance between the Maya and the EL-Ejju against the Muslim invaders. In the absence of a common religion to unite them the existence of a common or related language may have enhanced the formation of the alliance between the two so that they were able to put 5,000 men in the field and killed Becharah and Garad Cham, the two famous Muslim generals.³

We have suggested earlier that the appellation "Galla" came from the river Galla. As the river probably gave rise to the appellation, so did the province of Waj to the Waji Oromo clan. M. Cohen rightly thinks that the Waji Oromo clan got its name from the old political denomination.⁴ According to one Borana tradition recorded by Haberland, Waj was the place where the original Oromo fell from Heaven.⁵ This tradition, which makes Waj the original home of the first Oromo, perhaps

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1. Bahrey, in Some Records of Ethiopia, p. 113
 2. Arab Faqih, Futuh-al-Habasha, pp. 221, 234, 243, 253, 363; see also Takla Sadiq Makurya, Ya Grañ Ahmad Warara, pp. 328-329.
 3. Arab Faqih, ibid., pp. 361-362.
 4. M. Cohen, Etudes d'Ethiopie Méridionale, (Paris : 1931), p. 78 ff.
 5. Haberland, Galla Súd-Athiopiens, pp. 5, 24; Ulrich Braukämper, Geschichte der Hadiya Súd-Athiopiens, pp. 137-138.

reflects the long presence of some Oromo group(s) in the province. There is no doubt that some Oromo may have lived in the province much earlier than the sixteenth century. It is perhaps not by accident that the Arab historian makes the first reference to land of Orma (i.e. the land of an Oromo group) in the province of Waj. When Wazir Adole was either in or near Waj, during the early part of the jihad :

... He sent scouts of a hundred horsemen to Maya, under the command of Zahroubi Osman. From Maya the Muslim army went to the land of Aran which they looted and destroyed. From there they went to the land of Orm ... where the Muslim force was attacked by the infidels. After¹ defeating the infidels, the Muslim army left the land of Orm.¹

From this Arabic record it is clear that there was a group known as Orm (Oromo) in Waj. As the land of Maya was in Waj, so was the land of Orm. These Orm (or Oromo) were most likely the Waji Oromo. What is not clear from this monumental book of Arab Faqih is about the connection, if any, between the Maya people and the Waji Oromo. The history of the Maya is shrouded with a number of uncertainties that prevent us from making any generalisations.² However, we may mention the following facts in passing. What is intriguing about the name Maya is its existence as an important genealogical name in Harar, in the Gibe region and Wallaga. In Harar the Warra Maya (the house of Maya) are regarded not only as "the purest" of the Oromo, but also as the sons of Babile, the founder of a sub-confederacy within the grand Qallo confederacy. Maya in turn is regarded as the founder of five clans.³ It is not possible to assume that the Maya Oromo in Harar were the descendants of the Maya conquered and assimilated by the Borana Oromo pastoralists in Waj towards the end of the sixteenth century.⁴ The Harar Oromo to which the Maya belonged migrated from Bali around the middle of the sixteenth century directly

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1. Arab Faqih, Futuh-al-Habasha, Arabic text, Cairo ed. 1974, pp. 254-255.
 2. The discussion of the Maya is not complete because many aspects have been dealt with in a purely marginal way. It is also plagued by a number of uncertainties. It is very difficult, if not impossible, fully to reconstruct an objective history of the Maya with the materials at present at our disposal. That task has to await until oral interview is conducted among the remnants of the Maya people, if any. Another equally important contribution will be made if archaeological surveys and excavations are carried out where that is possible, in and around the old province of Waj.
 3. Father Angelo Mizzi, Cenni Etnografici Galla ossia organizzazione civile use e costumi Oromonici (Malta : 1935), pp. 81, 92; see also P. Paulitschke, "Die Wanderungen der Oromo oder Galla Ost-Afrikas", Mittheilungen der Anthropologischen Gesellschaft zu Wien XIX (1889), pp. 165-178.
 4. See chapter V, pp. 314-5.

to Harar, without making the long detour to the province of Waj. This excludes the possibility that the Maya were assimilated by the Harar Oromo in Waj. Maya is also the name of two very fertile valleys near Harar, Maya Guddo (the broad Maya) and Maya Qallo (the narrow Maya) about seventeen and twenty five kilometres southwest of Harar respectively. The small rivers that run through the two valleys are also known by that name. There is also a lake by the name of Maya, twenty kilometres west of Harar on the way to Dire Dawa. Maya is also a very important proper name among the Oromo of Harar.

Among the Oromo in Wallaga, Ulla Maya (the door of Maya), the last station of the Oromo before they crossed the Birbir river to Qellem, had special significance in the Gada system. The Sayo Oromo depended on Ulla Maya for their bokku (the wooden sceptre kept by the leader of the assembly). It was also to Ulla Maya that the Sayo Oromo went for the final decision of court cases which could not be solved at the bokku council. Today we also find Ammaya/Oromo in the district of Gurage west of Nonno in the modern province of Shawa. These are certainly the descendants of Bahrey's Ameye, who were mentioned as an important tribal group within the huge Macha confederacy.²

The province of Fatagar, which was the headquarters of the medieval Christian empire was probably a melting pot of Christian peoples. Two of the prominent emperors - Zara Ya'eqob and Eskender - were born at Tilq, in Fatagar. Ba'eda Marya had spent much of his childhood there, while Lebna Dengel is reported to have spent some years there.³ It seems the rich provisions of this province supported the huge court population that followed the roving capital. As the headquarters of the Christian empire from where decisions were made, campaigns led and evangelical work directed, the emperors must have taken considerable pains to integrate the various tribal groups into the body of one Christian nation. There must have been a considerable Christianization, so much so that it

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1. Nagasso Gidada, 1979, "People and tribal divisions of Oromo in Qellem", mimeographed 14-paged paper. I am indebted to Nagasso for sending me this paper.
 2. Bahrey, in Some Records of Ethiopia, p. 113
 3. Tadesse Tamrat, Church and State ... , pp. 152, 276, 296 and passim.

is difficult to identify different tribal groups that inhabited this province. As the nerve centre of the Christian polity, its population must have been totally Christian.¹ However, as a province, bordering with Adal in the northeast, "... in the north with Yifat, in the northwest with Shawa, in the southwest with Waj, and in the south and southeast with Bali",² it is very difficult to say that there was no Oromo element in this province. There must have been some who were probably integrated into the Christian nation through Christianization. The following Oromo place names probably suggest that Mount Borara, the rivers Dukam and Mojjo, are unmistakable ones.³

The province of Dawaro was bordered by Adal in the north and east, by Bali in the south, by Hadiya and Sharka in the west, and in the northeast by the country of the Maya.⁴ This was the most easterly of the Christian provinces and the richest. As far as the inhabitants of this province are concerned, Braukämper cautiously states that they were Hadiya/Sidama, while Merid claims that the population was heterogeneous Christian and Muslim, speaking Amharic as well as Argobba, who lived in the districts near Fatagar and Ifat, while the people living in the eastern parts were probably related to the Adare. What the two scholars have in common is the fact that neither suspects that some Oromo groups may have lived in Dawaro long before the sixteenth century.⁵ It appears that the above claims are based on Haberland's theory that all the areas of the Rift Valley, from the Gibe to Harar, were occupied by a large group of Semitic-speaking peoples who were split up and fragmented after the middle of the sixteenth century during the pastoral Oromo migration.⁶

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1. H. Ludolph, A new History of Ethiopia : being a full and accurate description of the kingdom of Abessinia, vulgarly, though erroneously called the empire of Prester John, (London : 1682), p. 51
 2. Ulrich Braukämper, "Islamic principalities ... ", EN, vol.I,no.1, p.41.
 3. Arab Faqih, Futuh-al-Habasha, pp. 96-116; see also Taddesse Tamrat, Church and State... , p. 176; Crawford, Ethiopian Itineraries ..., pp. 87, 198
 4. U. Braukämper, ibid., vol. I, no. 2, p. 19; see also, E. Cerulli,, Studi etiopici : la lingua e la storia di Harar, vol. I, p. 18.
 5. U. Braukämper, ibid., p. 20; Merid Wolde Aregay, "Political Geography of Ethiopia at the beginning of sixteenth century" in Congresso internazionale di studi Etiopici, (Roma : 1974), vol. I, pp. 624-625.
 6. E. Haberland, Galla Sūd-Athiopiens, p. 778.

Except in form, this is not different in content from the theory that peopled the whole region between Bali and the Gibe region by the Sidama people.¹ These theories seem to lack solid historical support. It appears this seemingly correct assumption results from a static conception of the ethnic situation before the sixteenth century jihad and the subsequent pastoral Oromo migration. For some scholars, including Dr. Braukämper, the pastoral Oromo migration started only after 1522, the date sanctioned by Bahrey's History of the Galla. This again is the reflection of the fact that these scholars seem to have misread what was meant for half to mean for the whole in the history of the Galla.² It is also a reflection of a static view of what was a dynamic in its nature.

As we have already indicated, the Amhara oral tradition is unanimous in claiming that the forefather of "Galla" was born in Dawaro. These traditions which are considered as no more serious than fables,³ are supported by the Arab chronicler, which strongly suggest that the Amhara traditions reflect a true historical reality in some form. In 1529, while the Muslim force was chasing the Christian general Ras Nabyat in Dawaro, the Muslims arrived in the village of Mashib in the country of Warra Qallu, where the Muslim force ravaged and burned the country, captured weapons and carried the inhabitants into slavery.⁴ This Arab chronicler also mentions one river called Buro in the country of Warra Qallu. The name of this river is unmistakably of Oromo origin. The Warra Qallu (the house of Qallu) was an important tribal group whose descendants are still found in Wallo, Harar and Wallaga provinces. In this Arabic source the Warra Qallu are not referred to as nomads, but as sedentary agriculturalists. Following the jihadic turmoil and the subsequent pastoral Oromo migration, the Warra Qallu seem to have joined the migrating Oromo abandoning farming in favour of pastoralism. As we shall see in the chapters on migration, several other groups (both Oromo and non-Oromo) joined the migrating bands, abandoning farming in favour of pastoralism mainly owing to the unsettled nature of the situation

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1. E. Cerulli, Studi etiopici: la lingua e la storia dei Sidama, (Roma : 1938), pp. 1-2, 31-33.
 2. *Infra*, pp. 65-6.
 3. Merid Wolde Aregay "Southern Ethiopia and the Christian kingdom", p. 153.
 4. Arab Faqih, Futuh-al-Habasha, pp. 135-137.

which exposed the farming communities to series of disasters.¹

In the same province of Dawaro Arab Faqih mentions an important Oromo place name called Andourah (which means centre or umbilical cord). This was the place where the famous Christian general Wasan Sagad had built a church, the construction of which took eleven years. This church, which is described as magnificent without comparison in the province, was looted and burned by the Muslims. As Andourah seems to have been the headquarters of the Christian forces in the province, it was also the headquarters for the Muslim operation, where the Imam stayed on a number of occasions.² From Andourah on one occasion the Imam went to Qonburah (an important Oromo place name), above the market of Dawaro, where he was received warmly by the inhabitants. What is very intriguing but difficult to explain is the fact that the Oromo Ramis, to which we have already referred, was located by the tradition of Abadir around the Wabi bend, where Bali, Dawaro and Adal had some sort of common boundary. However, it is impossible to make any comment, since Arab Faqih is silent on the topography of this area. Finally, the Oromo clans who use the political denomination of Dawaro are still found in Harar, among the Nole Daga Warra Hume.³ Another Oromo tribal group that uses the name Dawaro is also found in Wallaga province.

The important Muslim trading state of Bali, with the shrine of Shaikh Hussein as the rallying point for all the Muslims in the southern region, was bordered by Dawaro and Sharka in the north, Hadiya in the west, Adal and Dawaro in the east and the huge grazing ground of the Oromo pastoralists in the south. Following Bahrey's History of the Galla, most scholars have accepted the thesis that the Oromo invaded Bali for the first time in 1522. What these scholars have failed to realize is that Bahrey in fact only wrote about one section of the Oromo society, i.e. about the Borana, who lived around Harrow Walabu some way east of Lake Margherita. Bahrey had made it clear that he was writing on the Borana

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1. See chapters III, IV and V, especially the first on the migration of the pastoral Oromo towards Harar.
 2. Arab Faqih, Futuh-al-Habasha, p. 194.
 3. Emilio Scarin, Hararino : Ricerche e studi Geografici (G.C. Sabsibu editore Firenze : 1942), p. 86; see also Muhammed Moktar, "Notes sur le pays de Harar", in Bulletin de la société Khédiviale de Géographie, (Cairo : 1877), pp. 357-397.

while only treating the Barentu in passing. First he said that they came from the west to Bali and not from another direction. Second, and most important, surface observation of Bahrey's history demonstrates that he was well acquainted with the Borana, who attacked his country and forced him to flee, rather than with the eastern group about whom he gathered information from other people. He specially states that :

... those who are accurately informed declare that when Boran quit their country they do not all go, but those who wish to stay do so, and those who wish to leave do so ... those of the Boran who stayed came out of their country by way of Kuera.¹

This very information seems to have led many scholars to assume that it was meant for Oromo pastoralists, including the Barentu. Both Bahrey and historical facts tell us to the contrary. Thirdly, a close examination of Bahrey's genealogical description of the two Oromo divisions makes it abundantly clear that his information of the Barentu is far from satisfactory while that on the Borana is almost complete. What is certain about the division of the two groups is that the Barentu section lived in what is today the Bale province, while the Borana lived in what is today the Sidamo province.

In the past it has been claimed that the historical Bali,² was the "original home" of all the Sidama peoples. This theory, which was first propagated by Cerulli, and later accepted by many scholars, does not any longer seem correct. According to this theory, the Oromo who came after 1522 from the south pushed the Sidama people to the west to their present habitat.³ However, two recent researches in the field have shown that it was the Sidama people, and not the Oromo, who drove away some sections of the Borana group from the present habitat of the Sidama. Besides there is also some evidence that the Sidama in fact

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1. Bahrey, in Some Records of Ethiopia, pp. 113-114.
 2. When reference is made to Bali, it means the historical province, and when it is to Bale the reference is to the present province of the same name.
 3. Cerulli, Studi etiopici : la lingua e la storia dei Sidama, p. 2; see also Tadesse Tamarat, Church and State ..., p. 6; Trimmingham, Islam in Ethiopia, p. 67.

assimilated some Oromo speaking people who did not join the Borana exodus from the area.¹ As far as the Barentu are concerned, it is an indisputable fact that the majority of the pastoralists lived in the lowlands of what is today Bale province, the Awraj (sub-province) of Fasil, in Dallo on the two banks of Ganale river, while the agriculturists lived in the highlands of the historical Bali itself.² This conclusion is supported by the information contained in the book of Arab Faqih, where unmistakable place names, such as Qaqmah and Malou among others, have been mentioned. Besides, the Arab historian mentions a typical guerilla type fighting conducted by the people of Bali mainly during the night. Garad Kamil, the brother-in-law of the Imam, is reported to have advised the latter, saying that the people of Bali were bad and did not fight face to face. They make surprise attacks when you do not expect, and they retreat when you advance and attack when you retreat. They are the devils who attack in the evening.³ This sophisticated form of guerilla tactics, which from the Arab chronicler's report seem to have been highly developed and used in Bali, was very similar, if not identical, with the type of guerilla warfare with which the pastoral Oromo terrorized the entire region during their epoch-making migration.

Finally, Haberland reports a very important tradition which claims that the Arsi Oromo, who were part of the Barentu groups, had already broken away from the main body some "sixty" years, or two generations, before 1522, leaving their area near Wabi, and moving to the central highlands.⁴ It is also not out of place to mention in passing the

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1. Tasawo Merga, "Senna Umatta Oromo : Jalqaba Jarra kudda jahafti hama dumiti jarra kudda sagalefanti", (Addis Ababa : 1976), unpub. manuscript ("History of the Oromo people : from the beginning of the sixteenth century to the end of the nineteenth century", pp. 6-8. (Hereafter cited as Senna Umatta Oromo); see also, S. Stanley, "History of the Sidama", (Addis Ababa : 1967), p. 19, cited in Braukämper, "Islamic principalities in southeast Ethiopia ...", EN, vol. i, no. ii, pp. 25-26.
 2. Ibid., pp. 8-9.
 3. Arab Faqih, Futuh-al-Habasha, pp. 154-161, 163-164.
 4. Haberland, Galla Süd-Athiopiens, p. 511.

tremendous influence of Islam on some Oromo institutions. Probably owing to the strong Islamic current radiating from the Shaikh Hussein of Bali, the Oromo calendar, the Qallu institution suggest strong Islamic influence. It is the task of the next chapter to discuss these and a number of related developments that led to the huge Oromo pastoralist migration which changed the ethnic map of the region.

Chapter Two

The pastoral Oromo and their social organization on the eve of the great migration in the sixteenth century

At the time of the sixteenth century migration of the pastoral Oromo, there were two powerful confederacies among them named Borana and Barentu. In the national myth, Oromo was the common "father" of both. But in the separate Borana genealogy, Borana had a "father" called Sapera. Bahrey was the first historian to record that Sapera was the father of the Borana.¹ Antoine d'Abbadie, on the basis of numerous genealogies gathered in the Gibe region, concluded that the "father" of the Borana lived around A.D. 1400 in Walal.² D'Abbadie's information is important not for what it purports to tell us, but for what it implies. From this it would appear that the Borana had already migrated to Walal, before the fifteenth century, from their original home in the highlands of Bali, where they must have lived for a long time together with the Barentu group. The importance of this point will become clear later in the discussion, and here we concentrate on the myth of Sapera itself, according to which Sapera was considered to be "the son of a serpent". This story of a serpent is quite similar to the Aksumite story of the serpent king, that was worshipped.³ Perhaps this is one of the areas where Semitic influences penetrated into Oromo culture. The Borana Oromo, who now live in southern Ethiopia and northern Kenya, have two spiritual leaders, Qallu Oditu and Qallu Kararyu. The former, who is the senior and ritually most important of the two, is said to have descended from a snake, bofa, and still bears the title of boficco (the snake). The latter is said to have been of heavenly origin.⁴ The myth of the origin of the spiritual leader of the Gujji Oromo, the neighbours of the Borana, give another striking example of Semitic influence on an Oromo institution. It "... states clearly that he is Waka's son".⁵ (The son of the sky god). As with other

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1. Bahrey, in Some Records of Ethiopia 1593-1646, p. 112.
 2. A. d'Abbadie, Bibliothèque Nationale (Paris) Nouvelles Acquisitions Françaises, No. 21300, folio, 731, 788.
 3. J. Doresse, Ethiopia, p. 15.
 4. K.E. Knutsson, Authority and change : a study of the kallu institution among the Macha Galla of Ethiopia (Goteborg : 1967), pp. 144-145; see also E. Haberland, Galla Süd Äthiopiens, p. 158.
 5. Ibid., p. 147.

spiritual leaders, snakes play a prominent role in the ritual activities of the Gujji Qallu. It is true that snake legends are very common throughout Africa as well as throughout the Semitic culture, as in the Garden of Eden, where Eve was tempted by a snake. The snake is often a phallic symbol in Oromo. Even up to now among the Borana, the religious leaders keep snakes. Each moiety respects a certain type of snake. This respect for snakes is probably a common cultural trait underlying both Cushitic and Semitic cultures. In the form it is presented, the myth of Sapera reflects that the Semitic legend had filtered into Oromo tradition much earlier than the sixteenth century.

Bahrey includes in his Borana genealogies more than sixty tribal and clan names, while for the Barentu he mentions around twenty-four. Of these numerous groups, some were already confederacies or independent tribes even at the time of Bahrey. Christian literature and Oromo tradition unanimously make Borana and Barentu the eponymous heroes and founders of the two groups respectively.

According to another most common and widely diffused Oromo tradition, the two "founding fathers" were brothers. Borana was the son of Ana, while Barentu's "mother" was Antu, the sister of Ana. In this legend, Antu is presented as older than her brother. However, since tradition did not allow a girl to be considered as angafa (the first born son), with all the privileges to inherit most of the property and the authority of the father after the death of the latter, Ana became angafa. And ever since all his descendants are regarded as the first born among the Oromo.¹ On the surface, this seems to reflect the division of the primeval Oromo tribe into two exogamous moieties, of which one was called Borana "the masculine", and the other Barentu "the feminine".² Under the legendary cloak, this tradition is actually making Barentu older than Borana and as we shall soon see this was historically correct. What is difficult to explain are the terms Ana and Antu. According to Father Angelo Mizzi, Ana was the divinity of heat "the god of the sky", while Anat and Anaities were Semitic divinities representing the feminine principle in nature.³ The Kunama people, who live in the northern part

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1. Father Angelo Mizzi, Cenni Etnografici Galla ossia Organizzazione Civile, usi e costumi Oromonici, (Malta : 1935), pp. 70-75.
 2. E. Haberland, Galla Sūd Athiopiens, p. 775.
 3. Father Angelo Mizzi, Semplici constatazioni filologico-etnologiche Galla, (Malta : 1935), pp. 24-26.

of Eritrea, have a supreme god whom they call Ana. In their religion, Ana is supposed to have created the sky and the earth, including man. While the name of their supreme god is Ana, the name of their sacred capital is Barentu. The latter for the Kunama is the centre of their tradition and religion.¹ The appearance of the terms Ana and Barentu among the Kunama may suggest something more than accidental coincidence with the Oromo words. It is known that the Barya, who are the close neighbours of the Kunama have a language with Cushitic characteristics.² This must have influenced the Kunama, which in turn suggests that the terms Ana and Barentu were of earlier Cushitic origin.

According to the third tradition, Borana was a composite term composed of bori, "east, light" + ana (masculine divinity), thus Borana would mean "the light of the east". Barentu according to this was also a composite term. Bari, "morning, light, east" + antu (feminine divinity), thus Barentu would mean "the morning light of the east." In this sense both terms convey exactly the same meaning except that one is "masculine" and the other "feminine". The light of the east conveys a strong religious concept, which becomes clearer from the following :

Ya waqa bori waqa Barentuma
waqa bori waqa lallaba
bokkun gurracha tahe. ³

Oh god of the east, god of the sun,
rise god of Barentu
god of the people born in the east
god of proclamation
bokku (the wooden sceptre kept by a leader of the
gada class) has become divine.

What becomes clear from the literature collected by Mizzi, who had lived among the Oromo for more than three decades and gathered extensive oral tradition from both groups, is that in the final analysis both the Borana and Barentu are associated with divinity. As barantecca was some sort of divinity for the Barentu Oromo, borantecca was the divinity of the river to which tribute had to be given on crossing.⁴ What is more

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1. Adveniat Regnum Tuum, no. 30 (1975), pp. 49-51; no. 31 (1976), pp. 38-42.
 2. See for instance, Huntingford's "Historical geography of Ethiopia ..." p. 227.
 3. Mizzi, Semplici constatazioni ... , p. 76.
 4. Knutsson, Authority and change ... , pp. 45; see also A. Cecchi, Da Zeila alla frontiere del caffè (Roma : 1886), vol. II, p. 29.

barantecca for the Barentu and borantecca for the Borana was a serpent which was regarded as taboo.¹ What has been said so far demonstrates, if it has not explained, how difficult it is to define Borana and Barentu.

The fourth and final tradition relates that Borana and Barentu were brothers, who lived together "for a long time", until one day they quarrelled. In spite of Barentu's dutiful though unaffectionate respect towards Borana, the latter looked down upon his "younger brother". Then one day, the son of Borana killed the son of Barentu. Since it was not permitted for younger brothers to fight against their elder brothers, Barentu decided to leave the country, crossing the frontier near the Galana river. However, since the river was full at the time, Barentu was not able to cross it without the help of the men from the family of Galan (the first born son of Barentu). The following quotation expresses the currency of this tradition.

Lagni basu dide (o cesisu dide)
 intala warra Galan uf-dura busani
 rada warra Buro itti unsani
 intalti warra Galan irman dofite
 bisan gargar- cite isan baan
 Hormi (Borana) jogga dafani bisan ceu dorke.
 akasitti Barentumti gadi-dufte.

The Borana, with the daughter of the house of Galan (whom they married) at their head, (as an elder who reconciles) with the heifer from the house of Buro (neutral brother who was not a party to the quarrel), they followed Barentu to reconcile "him" to Borana.

However, the river prevented them from meeting each other. As result Barentu came to the east of the river, while Borana remained west of the river.²

The above tradition is interesting not only because it reflects strong Christian influence on the Oromo tradition, but also because it supports some of the points we discussed in the previous chapter.³ What is more, the tradition expresses the role of the first born son angafa in Oromo society. In the first place the tradition confirms that Galan was the

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1. R.P. Azais, "Etude sur la religion du peuple Galla", Revue d'ethnographie et traditions populaires, vol. xiii (1926), pp. 73-74.
 2. A. Mizzi, E Cenni etnografici Galla ossia organizzazione civile, p. 71.
 3. Supra, pp. 41-3.

first born "son" of the Barentu. Secondly the institution of angafa, seems to have given sustained stimulus to the continuous process of migration over several centuries. According to the Oromo tradition of primogeniture, the angafa inherited two-thirds of the father's property. This seems to have caused a considerable tension among the younger brothers, who had to make their fortunes on their own. This often entailed migrating beyond the reach of the elder brothers' authority.¹ The above tradition also reflects a long process that actually took place on the ground. On the surface the part that deals with the son of Borana killing the son of Barentu is very like the biblical story of Cain (the senior brother) killing Abel (the junior brother) because of his favour with God, and the separation of their descendants. Underneath the common biblical theme, we observe the factual core of separation between Borana and Barentu.

The problem of reconstructing the separation of Borana and Barentu becomes all the more difficult when one attempts to define the time depth involved. The only safe way of putting it is that it probably happened before the beginning of the fifteenth century.² It seems that at the initial stage of the separation the section that moved to the region west of the Ganale river acquired the appellation Borana for the reason to be given below,³ while the other section which remained in the region east of the Ganale river retained the old Cushitic name of Barentu. Due to the "masculine" attribute associated with Borana, this group acquired in the national legend the status of the "eldest son", which accorded the descendants of this section the seniority in the national myth.⁴ After the sixteenth century migration of the pastoral Oromo, the term Borana became a mark of distinction to express one's feelings of cultural and social superiority, or it was used to emphasize the fictitious or real "purity" of one's genealogy. To this day, the Borana signifies to Oromo-speakers a "cultural and linguistic purity" which is more apparent than real. By the beginning of the nineteenth century in the Gibe region of

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1. D'Abbadie, *Nouv. Acq. Fran. No. 21300, folio, 778.*
 2. According to one tradition, the Borana were already living in the Walabu and Walal region by 1400. See above, p. 69.
 3. *Infra*, p. 118.
 4. Martial de Salviac, Un peuple antique au pays de Menelik : les Galla, grande nation africaine, (Paris : 1905), pp. 20-36. See also Cerulli, Etiopia occidentale, (Roma : 1933), vols. I and II, pp. 139-143.

western Oromoland the term Borana had already acquired the meaning of noblemen, rich in cattle and slaves. In fact in this part of Oromoland the Borana became the wealthy ruling class, who distinguished themselves from the plebians by the marks they made on their left arms and by following certain food taboos.¹

Summarizing what has transpired so far, it seems that the term Borana started after a section of the Oromo people migrated to the west across the Ganale river. Of the two terms, Barentu appears to be an old Cushitic name. After the separation, the two groups seem to have emerged not by maintaining "the pure blood" of the ancestors, but by successfully assimilating diverse groups. The oral traditions that revolve around the endless genealogies of Borana and Barentu seem not to be just memorized legends of divisions or sub-divisions, but a story of fusion and interaction by which the two major divisions constantly increased or decreased in size.²

The geographical definition of the country of the pastoral Oromo on the eve of the sixteenth century migration

Until recently scholars thought that either northern or central Somalia was the original home of the Oromo people.³ This hypothesis finds solid support in the works of the sixteenth and seventeenth century Portuguese writers, and in the Somali oral traditions if these are taken at their face value. As for the Portuguese writings, all depend heavily on the works of the Christian monk Abba Bahrey. It is true, Bahrey was an intelligent person, a keen observer with a deep sense of history. However, his history mainly deals with the Borana, with whom he seems to have had first hand contact, while for the Barentu he gathered evidence from others. Almeida, on the basis of Bahrey's incomplete information places the land of Ilma Orma (Oromoland) on the southern border of the Christian kingdom. "They invaded", he tells us, "the kingdom of Bali,

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1. D'Abbadie, Nouv. Acq. Fran. No. 21300, folio, 717.
 2. e.g. D.W. Cohen "Iwo speakers", in Zamani : a survey of east African History, ed. B.A. Ogot, (Nairobi : 1974), pp. 136-149.
 3. E. Cerulli, Somalia : Scritti vari editi ed inediti (Roma : 1957), vol. I, pp. 70-71; I.M. Lewis, A Pastoral democracy : a study of pastoralism and politics among the northern Somali of the Horn of Africa, (Oxford University Press : 1960), pp. 23-26; G.W.B. Huntingford, The Galla of Ethiopia : the kingdoms of Kafa and Janjero, (London : International African Institute, 1955), pp. 19.

with which they had a common frontier, or of which they were close neighbours."¹ Almeida extends the limit of his cradleland of the Oromo nation to the Indian ocean. "These lands lying between Bali and the sea, the coast of which sailors call 'the desert', is the real home and fatherland of the Gallas".² This assumption started with Tellez, who, using Almeida's information, concluded that "these lands that lie between Bali and the ocean are the proper country and habitation of the Gallas."³ By the early twentieth century the hypothesis that stemmed from Bahrey's incomplete history and Almeida's innocent geographical ignorance was firmly established and fortified in a corpus of scholarly works. This was further enriched and widened by the addition of "new" elements such as Somali pressure, Somali oral traditions, the remnants of Oromo-speaking communities in northern Somalia and the so-called "Galla graves" in northern Somalia.⁴

I.M. Lewis believes that the Oromo lived in northern Somalia as far back as the eleventh century. He argues that around the twelfth century the Dir Darod (a powerful Somali confederacy) had already started the long process that expelled the Ishaq, (another powerful confederacy) from their original dwelling place in northern Somalia. It was presumably the Ishaq who in turn pushed the Oromo towards central Somalia, from where they were again supposedly pushed by the Somali pressure in the sixteenth century.

... To some extent this Somali expansion and Galla withdrawal coincided with Imam Ahmad's invasion of Abyssinia ... Certainly prior to their retreat to the south and south-west ... the Galla occupied central Somalia to the north of the Shebelle river, and part of north-eastern Ethiopia including the Haud now occupied by the Ogaden Somali.⁵

The question of Somali pressure which heavily depends on Somali oral

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1. Almeida, in Some Records of Ethiopia 1503-1646, p. 134. Almeida's conclusion seems to have been inspired by Bahrey's statement, which says "the Galla came from the west and crossed the river of their country which is called Galana, to the frontier of Bali". See Some Records of Ethiopia ..., p. 111.
 2. Almeida, *ibid.*, pp. 133-134.
 3. B. Tellez, The travels of the Jesuits in Ethiopia, tr. John Stevens (London : 1710), p. 64.
 4. See for instance, I.M. Lewis, "The Galla in Northern Somaliland", RSE, xv, (1959), pp. 21-38. *Idem*, "The Somali conquest of the Horn of Africa," Journal of African History, (1960), pp. 213-230. *Idem*, A Pastoral Democracy ..., pp. 23-26.
 5. I.M. Lewis, A Pastoral Democracy ... p. 23.

traditions, actually deals with other Somali groups rather than with the Oromo.¹ Perhaps one reason why scholars, including I.M. Lewis and Cerulli, tended to interpret the struggle between the major Somali tribal groups as the struggle between the Somali and the Oromo was because of the great importance they attach to the Somali oral tradition, which unanimously claims that the Somali fought continuously against the Galo (pagan) or camel owners, who inhabited the land before them. This Somali oral tradition, which revolves around the term Galo, seems to have been uncritically accepted by scholars as if they refer to the Galla (the Oromo) people. One recent Somali historian has abundantly proved that the references in the Somali oral tradition was to non-Muslim Somali and not to the Oromo people at this time in history.²

The nineteenth century English traveller and scholar, Charles Beke, basing his argument on the one hand on the Amhara traditions of Oromo origins (which in essence placed the Oromo homeland somewhere south of the frontier of the Christian kingdom) and on the other hand on traditions of the Oromo of Shawa, Wallo and Wallaga, which unanimously refer to either Bahr Gamo, Tullu Wallal or Walabu, (all located in the region Bahrey and Almeida indicated) arrives at the following conclusion :

The name thus given by the Gallas to the country of their ancestors ... may seemingly be regarded as a proof that the primitive Gallas were the inhabitants not of the plain country bordering on the Indian ocean, where they were known to have settled upwards of two centuries, but rather of some high mountainous country ...

The thrust of this argument was that the Oromo came from a high mountain country south of the Christian kingdom. The essence of this conclusion is correct. However, it suffers from two shortcomings. First, the Oromo oral traditions upon which Beke based his argument was mainly from the Borana section and therefore the traditions do not give a complete picture. Second, and even more important, Beke believed that the Oromo entered the

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1. As we shall see in the next chapter, the residual Oromo-speaking communities in northern Somalia, were the remnants of those who migrated in the sixteenth century. The so-called "Galla graves" in northern Somalia are found to be no older than some two centuries, according to I.M. Lewis's own information.
 2. Ali Abdurahman Hersi, "The Arab factor in Somali History : the origins and the development of Arab enterprise and cultural influence in the Somali peninsula", Ph.D. University of California, Los Angeles, 1977, pp. 20-24. See also Shaikh Ahmad Abdullahi Rirash, Kashf as-sudul can tarikh as-Sumal, pp. 36-57.
 3. C. Beke, "On the origin of the Gallas", Reprint from The British Association for the Advancement of Science, (1847), p. 7.

Christian kingdom through Wallaga from beyond the Baro river, in the west coming from central Africa.¹ This is historically incorrect to say the least. It reflects the prevailing nineteenth century theory that claims that the Oromo came from outside Ethiopia.²

H.S. Lewis, a scholar who has made a contribution to our knowledge of Oromo society, provides us with useful information about the original home of the Oromo people. Basing his argument mainly on linguistic data he overthrows the old theory of the Horn. The major thesis of his argument is that the Horn was not the original home both for the Oromo and the Somali people. On the contrary, it was the region of southern Ethiopia and northern Kenya which was the original home for both groups. From this general stand point, H.S. Lewis proceeds to the specific question of defining the exact location of the original Oromo homeland in southern Ethiopia. For this purpose, he analyses the Oromo traditions of origin, Bahrey's History of the Galla and Almeida's map, all in conjunction with linguistic data³, and arrives at the following conclusion :

The Galla originated in the area between and around Lakes Shamo and Stephanie, in the area of the Galan Sagan and Galana Dulei just south of Bahrgamo and Mt. Walabo in north-west Boran. It is here that the closest linguistic relatives of the Galla - Konso, Gato, Gidole, Arbore, Gawata, Warazi, Tsomai, Geleb- are found. The Galla language was once one with these and Galla speakers even today live in this area.⁴

His conclusion is partly correct, because the area he considers as the original homeland of the Oromo people was only the centre of dispersal for pastoral Borana in the sixteenth century. He seems to have arrived at this conclusion because he does not seem to have recognized the weakness of Bahrey's history and the incorrectness of Almeida's map. Further more, H.S. Lewis is incorrect in saying the Bahrey's home, Gamo, " ... was one of the earliest areas to be attacked by the Galla".⁵ However, we know

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1. C. Beke, "On the origin of the Gallas", pp. 6-7; see also d'Abbadie, *Nouv. Acq. Fran. No. 21300, folio, 729.*
 2. In the nineteenth century a number of writers assumed that the Oromo came outside of Ethiopia. Among others, see Rochet d'Hericourt, Voyage sur la cote orientale de la Mer Rouge dans le pays d'Adel et le royaume de Choa (Paris : 1841), pp. 205-206; see also, Paul Soleillet, Voyages en Ethiopie, (Rouen : 1886); p. 253.
 3. The usefulness of linguistic evidence for reconstructing early history in Africa has already been shown by many scholars. Among others, see Roland Oliver, "The problem of Bantu expansion", Journal of African History, vol. VII, no. 3, (1966), p. 361.
 4. H.S. Lewis, "The origin of the Galla and the Somali", JHA, (1966), p. 41.

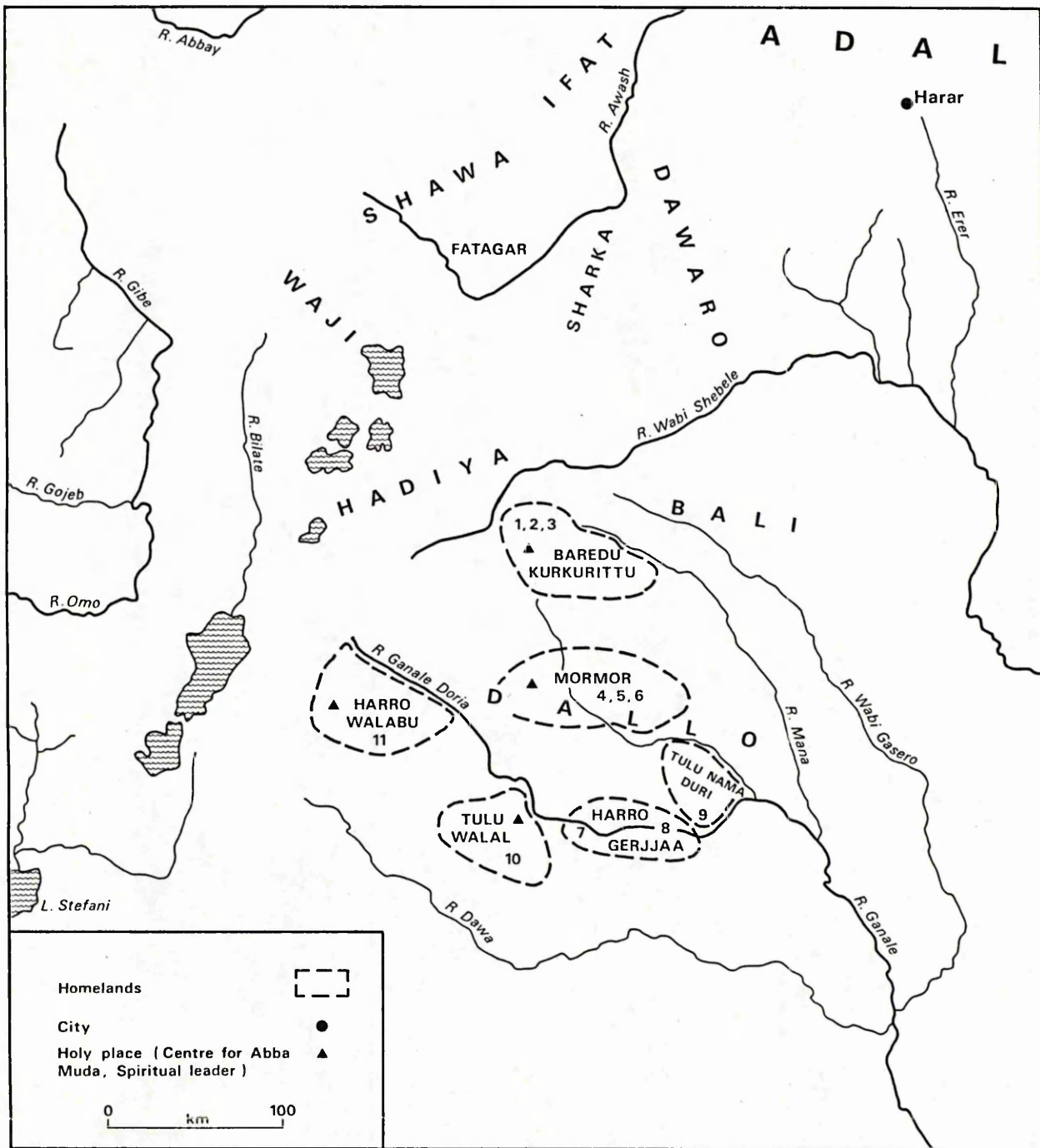
5. *Ibid.* p. 32

from Bahrey's History itself that Gamo was attacked only in the 1580s,¹ almost half a century after the first reported attack on Bali in 1522, and after the pastoral Oromo had attacked many provinces in many regions.

The oral traditions of all Oromo, whether of Kenya or Ethiopia, claim consistently that their pastoral ancestors had come either from what is today Bale and Sidamo provinces, and not from Gamo Gofa province, as Lewis claims. Besides, H.S. Lewis seems not to have realized that all the famous place names in Oromo oral traditions actually refer not only to the places in the region Lewis discussed, but also to earlier places in a different region. In other words, these place names could have been brought by migrating people from the old home somewhere else.²

In the nineteenth century, European travellers and missionaries reported that the Oromo of Harar remembered, as they apparently do even today, that their pastoral ancestors had come from Mormor in Bale. For Harar Oromo, Mormor, besides being the original home and the point of their dispersal in the sixteenth century, was the holy place of pilgrimage to the Abba Muda.³ Today, Mormor is found in Bale province in the awrajas (sub-provinces) of Fasil and Dallo, near the River Ganale. The Arsi Oromo claim that their original home was Baredu Kurkurittu in the highlands of Bale, on the side of Mormor, between the Walmali and Mana rivers, two tributaries of the river Ganale.⁴ The Borana in Kenya claim Tullu Nama Duri ("the hill of the ancient people") as the place of their origin.⁵ The Orma in Kenya similarly claim "Tullu" (Hill) as their place of origin.⁶ This Tullu probably was part of Tullu Nama Duri which is located in Bale in the awraja of Dallo, between the Walmali and Ganale rivers. The Borana in Ethiopia claim Tullu Wallal as the place of their origin.⁷

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1. Infra, p. 322.
 2. Tasawo Merga, "Senna Umata Oromo ... ", p. 8.
 3. de Salviac, Un peuple antique au pays de Menelik : Les Galla, grande nation africaine, p. 42.
 4. Tasawo Merga, ibid.
 5. Paul S.G. Goto, "The Boran of northern Kenya : origin, migrations and settlements in the 19th century". Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the B.A. degree in the University of Nairobi, March, 1972, pp. 26-28.
 6. A. Werner, "Some Galla Notes", in Man (1915), vol. xv, pp. 10-11
 7. E. Haberland, Galla Süd Ethiopiens, p. 24.



Groups that lived in the different homelands:

BAREDU KURKURITTU

- Karrayu 1
- Warantisha 2
- Marawa 3

TULU NAMA DURI

- Orma 9

MORMOR

- Akichu 4
- Ittu 5
- Humbana 6

TULU WALAL

- Southern Borana 10

HARRO GERJJAA

- Gujji 7
- Wara Daya 8

HARRO WALABU

- Historical Borana 11
(Tulama Macha)

Map 2. HOMELANDS FOR THE BARENTU AND BORANA GROUPS ON THE EVE OF THEIR 16th CENTURY MIGRATION.

Tullu Wallal, which is located in the area of present Gujji and northern Boranland, was known to be the general area from where the Borana launched their massive migration in the sixteenth century.¹ Tullu Wallal, though not part of Tullu Nama Duri, is located just a short distance south of it. The Tulama and Macha Oromo, who inhabit the central and western parts of Ethiopia, say "Umen Walabu bate" ("life came out of Walabu"). This seems to express a long time depth at which the Macha and Tulama (historical Borana) left this area. The said Walabu is found in Bale province, in the awraja (sub-province) of Dallo near the Ganale river. The famous Hayo Walabu (Walabu lake) is still found near the Ganale river by the side of Bediru village.² The Gujji, another Oromo group, claim that their original home was in Gerjjaa, which is found in the valley of the Ganale on both banks of the river, in the awrajas of Dallo in Bale and Jamjam in the Sidamo province. All this indicates that the land of Bale, the awarajas of Fasil and Dallo, were exceptionally important in the oral traditions of most Oromo.

As could be seen from these traditions, all Oromo do not mention one place as their original home, though all the places mentioned above are near each other. However, there is one tradition which claims that all Oromo lived together at a place called Fugug, before each group moved to its separate homeland, in the areas mentioned above. This tradition of Fugug,³ refers to a period so remote that all Oromo do not remember it today. Interestingly, those who remember categorically assert that Fugug was the first home of the Oromo people, before they moved to the region of Hayo Walabu. Fugug, as we shall see below, was part of historical Bali. An important conclusion flows from this. Due to the nature of their economy, to be mentioned below, sections of the Oromo people migrated from the highlands of historical Bali to the lowlands around the River Ganale, where they probably lived for a long time before they were split into two sections, one section crossing the Ganale and moving into the vast grazing grounds west of the river, while the other section seems to have remained to the east. This is clearly implied in the tradition about the separation of the two brothers cited earlier.

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1. Asmarom Legesse, Gada : Three approaches to the study of African society, (London : 1973), p. 8.
 2. Tasawo Merga, "Senna Umata Oromo ... ", p. 8.
 3. Infra, pp. 85-8.

H.S. Lewis claims that the closest linguistic relatives to the Oromo - the Konso, Gidole and others - are found in the region which he describes as "the original home of the Oromo people". However, two recent studies have abundantly shown that the Konso and Gidole were pushed from the Nagale area in Sidamo province across the Sagan river to their present habitat by the pressure of Borana Oromo. The Darassa also claim that they were expelled from their original home in Shakiro or Adola by the pressure of Gujji Oromo, who now occupy the region.¹ Finally, the area indicated by H.S. Lewis as the original homeland of the Oromo was the central point of dispersal of the Borana. However, despite some shortcomings in his argument, Lewis has greatly contributed to the overthrow of the older theory that the Oromo originally lived in the northern part of the Horn.

Professor E. Haberland, who has carried out extensive researches on the ethnography of southern Ethiopian peoples, has written of the Oromo :

... It appears quite certain to me that their true ancestral home was the cool highland in the region of Bali. There they lived as a tribe with a mixed cattle-rearing and grain-growing economy, until for reasons unknown to us there was a very rapid rise in the population.²

In support of his conclusion, Haberland presents a number of salient points. First, that all Oromo themselves locate their origin in the highlands of the middle south. Secondly, that to their traditions may be added others, such as the myths surrounding the origin of their high priests (qallu), and pilgrimage to the Abba Mada. Thirdly, that their only cereal crop is barley, which is a typical highland crop. Fourthly, their domestic animals, the cow and the long-tailed sheep, are likewise typical of a highland environment. Fifthly, that the Oromo calendar was conceived in the highland region, since the beginning of the year is placed at the end of the rainy season. Sixthly, that the central pillar of the Oromo house pre-supposes that originally they used permanent dwellings.³

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1. Paul Black, "Linguistic evidence on the origins of the Konsoid peoples", in Proceedings of the First United States Conference on Ethiopian Studies, 1973, (ed. by Harold G. Marcus, (U.S.A., 1975) pp. 291-302; see also, Tasawo Merga, "Senna Ummata Oromo ... ", p. 9.
 2. E. Haberland, Galla Süd Ethiopiens, p. 772
 3. ibid., pp. 773-774.

Among the Oromo of Harar, it is true that barley still holds a special place in the society. According to de Salviac, barley played a pivotal part in the rituals and prayers, especially that called wadaja the national prayer, which was universal in character and performed by all. The wadaja could be performed either by a family or clan, or by a tribe, and it could relate either to individual or group affairs. A family that needed such prayer was expected to prepare food for the guest, which had to include some bread of barley or some roasted barley.¹ Even today, when Islam has replaced the traditional religion and chat has replaced barley in wadaja, barley is still used when praying for rain, for fertility, and health, and in the ceremony of sowing seed when harvesting and when people die. In all ceremonial usage, it is either roasted or boiled. Before its consumption, a short prayer is said and a small portion is spread in four directions for the "persons of the other world". Among the Harar Oromo today, sorghum is the staple multi-purpose crop in that the grain is food, the leaf is fodder, the dried stalk is building material for thatching and also fuel.² However, sorghum, as a life-sustaining crop that dominates the economy, has not yet replaced the special role of barley. Barley still holds a special place in rituals, even among the Arsi.

Historically, it seems that barley, which is an indigenous and a typical highland crop, must have been a major crop which, together with milk, butter, blood and meat, provided staple food. It seems that barley was consumed largely in the highlands, where milk and blood was in short supply, while in the lowlands it must have been used as a supplementary food, and for ritual purposes.

Historically, cattle were certainly the most useful animals for the Oromo. The cow played an important role in ritual and in the economy. The Oromo drank its milk and blood, and ate its meat and butter. Its skin was used for clothing and the inside of its stomach for divination. One story relates that from the very beginning God sent down three books :

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1. M. de Salviac, Un peuple antique au pays de Menelik : les Galla, p. 137.
 2. Seifu Metaferia, "The eastern Oromo (Kottus) of Ethiopia and their time reckoning 'system'", in Africa Rivista trimestrale di studi e documentazione dell'Istituto Italo-Africano, Anno XXXIII, no. 4, (Roma : 1978), p. 487.

for the Christians, the Muslims and the Oromo. The Christians and Muslims took their books. The Oromo, through negligence, allowed their book to be eaten by a cow. When the Christians and Muslims want to know hidden things, they find them in their books by reading. Oromo cannot read, because the book has been eaten. However, the Oromo wise men were able to find the lost book : they found it in the stomach of the cow. By killing a cow, wise men can read from the inside of the stomach about the hidden secrets. The "wise men" who read the Oromo book are called ogessa.¹

The cow was more than an animal for an Oromo. It was the gift of Waka (god). The first black cow was found with the first Qallu.² As such, a cow was called, like a person, by a particular name.³ In general cattle, together with sheep and goats, were used for the dowry in certain areas, as the price of blood, as the measure of wealth, and were the main medium of exchange. Among the domestic animals black cows and long-tailed sheep hold a special place for the Oromo of Harar. A black cow is regarded as a good omen for the fertility of the animals, and for the peace and prosperity of the family. Milk was held to be sacred because of its healing qualities and its food value. The great attachment of an Oromo to his cattle seems to be derived from the holiness of its milk. It was not the cow, but the milk which was sacred.⁴ Among Harar Oromo, milk from a black cow is still ordered by traditional doctors for sick persons, as a cure for some diseases. Sheep also played an extremely important role in early society. Like barley, the sheep was used in traditional ceremonies. It was used in Rako marriage.⁵ It was very important in traditional oath taking. What is more, as a sign of their peaceful intentions, the pilgrims to the Oromo spiritual leader took sheep with them, and they were not molested even in enemy territory.⁶

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1. Guglielmo Massaja, Lettere e scritti minori III Anni 1863-1866, (A cura di Antonino Rosso), (Roma : Istituto Storico del Cappuccini, 1978), pp. 96-97.
 2. According to widely diffused tradition, the first Qallu was of divine origin
 3. Asmarom Legesse, Gada : Three approaches to the study of African society, p. 281.
 4. E. Haberland, Galla Súd-Athiopiens, p. 774
 5. *Infra*, p. 90.
 6. *Infra*, p. 113.

Again, among the Oromo of Harar the central pillar of a house also holds a special place. People are not allowed to be near the central pillar when it is raining. It is supposed that lightning will strike the person who is near the pillar when it is raining. When a person of social standing in a community gets seriously sick, the elders pray for him, mentioning repeatedly the ottuba (pillar) when they refer to God. At the height of the prayer the leader of the praying group stands under the central pillar stretching out his arms and crying. This prayer is supposed "to reach God" soon. In short, the central pillar is a sacred spot in a house, through which the soul "passes" when a person dies. It remains to be established whether this practice is common among Oromo in other parts of Ethiopia. However, the sacred quality of the central pillar of a house would seem to be a sufficiently general characteristic to confirm Haberland's conclusion that the Oromo originally lived in permanent dwellings rather than in the temporary shelters built by most pastoralists.

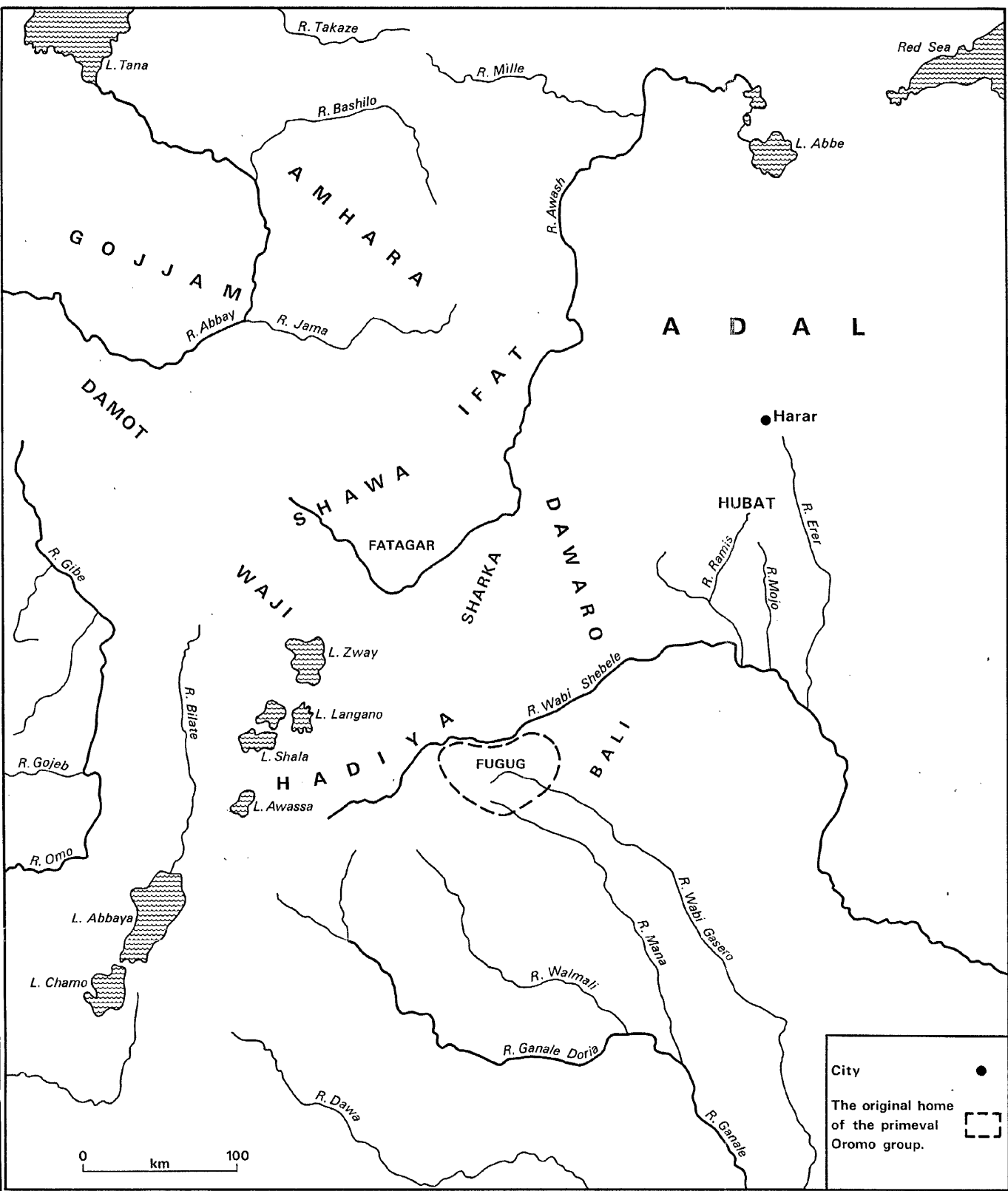
Finally, there are three opinions about the original home of the Oromo. As we saw above, H.S. Lewis makes the area between and around Lakes Shamo and Stephanie, the area of Gallan Sagan and Gallana Dulei, the original home of the Oromo people, while Haberland believes that their ancestral home was in the cool highlands in the region of Bali. More recently, U. Braukämper has argued that "... the homeland of the Oromo could ... be identified as the highland area between the Darassa country and the upper Dawa in the west and the Ganale Valley in the east."¹ Of the three, it is the theory of Haberland which is correct. We say this for five reasons. First, we have already seen that the area H.S. Lewis makes the original home was the point of Borana dispersal in the sixteenth century, while the region Braukämper makes the original home was actually occupied by the Darassa people before the latter were expelled by the Gujji Oromo.² Secondly, in one Oromo tradition, there is a reference to a far away land, the land which is consistently claimed as the first home of the Oromo people, the birth place of the nation.

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1. Ulrich Braukämper, "Oromo country of origin : a reconsideration of hypothesis, unpublished paper presented to the fifth international conference of Ethiopian studies held at Tel-Aviv University, April, 1980, p. 8. I am indebted to the author for sending me a copy of this paper; Idem, Geschichte der Hadiya Süd-Athiopiens, pp. 136-139.
 2. Supra, p. 81.

This land is known as Fugug. With the tradition of Fugug, it may be that we have an idea of considerable significance for identifying the whereabouts of the original homeland. The tradition places Fugug in the south-eastern region. However, neither the eastern nor the western Oromo remember today the exact whereabouts of the land of Fugug. To the Oromo in the south-west, and especially for those in the Gibe region, "Fugug was in the east near Tajurra, on the sea coast."¹ To those of Amiya in Harargie, the land of Fugug lay to the west in the direction of Bale province. The Afran Qallo Oromo in the central highlands of Harar are not sure of any direction.² For those in Charchar, the land of Fugug is in the direction of Bale and Arsi provinces. When all is said, only two things are remembered about this land. First that the Oromo had common ancestors who had lived in Fugug, for a long time before they had moved to Walabu.³ Secondly that still today, if some one has stayed away from his village for a long time and returned, people ask him, "Have you been to Fugug?". By this it is meant that you have been away for such a long time that we thought you may have gone to a very far away land (of Fugug). Thus the tradition makes Fugug a far away land, and this perhaps reflects the time depth at which the ancestors of the Oromo had lived there. Today we find the land of Fugug⁴ and Mount Fugug in the present province of Arsi, the heartland of historical Bali.

The tradition of Fugug becomes even more meaningful when it is taken in conjunction with the next point. Thirdly, we have already seen that the lowlands of the present province of Bale, the awrajas (sub-provinces) of Fasil and Dallo, were exceptionally important in the oral traditions

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1. The manuscript of Abba Jobir Abba Dulla, the last king of Jimma, p. 8. I am indebted to my friend Mahdi Hamid Mude for helping me to get hold of this manuscript. When I interviewed Abba Jobir himself on June 16, 1982, in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, the old man was not able to tell me the exact location of the land of Fugug. He said "Fugug is near Tajurra, on the northern Somali coast." For more description of Abba Jobir's manuscript see chapter 6, pp. 375-6.
 2. Among the Afran Qallo Oromo in Harargie, as late as 1875, the Abba Gada (Abba Bokku) was also known as Abba Fugug. It is not clear from their tradition why the Abba Gada was called by this name. However, the name Fugug and the concept it represents, "a far away land" is still strong among the Afran Qallo Oromo.
 3. Among others see the manuscript of Abba Jobir Abba Dulla, p. 8.
 4. Martial de Salviac, Un peuple antique du pays de Menelik : les Galla pp. 167-168. According to the same source, p. 157, the jila chanted the name Fugug on their way to the land of Abba Muda.



Map 3. THE PROBABLE LOCATION OF FUGUG AROUND 1330.

of most Oromo.¹ We have already drawn an important conclusion from this fact.² The primeval Oromo group, which practised barley cultivation lived in the highlands of historical Bali, while the lowlands in the valley of the River Ganale became the grazing grounds for the pastoralists, who drifted away from the main group due to the transhumant nature of their economy, to be mentioned shortly. At this juncture, one point must be made absolutely clear. It seems that the original home of primeval Oromo tribe (group) was small in size. It was the pastoral element of the Oromo society, even at that early stage, which moved far and wide enlarging the frontier of their grazing grounds, probably covering quite a lot of space and interacting with a lot of other peoples. In other words, the original home of the farming Oromo group in the highlands of historical Bali was confined to a small area; whereas the pastoralist segment of the Oromo people extended over a large area in keeping with their need for ample grazing land. In the process of this expansion of the grazing land, the pastoralists encountered many other peoples. In short, it was from historical Bali, from where the first phase of pastoral migration radiated in different directions. This phase of their migration seems to have been different from the subsequent migration of the sixteenth century in many respects, chief among which three are worth mentioning. First, it seems to have involved small unorganized groups. Second, it spanned over a long period of time, and thirdly it was essentially peaceful in character. The sixteenth century migration, as we shall see in the following chapters,³ was a reverse action of the history of the first phase of the migration. The Oromo pastoralists migrated from large lowland grazing grounds to a vast highlands. This phase of their migration not only involved a large number of people, but also was highly organized and aggressive in character.

Fourthly, in the previous chapter,⁴ we identified Fra Mauro's Galla river with the head waters of Wabi Shebelle. The latter was a major river of historical Bali. Haberland by placing the original home

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1. Supra, pp. 78-80.
 2. Supra, p. 80.
 3. Infra chapters, three, four and five.
 4. Supra, p. 41.

in the highlands of Bali makes it clear that it was near Wabi Shebelle. Finally, the Oromo calendar, the Qallu institution and other aspects of their social organization, to be discussed below, point to a real Islamic influence radiating from the Muslim state of historical Bali.¹ In short, there is no doubt that the highlands of historical Bali were the cradle of the Oromo nation. It was here that the single tribe grew into tribes.

The main section of the tribe lives in the highlands and practices agriculture while the young manhood looks after the herds in the lowlands. Each group follows its distinct way of life and thus the cultural elements associated with cattle-rearing come more strongly to the fore in the lowlands. There are plenty of cases where whole groups settled down for long periods in the lowlands and later became separate tribes. Favourable grazing conditions had led them to settle in the lowlands in order to live exclusively by cattle-rearing The vegetable food-stuffs needed for nourishment are procured by barter with the highland tribe.

Due to the transhumant nature of their economy, the tribes moved in different directions. However, since the fourteenth century their movement to the north, to the east and the west, seems to have been checked by the southward expanding Christian state. In fact, the Christian/Muslim struggle in the region of the cool highlands of the middle south seems to have encouraged the movement from the highlands of historical Bali to the huge lowlands south of the same province. That is to say, from the region where there was conflict and control to the region where there was no conflict or control. As we have indicated in the previous chapter,² this does not mean that the movement to the north, east and west was totally blocked. It only means the movement in these directions was insignificant compared to the flow to the south. Those who moved to the north-east and west seem to have settled in different regions among sedentary agriculturalist communities, by whom they were absorbed culturally probably maintaining their language in some cases. Since the northward movement seems to have started long before the Gada system fully developed among the pastoralists³ in the second half of the fifteenth century, in the lowlands south of Bale, it does not seem to have

1. E. Haberland, *Galla Sud-Athiopiens*, p. 774

2. *Supra*, p. 38.

3. As we shall see below, the core of the Gada system originated in the highlands of historical Bali. But the system developed fully among the pastoralists in the lowlands south of Bale, as a powerful mechanism for the control of population increase.

helped them to absorb large groups into their system as those who migrated during the sixteenth century did. On the contrary since their numbers must have been small, their impact on the people among whom they settled must have been negligible. On the other hand, the pastoralists who moved to the lowlands south of Bali, from where one section later spread across the Ganale river to the west, seem to have fully developed their Gada system, the institution which seems to be more suited for pastoral society than for sedentary agriculturalists. In short, the Gada system to be discussed below seems to have flourished among that part of the society engaged in the pastoral economy.

The social organization of the pastoral Oromo

While in the highlands of the middle south, the Oromo society seems to have shared a common language, a common culture, a common oral literature, common customs and manners, a common law, common "government" and common symbols, such as the office of Abba Gada, the institution of Qallu and the bokku. These symbols were engraved in the core of the culture, and left a lasting imprint on the history of the Oromo people. In short, they shared a common Gada system which encompassed the totality of their existence.

Although the immensely rich literature on the Gada system comes either from the works of the travellers and missionaries of the last century, or from the labour of serious scholars of the present century, it is possible to reconstruct how the system worked at the beginning of the sixteenth century with the literature at our disposal. Despite the four centuries that separate the present Borana people from the Oromo of the sixteenth century, the former have a social organization which is very similar, if not identical, with that of the latter at the beginning of the sixteenth century. This is because neither the economy of the present-day Borana, nor their way of life, have radically altered in the last four centuries. A large section of Borana society is still composed of pastoralists, who practise their traditional religion, while their gada system is functioning with full vitality. It has been said with some justification that "there is a direct and thoroughly instructive parallelism between the contemporary social organization of the Borana and the organization of the Oromo as a whole in the sixteenth century."¹

1. Asmarom Legesse, Gada : three approaches to the study of African society, p. 11.

Our starting point in attempting to reconstruct how the system operated in the sixteenth century is the family. The basic unit of Oromo society was the patrilineal extended family, consisting of husband, wife or wives and children. Generally speaking, the first marriage seems to have been effected by the rakko ceremony (marriage by binding oath), and it was for life. The first wife was usually the mother of the first born son (angafa) which raised her importance. Of the seven types of marriage¹ common among the Oromo, only four seem to have been of ancient origin, and these were associated with the traditional rakko ceremony. These were butti, hawee, asenna and walagara.² In all these four types of traditional marriage, the first marriage seems to have been accompanied by the rakko ceremony in which a sheep was killed and blood smeared on the hands of the couple. Through this the two were "united as brother and sister", and this oath was unbreakable and it was for life.

In the family, the abba warra (the father of the household) had full authority over the members of his family. According to de Salviac, writing of the Harar Oromo, this is the only domain where the authority interferes in the lives of an egalitarian society.³ Even today among the Borana the abba warra has right over all cattle, household goods, his wives and sons cannot kill or sell cattle without permission, not even those given them personally at a jila (name-giving) ceremony.⁴

Next to the father, the eldest son (angafa) was the most important in the family. He was important because by tradition he succeeded to two-thirds of the father's property and to all his authority and

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1. These were Butti, Hawee, Asena, Walagara, Hintala sadaca, Cissi and Naqatta or Qadima.
 2. Butti marriage has two forms : the prospective girl and her would-be husband make prior arrangements voluntarily and secretly from her parent, and allows herself to be "abducted" (butti) for the sake of formality in order not to offend her parent, while at the same time saving her would-be husband from paying huge marriage gift. The second form of butti was abduction by force (marriage by force). Hawee was the form of marriage in which a small amount of dowry was involved. Asena is a form of marriage in which a girl collects the fruit of bramble (hiddi) and goes to the home of the person who she intends to be married to, and throws them at the feet of the man. The man is socially obliged to take her as his wife whether he has others or not. Walagara was a marriage by exchange between families. Hintala Sadaqa is the form of marriage in which parents give their daughter to a religious man without asking for any dowry. It is practised by Muslim Oromos. Cissi is a form of marriage like butti, involving negotiation with the parents of the girl. Finally, Naqatta or Qadima involves a lot of negotiation and dowry. I am indebted to my friend Fiesha Genti for providing me with this valuable information.

3. de Salviac, ... Les Galla, pp. 216-228.

4. E. Haberland, Galla, pp. 109-110.

responsibility. This unfair law of inheritance that favoured the eldest son seems to have contributed much to the traditional migration.¹ Even today among the Borana the rule of primogeniture is known to be the source of major tension within the family. " ... It has the effect of scattering brothers, breaking up the joint families that brothers are expected to set up after their marriage."²

As elsewhere, the relation between the wife and husband seems to have been based on a clear-cut division of labour along the line of sex. The manna (house) belonged to the wife and ala (outside) to the husband.

The family contains within itself the division of labour dominant in the society as a whole. A family - it is from the beginning and at the minimum a man and wife, an adult male and an adult female. Hence, from its inception a family combines the two essential social elements of production. Division of labour by sex is not the only economic specialization known to primitive societies. But it is the dominant form, transcending all other specialization in this sense.³

This division along sex lines automatically excludes the female half of the population from active participation in the gada system. Since men controlled politics, warfare and ritual,⁴ women were only peripheral to the system, thus making the gada a "male democracy."

... The gada system is an institution that appears so exaggerated that it is readily dismissed by laymen and scholars alike as a sociological anomaly. Anomalous though it may be, it is one of the most astonishing and instructive turns the evolution of human society has taken.⁵

The term gada is very difficult to define precisely. It is a term loosely used for so many varied conceptions that it has almost lost one single meaning. The dividing line between the various definitions being very shadowy and indistinct unless one takes into account strictly the context in which it is used. This is because the interpretation of

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1. See for instance, de Salviac, Un peuple antique ... , p. 236; Azais, R.P. and Chambard, R., Cinq années de recherches archéologiques en Ethiopie, p. 99.
 2. Asmarom Legesse, Gada : three approaches ... , p. 25.
 3. Marshall Sahlins, Stone Age Economics, (Chicago : 1972), pp. 76-77.
 4. Asmarom Legesse, ibid., pp. 28-36.
 5. Ibid., p. 50.

Oromo terms, idiomatic expressions and proverbs related to gada have meanings other than they purport to project on the surface.

The meaning of word only becomes intelligible when the total context in which it has been uttered is taken into account. The words which express cultural values - the 'key-words' of a culture - cannot be understood unless one is thoroughly acquainted with the society in question. They are untranslatable except by lengthy descriptive explanations.

Our purpose in calling serious attention to the definition of gada is not because we have an alternative handy definition, but because the realization of the weakness of the definition of gada itself is an essential point to be kept in mind when dealing with this complex system. Below an attempt is made to define gada from various angles.

Father Gaetano Dathien, in his Dizionario della lingua galla defines it in two ways, (i) as the official title, with dignity, commander, brigandage, robbery, piracy, (ii) killers by profession. The two definitions have two interrelated things in common : robbery and killing. The two concepts are strongly embodied in gada through the practice of butta war, to be discussed below.² This is an incomplete definition. In his Oromo Grammar published in 1867, Massaja derives the etymology of gada from gadisa ("shelter, shade, that protects from the heat of the sun"). It is used in three contexts. First, in the sense of taking advantage of the shelter, second in the sense of protecting oneself with the shelter. Taking refuge in it, or in him, or using its or his good name for protection. Third, it is used in the sense of giving somebody a shelter, protecting him, or them, taking them under one's umbrella. In common speech in the language people say, "gada bala" (wide gada) meaning a haven for refugees, a large shelter for all. When reduced to the essentials, the above concepts of gada refer to the practice of "adoption" by the assembly and the indisputable protection which the assembly accorded to those adopted. This is again an incomplete definition. K. Tutschek, in his English-Galla dictionary (translated from German) defines gada in the following four ways : (i) to throw or cast away, (ii) to leave, to give up to one, to cede, (iii) to leave a child to be adopted : the

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1. Jan Vansina, Oral Tradition : a study in historical methodology, tr. by H.M. Wright, (London : Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961), p. 66.
 2. *Infra*, pp. 125-7.

adoption is double-gada guda (great or complete adoption, and gada tina (little or incomplete adoption), (iv) to lose. All the four definitions have one thing in common : they all refer to the practice of abandoning or giving children for adoption at the raba grade in the system.¹ This is the practice in the gada system which sheds light on definition. But it is also not a complete definition. According to Asmarom Legesse :

The term gada cannot be given a univocal [sic] interpretation. It stands for several related ideas. It is first of all, the concept standing for the whole way of life that is the subject of our study. More specifically, however, it refers to any period of eight years during which a class stays in power.²

To the speaker of the language, the term gada has the following various meanings. To turn an eye on some one without his knowledge ("to spy on some one"). It has a very strong concept of time : Gafa gada kammi (during which gada ?). It has the meaning of an official : Inni gada (he is gada, i.e. an official). The term can also be used in the following context : Gada nagaya (gada of peace), Gada quffa (gada of plenty), gada lolla (gada of war), gada kenna (our gada), etc. From the above, the strong concept of time in gada is visible. For an Oromo gada is a measurement of time. Gada also has a religious sense. Gadoma, ("sacredness"), the concept associated with circumcision and therefore maturity for political power.³

As can be seen, all the different definitions in one way or the other reflect the attributes of the system. One definition cannot be complete, because it leaves out the other attributes. If taken together, all the above definitions can give the broadest possible picture. However, for our purposes in this chapter we adopt the following definition, which stresses the military and political aspects of the gada system. It is these two aspects which are of paramount importance to our subsequent discussion.

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1. For the raba grade, infra pp.121-2.
 2. Asmarom Legesse, Gada : three approaches ... , p. 81
 3. Fr. Angelo Mizzi, Cenni Etnografici Galla ossia organizzazione civile, use e costumi Oromonici, pp. 53-60; idem, Sempliciconstatazioni filologico-etnologiche Galla, pp. 64-5.

The gada system is a system of classes (luba) that succeed each other every eight years in assuming military, economic, political and ritual responsibilities. Each gada class remains in power during a specific term (gada) which begins and ends with a formal power transfer ceremony. Before assuming a position of leadership, the gada class is required to wage war against a community that none of their ancestors had raided. This particular war is known as butta and is waged on schedule every eight years. It is this event that was most directly connected with the pulsing frontier of their dominions in the sixteenth century leading toward the conquest of nearly half of Ethiopia's land surface.¹

As its meaning is confused and complex, the history of the gada system is also confused and complex. History did not record when this system first started. Cerulli thinks that the Oromo adopted their gada from the Bantu, probably the Nyika, of northern eastern Kenya, and stamped it with their national character. The great Italian scholar, who travelled far and wide in Oromo territory and observed the variants of the system in different areas, probably arrived at this conclusion on the basis of his wide-ranging observation, although he may also have been influenced by the hypothesis of M. Cohen and Conti-Rossini. Cohen thinks that the Oromo had a long contact with the Negroes, while Conti-Rossini thinks that the Oromo had assimilated a branch of Negro people from whom they adopted the system.² Cerulli asserts that the Oromo had had long contact with the Bantu between the Juba and the Wabi Shebelle, where they were struggling with each other for many centuries before both were driven away by the expanding Somali. Since the theory of Somali pressure on the Oromo has already shown to be dealing with other Somali groups rather than with the Oromo,³ we pass it without comment. Cerulli's conclusion is quite reversed by Huntingford, according to whom it was in fact from the Oromo that the age-set system spread to the Nyika, Nandi and Masai. This must have taken place in the region of Lake Rudolf, which was the cradleland for the ancestors of the Nandi and Masai, and the grazing ground for the Borana pastoralists. According to this hypothesis the Nyika on the coast acquired the system from the Oromo, who expanded into the Tana valley by the second half of the

1. Asmarom Legesse, Gada : three approaches ... , p. 8.

2. Both sources cited in E. Cerulli, Ethiopia Occidentale , vol. ii, pp. 133-137.

3. *Supra*, p. 76.

sixteenth century.¹ Thus, for Huntingford followed by Asmarom Legesse, the gada system is an Oromo institution.

Whatever the precise origin of this custom, there seems no warrant for believing that its transmission to other African peoples such as the Nilo-Hamites and the Bantu Nyika of Kenya is due to any agency but the Galla. It seems to be the fashion now to look elsewhere for the ultimate source of this system. Jensen believes that it came to the Galla from the Konso. But a great deal more research into the political organization of the Konso is needed before this view can be accepted ... Trimingham sees in the former Bantu inhabitants of Somalia the gada system ... A study of the known facts shows that of all the existing age-group systems in north-east Africa that of the Galla is the most comprehensive, as it includes both a grouping by age and a method of ensuring a tribal ruler old enough to have the necessary experience and yet not allowed to linger in office till his dotage.²

On the other hand, Haberland thinks that the gada system started after the break up of the Eastern Cushitic-speaking family, which broke up probably in the second half of the 4th Millennium B.C. There is no hint within the system which shows that it was as old as Haberland thinks. On the contrary there is sufficient internal evidence to indicate that the system is much younger than the German scholar believes. Besides, Haberland raised two questions which leave much to be desired.

Two important questions remain unanswered. First, is the gada system an Ethiopian invention or must we seek its origin outside Ethiopia? Secondly, how did the gada system come to be adopted by Galla? It is arguable in view of the extremely simple archaic pattern of Galla culture as a whole, that the complicated nature of the gada system makes it appear a foreign element, like the calendar, whose foreign origin is unquestioned. The sanctifying of abstract numbers is a basic principle of the gada system. How can this be consonant with the original culture of a people who have no other interest in numbers, and whose religion even forbids them to count their cattle?³

Unfortunately, Haberland fails to show where the gada originated outside of Ethiopia, and who were the people from whom they supposedly "borrowed" it. Legesse convincingly argues that Haberland's conclusion is not only coloured by a strong bias against Oromo society, but is also without

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1. G.W.B. Huntingford, in Some Records of Ethiopia, Appendix 1, pp. 211-212.
 2. ibid.
 3. H. Haberland, Galla Süd-Athopiens, p. 777.

any concrete foundation. In fact, he says Haberland misunderstood the essence of the system he studied and therefore undermined the historic role of the Oromo nation in creating the gada system.

... Haberland fails to grasp the central philosophical concern of Borana, namely, the relationship between history and society ... Haberland's principal thesis is that a people whose religion prohibits them from counting their livestock cannot be held responsible for the invention of such an advanced institution such as the gada system. The institution is said to be so advanced that it does not fit in the rest of their simple culture ... Having thus dissipated the highest cultural achievements of Oromo society, Haberland can adhere to his axiomatic position that the Oromo are incapable of sustaining complex thought processes and if they do it must be something taught to them by others, more civilized.¹

The Oromo calendar which was the basis for the operation of the gada system and whose foreign origin according to Haberland is unquestioned, is worth discussing here. The traditional Oromo calendar is still operative today. The following analysis of the calendar is a summary of the various opinions on the subject. The calendar which was an integral part of the system seems to have developed before the split of the Oromo people into two groups and the geographical separation of the Borana and Barentu. We say this because the core of the calendar is more or less the same everywhere, despite the sixteenth century migration and the subsequent absence of physical contact among the Oromo people, who spread over wide territory. This of course does not mean that there is no variation. Indeed, there are variations in the names of the months, and changing seasons of a year both in the highland and lowlands. Here we concentrate on what is common to all.

The calendar is based on the cycle which divides a year into two - Shanan bonna (the five months of the dry season) and Torban ganna (the seven months of the wet season). This aspect is the striking confirmation of Haberland's highland conception, since the seven wet months are impossible in the lowlands. The months of the dry season cover the period from the second half of October to the first half of March, and the months of the wet season are the second half of March to the first half of October.² As the two seasons recur continuously, the movement

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1. Asmarom Legesse, Gada : three approaches ... , pp. 279-282.
 2. Angelo Mizzi, Cenni etnografici Galla ... , pp. 34-35; see also Sefu Metaferia, "The Eastern Oromo (Kottu) of Ethiopia and their time reckoning 'system' ", Africa, rivista trimestrale di studi ... vol. XXXIII, p. 491.

of herds from the highlands to the lowlands followed the pattern of the seasons. The farming activities in the highlands and the religious activities in both areas followed the same pattern. There is internal evidence which hints that the calendar was of agricultural origin. The meaning of the names of months which exactly correspond to the changing seasons of the year explain this aspect succinctly. What is more, one recent study on the Eastern Oromo calendar has shown that it was of agricultural origin.¹ A year has twelve months,² and a new year starts in September, which is another striking confirmation of Haberland's highland conception, since the rain ends and the dry season begins in this month. The first month is Birraa (September). Birran barehee (the dawn has come, the clouds have cleared, the rains have ceased, the flowers have blossomed, hope is brightened by the leaf stalk of crop, promising). This month of hope is also the most important month, in which an important religious ceremony took place. Ankolalessa or Ciggawa (October) depicts the severity of the cold weather experienced during this month in the highlands of Ethiopia. Sadasa (November) is the third month, and Afrasa (December) is the fourth. Third and fourth are so named from their positions in the list of the five months of the dry season.³ Ammajji (January) is a composite name from amma, "now", and jji, "say now", meaning that because now that the farming activities are over the farmer has time to say to his friend "now say what you have to say and I will listen". And, indeed it is the month of release from the farming drudgery, during which the farmers can mend their fences, build their thatched roofed houses, go to the market and even get married.⁴ Ammajji, coming as it does after harvest was the time of plenty. Traditionally, godo ("the time when farmers went to the cave to feast themselves on meat") was held in this month. It was also the month of important traditional ceremonies. Gurrandala (February) is a composite term. Gurra, "ear" and dala, "give birth to", "to give birth to an ear" meaning to acquire fame by worth-while deeds, to gain reputation. Indeed it was the month during which both young and adults made names for themselves and their families. Historically this seems to have been an important month in

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1. Seifu Metaferia, "The eastern Oromo ... time reckoning system", Africa rivista, vol. XXXIII, p. 478.
 2. There are eleven different names of the months, which have only slight variations. Those used here are the most common.
 3. Seifu Metaferia, ibid., p. 494.

the gada calendar. It was during this month that the Butta war was conducted every eight years, by the gada grade which was coming to power. The Butta war was ritual in character and economic in content.¹

Btotessa (March) is a name derived from bitte, the little rain that softens the soil and grows grass after the long dry season. Odolessa (April) means sunny. Caamssa (May) means the cloudless sky, when there is no rain. Watabagi (June) is a composite name from wataba (move, do something, help yourself), and jji, (now), meaning that because the farming activities are starting again move, do not sit idle, start work. It seems it was the time when the ground was prepared for the sowing of barley. Ebile (July) means cold, because of the absence of the sun which is covered by cloud and the strong winds that accompany rain at this time. Hagayya (August) brings showers that are repeated several times in a day. It is a sign that the rains are coming to an end. Each month has about 27 named days. This should mean that the Oromo lunar year has about 324 days. However, this is not the case :

These twenty-seven days of the month are permutated through the twelve months of the year, such that the beginning of each month successively recedes by approximately 2.5 days and completes the cycle of 29.5 days in one lunar year. The loss per month is equal to the difference between the two types of months, that is, the 27 day month (ceremonial) and the 29.5 day month (lunar).²

Each of the 27 days of the month has special meaning and connotation. For instance, there are days of "good fortune" and days of "bad fortune".³ As a year is divided into twelve months, so is a month in turn divided into weeks. Torbaan (the seven), is an Oromo name for a week.⁴ The names of the days in a week are : Hojjdurra (Monday), the first day of the week. Lammaffo (Tuesday), the second day of the week.

1. *Infra*, p. 125.

2. Asmarom Legesse, Gada : three approaches ... , p. 181.

3. See for instance, Gadaa Melbaa, Oromia : A brief introduction (Finfine, 1980), p. 18. "Each of the 27 days of the month has a special meaning and connotation. For instance, Dureti is a favourable day for certain transactions such as marriage, buying and selling of cattle, etc. It implies good fortune to be born on this day. Among unfavourable days are Gidada and Garba Nanna. When a child is born to a family, the father visits the ayantu (time-reckoning experts) in the neighbourhood to learn the destiny of the new baby."

4. There are seven different names for the days of the week. Those used here are the ones most commonly used in Ethiopia among the majority of the Oromo.

Robi (Wednesday), Kamissa (Thursday), Gimaata (Friday), Sanbatadurra (Saturday) "the first sabbath" and Sanbata Gudaa (Sunday) "the big sabbath". As can be seen from the above list, the third, sixth and seventh days of the week are unmistakable Amhara Christian names. It is even more so with "the first day of the work", coming after Sunday.¹ The fourth and fifth are names of Arabic origin.

Obviously, there are very strong foreign influences on the whole structure. Haberland believes that the foreign origin of the calendar is unquestionable. However, he failed to show us where that foreign origin came from. On the other hand, Asmarom Legesse thinks that the calendar which is the foundation of the gada system is one of the highest achievements of the Oromo.² But the facts of history seem to suggest that the Oromo calendar was a combination of foreign influence and the indigenous core elements. It is neither a carbon copy from a foreign source, as Haberland wants us to believe, nor completely an expression of Oromo cultural creativity, as Legesse wants us to accept. There is no such thing as a "pure" carbon copy or "original" about it. It is a combination of both. This cannot be unique, because human history shows that the edifice of human civilization is built upon borrowing, adapting, and adding new elements.

Clearly, there has been influence from the Christian Amhara calendar. The beginning of the year, the name of the first month, Birra, is most probably from the Amharic birra, itself from barra, "there comes light", meaning that the clouds have cleared and the rains have ceased.³ Three names of the week, the third, the sixth and the seventh days, are borrowed from the Amhara Christian calendar. The fourth and fifth days of the week are borrowed from the Islamic week days.⁴ The names of the twenty-seven days of the month, the days that are doubled, reflect similarity or a common source with the Persian Calendar. This means the Oromo calendar was influenced by the Christian, Muslim (Arabic) and Persian calendars. The important question is where did the influence from the three foreign calendars meet with the Oromo Cushitic element, cross-

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1. Seifu Metaferia, "The Eastern Oromo ... ", Africa Revista ... , p. 496.
 2. Asmarom Legesse, Gada : three approaches ... , pp. 278-282.
 3. Seifu Metaferia, "The Eastern Oromo ... ", Africa Revista ... , p. 493.
 4. Ibid. pp. 495-496.

fertilizing with it to produce one of the most sophisticated and highly developed oral calendars? Some of the trading Islamic states of southern Ethiopia could be the most likely areas for the conception of this calendar. It seems to us that the Muslim state of Bali, with its weaving industry and its foreign traders, with the tomb of Shaikh Hussein as the seed-bed of Islam in the southern region, with its large Arab community, including some Persian as well as Christian merchants, administrators and military colonists, could have been the most likely state where the Oromo calendar took its shape under the pressure of different influences.¹ It is impossible to say at what period this took place. Probably it may have happened between the fourteenth century and the first half of the fifteenth century. By the second half of the fifteenth century it must have been in operation. We say this because, by the end of the same century or the start of the sixteenth century, the gada system was already a fully fledged military, political, economic, social and ritual institution of the Oromo society. The system is based on the oral calendar and the two are inseparably linked.

This institution - the gada system - is keyed to a remarkably sophisticated system and is based on accurate astronomic observations associated with a complete day-month nomenclature. The total system is a permutation calendar the like of which has been recorded only three times in the history of mankind. It occurs among the Chinese, the Hindu₂ and the Mayans - three civilizations far removed from Borana.²

Finally, we close this brief discussion on the calendar by stating that the measurement of time was an important concept in gada and therefore in Oromo life. The lives of individuals, rituals, ceremonies, political, military and other activities were regulated by the smooth functioning of the oral calendar. Unlike the calendar on which the borrowed foreign elements are visible, there are no visible foreign elements in gada which suggest that the system was "borrowed". On the contrary, the gada system seems to have been an Oromo institution. As far as the Oromo attitude towards the institution is concerned, Paul Baxter's penetrating observation on the Borana seems to hold for all the Oromo. "The origins of the system are obscure and unimportant to the Boran. I was told that it had always existed, that God designed it, or that the first kallu

1. See for instance, G.W.B. Huntingford, The Galla of Ethiopia: the kingdoms of Kafa and Janjero (London: International African Institute, 1955), p. 81: "The province of Bali ... was one of the more vigorous of the early Moslem trading states ... was a seed-bed of Islamic culture which could not but affect those Galla who came in close contact with the Moslems".

2. Asmarom Legesse, Gada: three approaches ..., p. 279.

instituted it, or just it is the custom of our fathers."¹ This seems the general tendency. What is not so easy to explain is that gada has not existed, in the form we now know it, ever since the sixteenth century. It may have existed in a very rudimentary form, which must have been radically different from the all-encompassing institution with which the pastoral Oromo astounded the peoples of north east Africa in the middle of the sixteenth century.

Historically, the Gada system probably started out as a system of age-sets. Today it is organized along radically different lines : it is a system of temporal differentiation of society having little to do with age. Real age-sets are organized in such a way that people who are approximately the same age share collective military, economic, political, or ritual responsibilities. The members are initiated into the adult society at the same time and perform a variety of rites of passage, or transition rites, together as they approach each new stage of the life cycle ... This type of social organization is wide-spread in eastern Africa ... Among the Galla of Ethiopia the institution has reached a most remarkable level of complexity ... Here we find a society that is stratified into two distinct but cross-cutting systems of peer-group structures. One is a system in which the members of each class are recruited strictly on the basis of chronological age. The other is a system in which the members are recruited equally strictly on the basis of genealogical generations. The first has nothing to do with genealogical ties. The second has little to do with age. Both types of social groups are formed every eight years. Both sets of groups pass from one stage of development to the next every eight years. (2)

Such a radical change in the simple age-set system does not appear to have taken place at the earliest before the 15th century, and at the latest by the beginning of the sixteenth century. There are two pieces of internal evidence that support this conclusion. The first is the writing of Bahrey and the second is the internal "pressure" that led to the imposition of rigid rules on age graded population. Bahrey accurately described the Oromo lubas (gada grades) as an effective military organization that contributed to their success.³ The victories of the sixteenth century were won by warrior classes who stood as one man and fought as one man. Bahrey says "all men, from small to great are instructed in warfare among the Gallas."⁴ Secondly, around the beginning

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1. P.T.W. Baxter, "Social organization of the Galla of Northern Kenya" D.Phil. thesis, Oxford University, 1954, p. 282.
 2. Asmarom Legesse, Gada : three approaches ... , pp. 50-51.
 3. Bahrey, in Some Records of Ethiopia 1593-1646, p. 115.
 4. Ibid., p. 126.

of the sixteenth century, it appears that Oromo society was experiencing a demographic explosion, which led to a radical change in its social organization. Bahrey makes abundantly clear a very important point which scholars so far have either ignored or failed to realize with its true implication. Bahrey writing around 1593, in his old age, only some seventy years after 1522, when the first attack on Bali was reported, gives no less than thirty names of "father" figures, that is to say founders of confederacies which gave birth to "numerous children" in the shape of numerous clans and tribes. Bahrey leaves no shadow of doubt that all these came out of their country during that short period of seventy years.¹ This huge migration can only be explained in terms of large demographic change among the pastoral Oromo. It is impossible to account for this spectacular increase of population in the sixteenth century. However, one crude, tentative generalization can be made. Substantial increase in livestock, accompanied by growth in the human population, could have been the initial cause of the movements.²

It seems evident that gada system operated as a non-generational system of age-set for a major part of its history (i.e. during the fifteenth century and earlier). The rules restricting the position of the generations of marriage and child bearing were introduced sometime during the sixteenth century to set limits on the rapid expansion of the population that occurred in that century.³

Therefore it seems reasonable to accept Asmarom Legesse's conclusion that the gada system was a powerful mechanism of population control, which was perfected probably in the second half of the fifteenth century or at the beginning of the sixteenth.

As the Borana today, so the Oromo society of the sixteenth century was stratified into two distinct but cross-cutting systems of peer-group structures. In other words, the male members of the Oromo society were classified into age-sets and age-grades. "The set or class is the group of people who share the same status and who perform their rites of passage together, whereas the grades are the stages of development through

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1. Bahrey, who was not well acquainted with the Barentu group did not record the names of many full-fledged confederacies and numerous tribes and clans that spread as far as the sea in northern Somali in the east and as far as the Milandi coast in the south, where the Portuguese sources report the presence of Oromo groups by the early seventeenth century.
 2. See E. Haberland, Galla Süd-Athiopiens, p. 772.
 3. Asmarom Legesse, Gada : Three approaches ... , p. 154.

which the groups pass."¹ Our main concern here is with the gada grades. It is very difficult to fully reconstruct the names of the original gada grades. This is because after the migration the various groups adopted slightly different names. This led to confusion at two levels. First on the names of gada grades,² and second on the names of the Gada in power.³ The latter will be discussed shortly, but first we deal with the gada grades. According to many authors, the full cycle of the gada system was about ten grades. An individual entered the first grade at birth and left the last grade at the gada age of eighty. After that the individual withdrew from the system totally. The first five grades of eight years each were known collectively as gada. In order to minimize confusion we call this the "small" gada and use a small letter. The sixth grade, the stage of political power, the pivotal of the system was also known as Gada. We write this with the capital letter, in order to distinguish it from other grades. The first five grades according to one source were the "practical schools" during which young men were trained militarily, politically and ritually to take over the leadership of the nation.⁴ The full cycle of the gada system was ten grades. This full cycle was divided into two periods of forty years each. The period of forty years was known as Mesensa (a thread that links two points). In this case, it means a blood tie that links members of one full cycle of forty years. This is because children of a father regardless of their ages all belong to one branch mesensa.⁵ The gada of the father, the first forty years, had particular names, and that of the son, the second forty years, also had their names. The system worked on the pattern in which the forty years of the father was followed by another forty years of the son. This seems to have been the core of the system. "... The basic rule of the gada system is that the newly born infant boy always enters the system of grades exactly forty years behind the father regardless of the age of the father; father and son are five grades apart at all times."⁶

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1. Asmarom Legesse, Gada : Three approaches ... , p. 51.
 2. There is a variation from region to region in the names of the grades.
 3. *Infra*, p. 104.
 4. Yelma Deressa, Ya Ityopya Tarik (Ba'asra sedestannaw kefla zaman) in Amharic (History of Ethiopia in the sixteenth century) (Addis Ababa : 1957 E.C./1967/8), pp. 217-220.
 5. E. Cerulli, Etiopia Occidentale, vol. ii, p. 124.
 6. Asmarom Legesse, Gada : Three approaches... , p. 124.

The relation between the gada of the father and that of the son is described by Cerulli by a very powerful term masanu.¹ In its present meaning, the masanu expresses the latent enmity or jealousy, or rivalry between two women who have a common husband. The two women are jealous of each other, and make unhealthy competition for the love of the husband. They often quarrel with each other and with their husband. The children of the two women, who grow up in the environment of mutual hatred and mistrust, develop hard feelings and incompatibility towards each other. Masanu in terms of the relation between the father and the son, seems to express the uneasy relation between the two. The meaning of this strong term compels us to assume that the forty year gap between the father and the son was probably meant to regulate sexual life between the two. This becomes more evident when one considers the generous liberality with which gada class related to each other in terms of sex. The men of each gada are liberal with each other, and compete with each other for marriage and for favour with women. The forty year gap between the father and the son stops this practice in a very decisive manner. Since father and son belonged to separate forty year periods, they both married in their cycle. This in principle excluded the marriage of the father into the gada of his son or that of the son into the gada of his father.

The movement of the forty years was cyclical, repeating itself after every eighty years. The following gada names were recorded by Bahrey. Other names are included in the footnote.²

<u>Fathers</u>	<u>Sons</u>
(1) Melbah	Harmufa
(2) Mudana	Robale
(3) Kilole	Birmaji
(4) Bifole	Mulata
(5) Michelle	Dulo ³

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1. E. Cerulli, Etiopia Occidentale, vol. ii, p. 124
 2. d'Abbadie, 1880 : Fathers : Birmaji, Malba, Mudana, Robale, Dulo
Sons : Aldada, Horata, Bifole, Sabaqa, Kirole
Cerulli, 1920s : Fathers : Horata, Robale, Dulo, Melba, Holcisa
Sons : Michelle, Birmaji, Bifole, Mudana, Kilole
Yelma Deressa, : Fathers : Michelle, Mudana, Robale, Melba, Birmaji
1960s : Sons : Kilole, Mulata, Bifole, Dulo, Horata
- Various other gada names are given by Huntingford, in Some Records pp. 206-208. However, what is important to note here is that in the

These ten gada were instituted, reports d'Abbadie, by a very ingenious person named Maqgo Bili in 1589.¹ A complex system like gada could not be instituted by an individual, no matter how "ingenious" he may have been. What is more, Maqgo Bili seems to have been a historical figure who lived towards the end of the sixteenth century after the Oromo had already spread over huge territory.²

According to Cerulli's information, and abundantly recorded by d'Abbadie, each gada has a particularly favourable or unfavourable meaning, which the people assumed to apply to that particular eight year period. Thus the gada(s) with an unfavourable meaning can be officially abolished or deliberately forgotten or replaced by other gada with a favourable meaning.³ With the difficulties in life, the setbacks in war, drought, famine and epidemic diseases, all assumed to be due to the name of the "unfavourable" gada in use, changes must have been frequent. Brief descriptions of the meanings of gada names are given below.

Melbah is a composite term consisting of mela "foot" or "feet" and bah "go out", i.e. to go out, leave an area and go somewhere, to go on an expedition for explicit purposes of raids. This is the gada period during which it was supposed that expeditions were expected to be successful. Accidentally or otherwise, it was during the period of this gada 1522-1530, that the first Borana incursion into Bali was reported. According to Bahrey, the gada to invade the country of Bali was melbah. He adds that "I know not the name of his father, for no man was able to tell me", personifying the gada as one man.⁴ Mudana is also a composite term consisting of muda "pilgrimage" and na "we go", i.e. we go on pilgrimage to the Abba muda (the high priest to whom pilgrimage was made).

..... above three examples almost all Bahrey's gada names are repeated. These were the most important gada names.

3. Bahrey, who wrote his History of the Galla in 1593, did not write the name of Dulo, since the dulo gada came to power in 1594. See chapter four, p. 259.

1. d'Abbadie, "Sur les Oromos, grande nation africaine", Annales de la société scientifique de Bruxelles (1880), vol. iv, pp. 470.
2. *Infra*, pp. 328-30.
3. d'Abbadie, *Nouv. Acq. Fran. No. 31300*, folio, 718-719; see also E. Cerulli, Ethiopia Occidentale, vol. i, pp. 32-33.
4. Bahrey, in Some Records of Ethiopia 1593-1646, p. 115.

Since the religious leader symbolized peace and unity of the people, the term conveys strong sense of the gada of "peace and unity". It is not without reason that this gada was described as "the gada which is supposed to be the most beautiful with all the fruits of the land".¹ Kilole is a composite word consisting of ki "that which" and lole "I fought", i.e. the gada in which I fought. The powerful concept behind the term seems to suggest that it is the gada of good omen for success in battle. Bifole is derived from bife "drizzle", the little rain which is not sufficient for growing of grass or for farming. The unfavourable meaning in this term is that it is the period characterized by drought, which causes suffering to cattle as well as to men. Michelle, according to d'Abbadie, was the gada of peace, plenty and prosperity.² These are the five gada names of the father, and the other five gada names of the sons have similar favourable or unfavourable meanings.

A number of writers on the Oromo in Ethiopia agree in emphasising the political significance of the system. Cerulli in particular looks at the system as a mechanism for "the gradual acquisition of political power followed by gradual withdrawal from it."³ D'Abbadie also strongly stressed the political significance of the system. Yelma Deressa also stresses the political and democratic aspect of the system. For him the system existed for its political and military importance and the rituals stressed in the system were part of the politics.⁴ For the eastern Oromo (Harar) de Salviac and others⁵ have equally stressed the political significance of the system. Among the Afran Qallo (the four sons of gallo) in Harar the gada government has been shown to be the raison d'être for the existence of the system. The gada government among the Afran Qallo has been shown to have its own "capital" with all the paraphernalia of a traditional government. Bahrey, who first wrote about this system, equally stressed the political nature. So did Asmarom Legesse abundantly. However, one point must be made clear at this stage. Within the gada system, it seems impossible to draw a clear demarcation between the ritual and the political functions. Both were part of the same body politic.

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1. A. d'Abbadie, Nouv.Acq. Fran. No. 21300, folio, 718-719.
 2. Ibid.
 3. E. Cerulli, Folk literature of the Galla of southern Abyssinia, Harvard African Studies III, 1922, (Cambridge, Mass, 1922), pp. 167-180.
 4. Yelma Deressa, Ya Ityopya Tarik, pp. 212-227.
 5. De Salviac, Un peuple antique ..., pp. 184-195; see also Muhammad Hassan "The relation between Harar and the surrounding Oromo 1800-1887", B.A. Haile Sellasie I University, 1973, pp. 23-26.

Since both dealt with the good of society, it was unnecessary to distinguish between them. We also suspect that the system itself worked against the formation of single state. It is true that the gada system, taken as a whole, contains to a marked degree the ideas and practices germinal to state formation.¹ However, the political "power" was held by the gada class, and not by one or a few individuals. The officers elected were simply the representatives of the "reigning set", and they did not have powers separate from the one given to them by the chafe ("meadow") assembly. There was no permanent power invested in the officers. The ultimate source of power was the assembly, which exercised this power in specific circumstances. Hence, the system seems to have worked ideally for small groups whose members knew each other and met face to face when the situation demanded. With a large group spread over a wider territory, the system did not work effectively. Instead of having one supreme assembly, several competing assemblies sprang up in different areas. That is why, although the Oromo nation was under a single gada system, they did not have a common government, instead they had different tribal governments. The numerous assemblies exhibited features of government and social organization found in the state, but the absence of offices with a permanent concentration of power made them only half-way houses for the formation of the state. A glance through the literature of de Salviac and Massaja, who observed the assemblies at work during the last century, gives striking confirmation to the above conclusion.²

The following discussion on the gada system will concentrate mainly on the military and political aspect and very little on the ritual. It summarises most of the literature written on the system in Oromiffa (the Oromo language), Amharic, English, French, Italian, German and Arabic. It covers the five stages in life or the five different gada grades that lead to the Gada - the stage of political and ritual leadership.

Daballe (1-8 years), was the first stage in life through which an individual had to pass. Daballe is from the verb daballu (jump about

1. *Infra*, pp. 385-7, 395.

2. de Salviac, Un peuple antique ..., pp. 184-195; see also G. Massaja, I Miei Trentacinque anni di missione dell' alta Etiopia, (Roma : 1886), vol. III, pp. 172-177 and *passim*.

dance around) and daballe (noun) conveys the concept of childhood games. The term conveys a rosy picture of happy times, which elders envy. It was the stage in life when a boy went literally naked and was referred to as "girl", because he did not have a real name and he did not go out of the domain of women into that of men. As a mark of the grade's distinction within a society, Cerulli says "the daballe have their hair shaved off except for curls which are gathered at the back of the head."¹ Even today among the Borana, as the mark of the grade's distinction, the daballe put on a hair style known as guduru.² During the daballe grade young boys were taught about the family tree within the clan". A boy of five years knows the names of his forefathers to the depth of twelve to fifteen.³ According to oral tradition, through the knowledge of the family tree within the clan, the child establishes his place in the society. This underlines the importance of the clan and the tribe within the pastoral Oromo society. There is no exact Oromo term for clan. The closer term is gossa, which is not just a clan. "It is a nation, tribe sub-clan, species, type, etc."⁴ Like the meaning of gada the meaning of gossa varies from situation to situation, and its true meaning can be gleaned only from the context in which it is used. Throughout this chapter, we prefer using the English terms clan and tribe, so as to minimize confusion. The importance of a clan was that clansmen were under a moral and legal obligation to help each other in any situation. As Paul Baxter says for the Borana, "clansmen should render each other every sort of assistance, contributions to fines, hospitality, help with herding, gifts in misfortune and distributions from fortunes of bounty".⁵ Throughout northern Oromoland, this was a "right" and "obligation" at the same time. A right because an individual was rescued by his clansmen in misfortune and obligation because an individual was forced by clan's law to contribute what was demanded of him.⁶

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1. E. Cerulli, Folk-literature of the Galla of Southern Ethiopia, p. 170.
 2. Asmarom Legesse, Gada : three approaches ... , p. 52.
 3. See E. Haberland, Galla Süd-Ethiopiens, p. 115; see also Asma Giyorgis, "Ya Galla Tarik", p. 21.
 4. Paul Baxter, "Social organization of the Galla of Northern Kenya", p. 77.
 5. ibid., p. 102.
 6. Yelma Deressa, Ya Ityopya Tarik, pp. 212-227.

Folle (Junior Gamme Borana, 8-16 years). The education in this grade was the continuation of the first. Here, the status of the young boy changes from "girl" to a boy acquiring a real name and shaving the guduru.¹ With that the boy went into the village singing and dancing with his age mates. He went into the clan or tribal assembly under the oda (sycamore tree) to listen to the discussion either on legal matters or on settling disputes. According to one source there were three major institutions of learning at this stage. First the home; second, the village assembly (where the young men learned the art of listening); thirdly, the qallu institution.² The first does not need any discussion, since it is universal practice among all mankind. The second will be dealt with under the heading of government in the last part of this chapter. Here we concentrate on the third.

The Qallu Institution

The noun qallu is derived from the verb qalla, to slaughter, to sacrifice. Qallu was a high priest who performed a ritual sacrifice. The national myths surrounding the origin of the first high priest, though varied in form, are the same in content.³ In general the story is unanimous. The first qallu was of a divine origin. Some say he "fell from the sky itself, and other say the first qallu was found with the first black cow. And still others say he was the "eldest son of Ilma Orma".⁴ Because of his origin and his role in the traditional ceremonies, the Qallu was the centre of Oromo religion. Without the political power or authority he enjoyed a "super human" prestige which was incontestable. As the "eldest son" of all Oromo, the national myth confers upon him the title of the father, the source of all law and traditions. In this role he was "the prophet of the nation" who guarded the law of Waqa (the sky-god) and its interpretation.⁵ Waqa was both the sky-god and the sky itself, manifesting the dual nature of the two moieties within the nation. The Waqa, both sky and god, had to do with fertility, peace and life-giving

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1. Asmarom Legesse, Gada : three approaches, p. 55.
 2. Yelma Deressa, Ya Ityopya Tarik, pp. 212-227.
 3. We have already seen that the Karrayu Qallu of the Borana is said to have fallen from heaven itself. The first Qallu of the Guji is said to have been the son of Waka, who fell from heaven. See K. Knutsson, Authority and change, pp. 145-147.
 4. See for instance Paul Baxter, "Social organization of the Galla ... pp. 156-192 et passim; Haberland, Galla Süd-Athiopiens, pp. 475, 537. de Salviac, Un peuple antique ... , p. 152
 5. See below

rains which was the sine qua non for farming and pastoralist society. That must have been the reason why the prayers for peace, fertility and rain are at the centre of Borana religion.¹

When reduced to the essential, both the Qallu institution and its relation with Waqa were the core of the traditional religion. Like the calendar, the qallu institution seems to have been profoundly influenced by ideas drawn from Islam and Christianity even at that early stage. Continuously inspired by the contacts the Oromo people had with the Muslims, (most likely in Bali), the Islamic influence, radiating from the shrine of the Shaikh Hussein of Bali, seems to have made a deep impact on the qallu institution. The annals of these contacts are completely shrouded in uncertainty and a full reconstruction of its impact must await further research in the field. But one thing can be said with some certainty. There can be no doubt that the Islamic influence on the qallu institution was very real. There are several reasons for making this conclusion. First and foremost, the national myths surrounding the origin of the high priest cited above make them either of divine origin or the first son of Ilma Oroma. However, there is sufficient evidence that these high priests in fact were of non-Oromo origin. And there is also good reason to believe that the first high priest(s) must have been exposed to some rudimentary form of Islam.

The second reason deals with the story of Abba Muda, whom a number of scholars tend to translate as "the father of ointment". Muda in its proper sense means to go on a "pilgrimage" to visit a "holy place" or a person. Abba Muda in this context means "the father", the high priest for whom pilgrimage is made. Because ointment with butter was one of his important blessings, scholars have tended to translate Abba Muda as the "father of ointment".²

The institution of Abba Muda was an important Oromo institution. Bahrey, who first wrote about the military aspect of the gada system, did not mention the pilgrimage to Abba Muda. This is one of the many indications that Bahrey's knowledge about the Oromo society of the time was

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1. Paul Baxter, "Social organization of the Galla ... ", p. 48; Asmarom Legesse, Gada, p. 216.
 2. Among others, see G.W.B. Huntingford, The Galla of Ethiopia : the kingdoms of Kafa and Janjero, p. 83.

limited. What is more, Bahrey does not appear to have gathered information about Oromo history from the Oromo themselves, who were in the army of the Emperor Sarsa Dengel (1563-1597). But a few years later, around the beginning of the seventeenth century, Aza'i Tino, one of the authors of the chronicle of Susenyos, described the pilgrimage to Abba Muda in glowing terms. He says besides their belief in one Waqa, the Oromo believe in one single person whom they call Abba Muda. As the Jews believe in Moses and the Muslims in Muhammed, the Oromo believe in their Abba Muda. They all go to him from far and near to receive his blessings.¹

Four important points emerge from Tino's vital piece of information. First, that Abba Muda was the spiritual leader whom the Oromo regarded as their prophet. Secondly that the land of Abba Muda which the pastoral Oromo regarded as sacred and the cradle of their birth, was located in the highlands of the middle south, and thirdly, the pilgrims to Abba Muda were delegates, who were the representatives of their clans, and finally that these pilgrims were either Borana or Barentu.

European travellers and missionaries of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have reported a strikingly similar picture of the pilgrimage to Abba Muda.² Perhaps what Cecchi says about the journey to the land of Abba Muda may sum up the important points, though not all what others have to say :

The journey to Abba Muda is made partly to honour him and partly to receive his blessing and anointment, which qualify the pilgrims for ritual functions in their own home region. Only those who have committed no serious crimes may make the journey ... They must be married and circumcised. This means that they must have undergone the butta ceremony and thereby completed their forty-year participation in the gada system. During the journey they are said to be dressed as women and to receive food from women. They wear their hair cut short and bear no weapons. As an offering to Abba Muda they bring a bull, and as a sign of their

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1. F.M. Pereira, Chronica de Susenyos Rei de Ethiopia, (Lisbon : 1892), p. 214.
 2. The literature on Abba Muda is not only rich but also covers the major part of Oromo territory. Among others, d'Abbadie and A. Cecchi reported on the pilgrimage to Abba Muda in the Gibe region, while Cerulli reported on Shawa and de Salviac and Mizzi on the south-eastern parts of Oromo territory.

peaceful intentions they drive a sheep. When they reach Abba Muda, the pilgrim's leader offers food to the snake that guards Abba Muda's grotto. After communal prayers Abba Muda anoints the jila and gives them myrrh. He commands them not to cut their hair and to be righteous, not to recognize any leader who¹ tries to get absolute power, and not to fight among themselves.

Those who went to Abba Muda and received his blessing and ointment were called jila ("saintly people"). Jila were considered as "saints", the link between the spiritual father and the nation.² As the jila was inviolable, no-one touched his cattle either in war or in raids between villages. People who kept their cattle were unarmed as a sign of their peaceful intentions. The story runs that jila was "brother" of Borana and Barentu. Each had his own law, and the descendants of jila being extinct, men can acquire "his law" by the pilgrimage to the spiritual father of the nation. The 'law of jila' peace (maintaining peace between the two brothers) is thus set against 'the law of the rival descent groups'.

On the arrival of the jilas at the spiritual centre of Abba Muda, the latter asked them about the law of Waqa (sky-god) and the customs of Ilma Orma. We are told that he denounced the danger of abandoning the way of life of the fathers, and urged them to stick to the simple pastoral life that guaranteed the continuity of the ancient traditions. The ancient fathers were pastoralists and the Abba Muda was the unifying factor that cut across the numerous loyalties of the conflicting and competing pastoralists. The prayers and blessings which Abba Muda showered on each pilgrim underlines the ideal type of prosperity he wished for the Oromo society.

'Prosper, O son of Orma, return home to your family and Abba Boku. May the milk of your herds flow in abundance. May the whole village drink of your superfluity (of milk). May you be loaded with goods. May your favourite cow's udder be full of milk, from which none drinks but the father of the family, from which none drinks but the mother of the family, from which none drinks but he who has received Unction. It is the wish of my heart that you should prosper. May Waqa be with you.'³

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1. A. Cecchi, Da Zeila all frontiere del caffà, (Roma : 1886), vol. ii, p. 30. Translation by K. Knutsson, Authority and change, p. 148.
 2. Angelo Mizzi, Cenni etnografici Galla ossia Organizzazione civile, p. 9; see also de Salviac, Un peuple antique ..., pp. 155-156.
 3. de Salviac, Ibid., vii, p. 159, translation by G.W.B. Huntingford, The Galla of Ethiopia and the kingdoms of Kafa and Janjero, pp. 83-84.

Before the pilgrimage to Abba Muda was officially abolished by Emperor Menelik, who saw the danger of Oromo unity in this practice, around 1900,¹ pilgrims from Harar used to go to Mormor in Bali. Those from Shawa, Wallaga and the Gibe region either went to Wallal or Harro Walabu. The Arsi went to Dallo Baruk or Debanu.² As can be seen from the above, the different groups sent their representatives (jilas) to their spiritual father in the country of their origin, before the sixteenth century pastoral migration. This in turn abundantly demonstrates that even in the sixteenth century the nation did not have a single spiritual father. It seems that after the separation into the highland and the lowland groups, each group had its own high priest. Despite the multiplicity of the high priests, they seem to have performed almost identical duties, which again demonstrates that originally they were probably all from the same source and the same place.

The jila were considered as "men of god", the concept that imbued them with a sort of "sacred quality" men without sin, a parallel concept with Muslim pilgrims to Shaikh Hussein of Bali or even to Mecca. On the route to the spiritual father the jila were not molested even in enemy territory. On the contrary, they were given protection and the necessities of life. Their wives absented themselves from a number of things during their husbands' long journey, which in some cases took six months. The concept of ritual purity on the part of jila and their families seems to have parallels with the concept of "cleanliness", which is paramount among the Muslims who go to Mecca. Once en route the jila did not cut their finger-nails or hair. In order to show their peaceful intentions they did not carry spears, the mark of manhood. Instead they had other insignia which they carried.

This had profound similarity to the pilgrimage to the tomb of Shaikh Hussein in Bali. It had also a crucial difference in one sense. The jila went to Abba Muda as the representatives of their clans or tribes

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1. G.W.B. Huntingford, The Galla of Ethiopia ... , p. 83; see also E. Haberland, Galla Sud-Athiopiens, p. 776; K. Knutsson, Authority and change, pp. 147-155.
 2. E. Cerulli, Etiopia occidentale, vol . ii, pp. 139-143, 169, 172; see also, Paul Soleillet, Voyages en Ethiopie, p. 261; de Salviac, Un peuple antique ... , pp. 154-5.

whereas the pilgrimage to Shaikh Hussein was undertaken by individuals. Here we concentrate only on the similarity rather than on the difference. The jila carried as a "badge" a forked stick, which they displayed on their way. The forked stick, we are told, had three branches standing for peace, unity and knowledge of the ancient tradition. What is very striking is the similarity between the badge of those who went to the high priest and those who even today go to Shaikh Hussein in Bale. It must have been because of this cultural "fit" or similarity probably that two scholars, Cerulli and Trimingham, thought that Shaikh Hussein was the continuation of the old Muda for the Muslim Oromo.¹

We also suspect a cross-fertilisation of ideas between the "benevolence" attributed to Shaikh Hussein and that of Abba Muda.² Underneath the prayers chanted by jila on the way to and from Abba Muda, and by those who today go to Shaikh Hussein, we detect a common cultural source or tradition. We also find some similarity between the traditional idea of generosity within Oromo society and the powerful image of Shaikh Hussein which inspires people to show kindness and charity to those pilgrims on their way to and from the shrine. In essence the latter is not different from the treatment the jila received in the past.³ Abba Muda's "two hands" holding a blessing and a curse, the former so much sought after, and the latter so much dreaded, is not very different from the tradition of Shaikh Hussein.⁴ Moreover the isolated tomb of Shaikh Hussein in Bali does not seem to have suffered from the Oromo attacks in the sixteenth century. Perhaps the shrine may have served as neutral ground for settling internal disputes among themselves and with their enemies.⁵ This may have been due probably to Shaikh Hussein's influence on the Oromo through Abba Muda.

Finally, there is a good indication that the Barentu Abba Muda was of a non-Oromo origin. This may also be true of the Abba Muda of the

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1. E. Cerulli, Etiopia Occidentale, vol. ii, p. 145; J.S. Trimingham, Islam in Ethiopia, p. 256.
 2. B.W. Andrzejewski, "Shaikh Hussen of Bali in Galla oral traditions" IV Congresso Internazionale di Studi Etiopici (Roma : 1974), pp. 33-34.
 3. de Salviac, Un peuple antique ... , pp. 157-158; Asma Giyorgis, Ya Galla Tarik .. , pp. 26-27.
 4. e.g. R.A. Caulk, "Harar Town and its Neighbours in the nineteenth century", The Journal of African History, (1977), vol. XVIII, p. 372 .

of the Borana. The following Barentu song, which was popularly chanted by the jila on the way to and from Abba Muda establishes that he was originally a "stranger", a non-Oromo.

Barentu acci Debanu gale : Barentuti Tabbo galte
 Tabbo mormor duba Asta warra Tabbo gale
 Muda, warra Muda dide, Barrentima inqabu : himni dalata.¹

... From there Barentu has come to Debanu, the people of Barentu are from Tabbo
 Tabbo is behind Mormor, Asta the family that come to Tabbo
 Muda are those who go on pilgrimages. He is not Barentu :
 He is "born into it".

This tradition of Barentu makes it clear that their Abba Muda was a non-Oromo. The claim of this tradition is strongly supported by recent research in the field. According to this, the influential Abba Muda who now resides in Dollo Bale is not of "true" Oromo origin but is descended from the offspring of a mixed Somali Arabic clan called Raitu (Raya). According to this view, the Muslims succeeded in attaining and conserving a kind of leading position at least spiritually in pagan society.² Although there is a mistake in this conclusion, it seems that a part of it is sound. A mistake, because the author starts from two incorrect premises. First he believes that the ethnogenesis of the Raya Oromo was formed only after 1540. However, we know from other sources that Raya was a large and powerful confederacy with clan names appearing in almost every Oromo genealogy all over Oromo territory. Probably, therefore, Raya was among the original Oromo clans. Otherwise how could one explain the diversity of its name in clan genealogies. Secondly, the author believes that the Oromo arrived in Bali only during the gada Melbah (1522-1530) first recorded by Bahrey. According to this view, the first Oromo contact with Muslim elements dates from that time. This conclusion is historically incorrect to say the least. However, his second point, that the Muslim elements succeeded in attaining a leading position in the pagan society, seems sound. But this must have started much earlier than he thinks. We even suspect that the Qallu institution, with all its paraphernalia and practices, was probably a blend of Islamic and Oromo traditional belief centred around the concept of Waqa. Finally another popular Barentu song chanted by jila going to and from Abba Muda implies that the

1. Angelo Mizzi, Semplici constatazioni filologico-etnologiche Galla, p. 74.

2. Ulrich Braukämper, "Islamic principalities in southeast Ethiopia between the 13th and 16th centuries" in Ethiopianis notes, (1977), Vol. i, no. 2, pp. 27-28.

spiritual leader saved the nation by his "blessing" and advice from a situation of terrible crisis caused by hunger.

Elje Muda godane godana sore
Sore nutti robe kollegi kallese(ifire)
wej a butusese(ifire)
Warri Muda in bakne jalo wata mo tumtu ijalo.¹

Upon the advice of Muda we dispersed,
the diaspora of hunger in search of food
the hunger that skinned and killed men and animals
the hunger that destituted and destroyed people.
It rained and plenty showered upon us
Those who do not know the beloved Muda, comrade,
they are wata and tumtu, comrade,
they are beasts, comrade.

From the above it appears that the implied migration was caused by hunger and Abba Muda blessed them and told them to disperse in different directions. The same role has also been reported for the influential historical Borana Abba Muda.

Qallu the religious leader and his spiritual centre, galma, was an important aspect of Oromo ritual. It seems that young men visited the Qallu spiritual centre for ritual study. Ritual knowledge was an essential aspect for the future leadership in the society. Today among the Borana, the Qallu stands for the moral quality, the peace and unity of the people. "His path is that of peace and truth". He represents the Borana ideal of generosity and unreserved concern for fellow brothers. "Qallu is the life spirit of Boran".

Neither Boran society nor culture can be understood without consideration of the part played by the qallu. All Boran acknowledge the sanctity of the qallu; it is by the qallu that all their essential customs were ordained and by them endowed with a moral force and divine order. Further, it is their possession of the qallu which above all else, distinguishes the Boran tribe from the 'junior' tribe and makes them all superior to their neighbours.³

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1. D'Abbadie, Nouv.Acq.Fran.No. 23852, Lettres sur la mission catholique du pays des galla; 1845-1895. Letter of Taurin Cahagne Harar, 3 December 1883.
 2. Wata and Tumtu (blacksmiths) were not allowed to go on pilgrimage to Abba Muda.
 3. Paul Baxter, "Social organization of the Galla of northern Kenya", p. 157.

Whatever their role within gada politics, the Qallu's spiritual centre seems to have represented the continuity of peace within the nation even in early times. After the separation of the Borana and Barentu, and more particularly during the great migration, it seems every fully fledged tribe went with its own Qallu. The religious leaders who accompanied the migrating tribes were not Qallu in the real sense of the term. They were called irressa, "the right hand" of the Qallu, his emissaries, who received the "right to exercise their functions from the high priest in the south".² This explains the continuous link maintained through the jila pilgrimage every eight years to the "birth place" of Abba Muda in the south. What all these had in common was that despite the separation of the tribes from each other over a long period, they all recognized that the cradleland, the fountain head of the nation's spiritual centre, was in the highlands of the middle south. For them this area was like what Mecca is for the Muslims. And what is more, the Qallu institution developed among the Macha only after 1900, when the contact with the spiritual centre was stopped.³ Before the separation and migration, the possession of Qallu and the common gada government seem to have been the "special mark" of the Oromo nation. After migration and the adoption of a large number of people into the Oromo nation, the two offices remained in the hands of the descendants of the earlier leaders who are termed in the national myth as "pure" Oromo.⁴

Finally according to Oromo traditions, young men in the Folle grade visited the spiritual centre of the Qallu. Besides, we are told they learned love songs, war songs, and songs about people and animals. In traditional Oromo society songs served as the expression of the attitude of people to historical events.⁵ In terms of economic activities, the Folle grade seems to have helped in herding the cattle in the village. By the end of this grade, it is believed that a young man was engaged in the economic activity of his family, participated in the village assembly as a passive listener and acquired some moral values of the nation through ritual education.

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1. According to Asmarom Legesse, Gada : Three approaches ... , pp. 44, 48, the Qallu villages are the spiritual centres around which political campaigns ... are organized.
 2. de Salviac, Les Galla, p. 104.
 3. K. Knutsson, Authority and change .. , p. 155.
 4. Knutsson, ibid., p. 67; Cerulli, Folk literature, pp. 178-180.
 5. Anonymous, A Short Memory of Gada Landscape, (1976), p. 4.

Qondalla (Senior gamme Borana), 16-24 years

Today the term qondalla has the meaning of strong young man, young soldier, a person full of life and energy, a well built person.

K. Tutschek, in his English-Galla dictionary defines it as "hero, champion, a man who has the right to anoint himself from his deeds". His definition describes the historic role of this grade and we use the term qondalla in precisely this sense.

The qondalla grade brings a radical departure from the earlier grades in a double sense. First, it was in this grade that young men received hard and difficult military training and discipline. Secondly, it was in this grade that young men went on raids on the basis of age-sets. Both seem to have been formed during the fora expedition. Fora was the practice of dividing the cattle into "dry" and "lactating" cows, keeping the latter near the village, while the former were taken to the lowlands where there was enough pasture in the wet season.

Although Asmarom Legesse thinks that fora started assuming a progressively larger role in the life of the adolescent Borana, with the decline of the inter-tribal wars,¹ it seems that this was an old institution in Oromo society. It was one aspect of the transhumant economy which accounts for the separation of the original tribe into the highland and lowland communities. A Gujji Oromo legend reported by Haberland brings an important point to light.² The legend claims that the Borana originated in fora. According to this legend, Borana came from Gujji herdsmen "who wandered off" ("wronite in boronte"). This legend is very important, because it introduces an interesting concept "inboronte", wandered off, went on something and did not come back. In the language in fact the term Borana conveys a very strong concept of a "wanderer", who moves from place to place sticking to the simple but noble tradition of pastoral life. Probably the term Borana developed to express the concept of those "who wandered off" and did not return. That must have been the reason why the term Barentu was an old Cushitic name, while Borana was an Oromo term of later origin.³

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1. Asmarom Legesse, Gada : Three approaches ... , p. 57.
 2. E. Haberland, Galla Süd-Athiopiens, p. 277.
 3. Supra, p. 73.

At the present among the Borana, fora "is the time when young men take the family herds into the untamed river valleys. Borana is rich in wild life and no part of it is better endowed than the Dawa and the Ganale basins".¹ So are the lowlands by lake Abaya for the Gujji.² And so is the Ramis valley for the Anniya, the only pastoral group in Harargie, that still calls itself Barentu.

While on expeditions the young men had to protect themselves and their cattle from enemy raiders and wild animals. The young men on fora spent several months in the jungle with the cattle. There was nothing unusual in this practice. According to Oromo belief, a brave warrior was expected to spend some times in his youth roaming alone or with a group through mountains and forests at a distance of several days' journey from inhabited places, living on game, and milk, dressing in the skins of the wild beasts they killed. It was this aspect which was known as "practical schooling" in Oromo tradition.³ The young men on the expedition were always on the alert, watching out for enemy raiders with spears in their hands, ever ready to hurl at the enemy. We are told they learned the offensive and defensive tactics to use in any situation. From what is written on the subject, the killing of big game was an essential aspect of this training. Bahrey, when describing the gondalla grade, has this to say :

... These are they who begin to take part in warfare. The young men who are not yet circumcised are called quondela. They dress their hair like soldiers ... if they kill a man, an elephant, a lion, a rhinoceros, or a buffalo, they shave their heads leaving a patch of hair on the top. But those who have killed neither man nor animal do not shave their heads in the same way, married men do not shave themselves if they have killed neither man nor animal.⁴

In the above statement, that intelligent Christian observer deeply touches upon the values of the Oromo society of the time. These values were expressed in terms of "bravery" and bravery was demonstrated by killing a "conspicuous enemy". This killing was the outward expression of a chronic mental attitude that characterized the nation. One might refer to Cerulli's Folk literature of the Galla, where shameful qualities

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1. Asmarom Legesse, Gada : Three approaches ... , p. 57.
 2. E. Haberland, Galla Süd-Ethiopiens, p. 286.
 3. Yelma Deressa, Ya Ityopya Tarik, p. 218 .
 4. Bahrey, in Some Records of Ethiopia, 1593-1646, p. 127.

of cowardly warriors are enumerated. A cowardly man, it seems, did not have any place in a society that worshipped "bravery".

The hardship and endurance in long distance walking for which the Oromo warriors were famous,¹ seems to have been acquired during the fora expedition. We are told that the young men on the fora expedition were fed only on animal produce such as milk, butter, meat and blood. These foods according to the pastoral Oromo traditions and beliefs "sharpen" young men's "bravery". In short, through the fora expedition young men established their image in the eyes of the society by killing either an enemy or a dangerous animal. This was the essential quality for success in the society.

The qndalla grade seems to have been the stage at which the East African age-set fighting methods and the Cushitic war strategy was fertilized producing the very effective guerilla and conventional war tactics. Bahrey's description of Oromo war tactics makes it abundantly clear that the age-set was the fighting unit.² It seems that the age-set was an effective way of mobilising men for warfare. As a fighting unit, we assume that each age-set had its own leader, elected on the basis of distinction and courage in war. Each leader was responsible for the activities of his unit. The duties of the leader and his assistants were probably to settle disputes within each unit. After the imposition of the generation grading on the original non-generation graded population, the disparity in age seems to have undermined the military effectiveness of the system. The southern Oromo revitalized the military efficiency of the system by introducing the old age-set, as a new hirya-set (age-mates).³

All studies of the Borana have stressed the importance of the hirya-set as a convenient method of organising young men. When writing about the Borana hirya-set, Baxter says, "To be chosen as a chief of an age-set

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1. See James Bruce, Travels to discover the source of the Nile in the years 1768, 1769, 1770, 1771, 1772 and 1773, (Edinburgh : 1805), vol.III p. 240; E.A. Wallis Budge, History of Ethiopia, vol. II, p. 614.
 2. Bahrey, in Some Records of Ethiopia, pp. 127-128.
 3. Paul Baxter, "Social organization of the Galla of northern Kenya", p. 408; see also E.R. Turton, "The pastoral tribes of northern Kenya 1800-1916", Ph.D. thesis, London University, 1966, p. 38.

a young man must have already distinguished himself as a warrior and hunter; conspicuous courage was the most essential requirement."¹ He adds that the duties of the Borana age-sets are to terrorize the neighbours of the Borana by offensive raids, and to bring back with them the stock of their enemies. From the literature it appears that this was the type of duty that the raiding party was undertaking at the time of migration in the sixteenth century. When describing the Oromo attack on Gojjam, Bahrey states, "When the Galla fell upon them suddenly and unexpectedly, all the people of the country were filled with terror and their troops fled."² Almeida drives home the role of the age-set when he says, "The Gallas do not usually come in bands of more than six or seven to eight thousand, but these were mostly picked young men."³

These picked young men were the young hot bloods who had been hardened by for a expedition experience, united by age-set ties, emotionally set aflame with the burning desire to "qualify themselves as brave warriors" in order to establish themselves in a worthwhile social standing in the society. It was precisely for this reason that it was said, "... Fighting was the duty as well as the pride of those who reach the qondala grade."⁴

Raba grade (Cusa, junior warriors Borana) 24-32 years

The term raba means "something new, a condition in which some new events take place". This new event was the "political personality" of the grade. Before this grade, young men did not have any political personality, but at this stage they started evolving their own political personality. Bahrey does not shed any light on this grade. However, it was at this stage that the grade elected its leaders.⁵ This was most common among the northern Oromo. Asmarom Legesse, writing about the Borana, has this to say :

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1. Paul Baxter, "Social organization of the Galla of northern Kenya", p. 415.
 2. Bahrey, in Some Records of Ethiopia, p. 122.
 3. Almeida, in Some Records of Ethiopia, p. 137.
 4. G.W.B. Huntingford, The Galla of Ethiopia : the kingdoms of Kafa and Janjero, p. 58.
 5. E. Cerulli, Folk literature of the Galla of southern Abyssinia, pp. 167-172.

The transition from the third to the fourth gada grade is one of the most important events of the gada system. At this point the gada class and the age-set come into being as formal corporate groups. Leaders are elected for both groups. The name of the most senior man in each group becomes the name of the group as a whole. The two groups then become cross-linked, cross-cutting, structural units that operate as complementary institutions so long as they are both represented by living members ... Six boys were elected. These young men were invested in the lallaba ceremony as senior councillors (Adula). As leaders of the gada class they were all said to have the same mura ('cutting edge'). In spite of the fact that they were ordered by seniority, they were a community of equals and shared the same amount of decision-making power. This is the Borana version of 'government by committee'.

There is, of course, no direct evidence about the nature of the election before the migration. However, the present practice among the southern Oromo does indicate that the raba grade was the first stage at which the young junior warriors started evolving their political personality. For the next sixteen years, these elected leaders completed their preparation to take over the leadership of the nation, the Gada stage. This appears to have been the practice in full swing before the split and eventual migration of the two major groups. In the literature this grade was known militarily as the junior warrior class. However, its military role is not spelled out in our sources.

Dori (Raba senior warriors Borana) 32-40 years

The term Dori means, first in going out, first in sitting, and first in fighting. As the name indicates, the grade was the senior warrior class that spear-headed the offensive in battle. This brings us to the military aspect of the system. As among the Borana today, the Dori grade was the senior warrior class in the nation. This was so among the northern Oromo in general, and the Afran Qallo confederacy in particular. The military tactics of this grade was best expressed by the officer who saw it in action in 1875 :

They always advance in a great line of ten or a dozen ranks deep so that the first who fall are immediately replaced by other fighters who continue to advance without being in the least demoralised by the fall of their comrades ... They are hardy and brave, taking death with the greatest boldness, their attack is terrible ... It is necessary for troops to have presence of mind and coolness in order not to be frightened at the first approach and to resist afterwards.²

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1. Asmarom Legesse, Gada : three approaches ... , pp. 61, 63.
 2. Mohammed Moktar, "Notes sur le pays de Harar", Bulletin de la société khédiviale de Géographie (Le Caire, 1877), p. 388.

Probably throughout Oromo society, the dori was the senior warrior class that seems to have played the dominant part in the offensive. As for the other warrior classes, all of the male population between the age of 16 and 40 was under arms. In fact, the number of people under arms seems to have been greater than just this age bracket.

... From an early age Galla boys are brought up as warriors and both while herding the cattle, and during their games they learn to handle the spear. ... A light wooden hoop is set rolling over the ground, and they practise throwing sticks through it when it faces them full circle. When grown up they can as a result throw spears with accuracy; a good spearman can transfix a tree or a man at 50 paces, and a horseman can throw a maximum distance of about 90-100 yards.

According to Bahrey, "All men, from small to great are instructed in the art of warfare."² Bahrey's observation touches on the essence of the system which was the militarization of the society. The system divided all fighting men into three categories : first the Qondalla grade, the young warriors, who were hardened by the fora expedition, second the Raba grade, who were the junior warriors and third the Dori grade, the senior warriors. By this arrangement the system furnished leadership in offensive and retaliatory wars.³ In any offensive the senior warriors formed the frontal line of attack, the junior warriors formed the rear lines, while the young warriors played an auxiliary role. In other words, the brunt of the battle was fought by the two upper classes. The weapons used were of poor quality. "The chief weapon is the spear, warana, of several types, with a maximum length of about 6 ft. 6 ins. On a campaign each man carried two smaller spears called ebo for throwing, the larger spears being seldom thrown."⁴ According to Almeida, their principal missiles were wooden clubs.⁵ According to the oral traditions of Harar Oromo, the warriors used wachafa (slings), bows and arrows, and knives.⁶ The slings were used against long distance enemies (long range missiles), bow

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1. G.W.B. Huntingford, The Galla of Ethiopia : the kingdoms of Kafa and Janjero, p. 58, citing de Salviac, Les Galla, chapter xiv, pp. 268-77.
 2. Bahrey, in Some Records of Ethiopia, p. 126.
 3. Asmarom Legesse, Gada : three approaches ..., p. 76.
 4. Huntingford, ibid.
 5. Almeida, in Some Records of Ethiopia, p. 137.
 6. Muhammad Hassan "The Relation between Harar Town and the surrounding Oromos", p. 26.

and arrows and spears for nearer enemies (medium range missiles) and knives for hand to hand fighting.

Bahrey and Almeida tell us that the warriors adopted cavalry and ox-hide shields of body length that protected them against the dangerous arrows of the Maya people, while they were invading the Christian kingdom.¹ It seems that the adoption of cavalry and the protective shield revolutionized their warfare. Immediately after the change they won the first major victory over the Harar Muslim state, from which that state never fully recovered. Both Bahrey and Almeida admit that the Christian warriors were more numerous, had excellent cavalry, muskets, helmets and coats of mail in plenty.² Despite the disparity in weapons and man-power, the Oromo warriors were not stopped. Almeida attributed their success to their determination to conquer or to die. Tellez thinks that the Oromo success did not depend on their possession of weapons, but on their hands and courage.³ It seems that the Oromo warrior classes which fought with frenzied determination astonished the elite of the Christian and Muslim states and terrorized the populace, which resisted and fought back brilliantly. Through the continuous mutual destruction in all of this development the idea persisted in the minds of the Christians and the Muslims that the "savage Galla" were sent by God to punish them for their sins and warning for their repentance.

Along with its military responsibility, the Dori grade undertook both ritual and legal activities. This was done by the leaders who were elected in the raba grade. In this we are told that these leaders cooperated with the leaders of the reigning grade. The last three years of the Dori grade was the time of apprenticeship in the legal, ritual and administrative field. Finally, the forty years period of the five gada periods which were started with Daballe was concluded with the Dannisa (fatherhood) ceremony.

The dannisa ceremony brings to a conclusion forty years of development of the gada class. Seen from one vantage point, the ceremony is the dividing line between the two halves of the hypothetical life cycle. From another vantage point, it is nothing more than an inter-grade ceremony of the raba grade.⁴

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1. Bahrey and Almeida, in Some Records of Ethiopia, pp. 117, 120.
 2. Ibid., pp. 125, 137.
 3. B. Tellez, The travels of the Jesuits in Ethiopia, p. 67.
 4. Asmarom Legesse, Gada : three approaches ... , p. 73.

This brings us to the heart of an important institution in the gada system, the butta war, the kernel of the complex military preparation. Bahrey does not mention butta by name. But he expresses the practice known as dulaguto.¹ This is a composite term consisting dula, war, and guto, full or complete, which means full or complete war. And butta was indeed a complete national war conducted every eight years. According to Cerulli, butta was a great Oromo festival which each tribe celebrated every eight years. These celebrations were followed by a butta war.² From this it follows that two concepts are embodied in the term butta. The grand feast that preceded the ritual war, and the war that followed the feast. The war was part of the ritual requirement of the system. As such it was either directed against big game or enemies, which of the two depending on the economic gains involved.³ At least by the sixteenth century there is good evidence to show that butta war was the major source of booty for Oromo warriors. This aspect becomes crystal clear from Bahrey's description. What makes the butta war even more economic in character was the fact that it was preceded by the grand feast, for which all the gada class without exception sacrificed animals, depleting their stock. In economic terms, the booty that followed the feast was undertaken partly to replace the depleted stock.

The grand feast of meat and butter eating, and milk drinking, was one of the most joyous times in the life of the nation every eight years.⁴ The feasts were accompanied by dances, love songs and above all boasting war songs that intoxicated the joyous participants. The boasting war songs were of two kinds. Farsa - these were long poems with short verses, in which were celebrated the most famous warriors of the tribe, particularly by recalling their ancestors on the fathers' and mothers' side. They were "poetical expressions of the bonds which united the members of the tribe. They were the boasting songs of the tribe as a whole."⁵ Gerarsa - these were the boasting songs of single warriors "bravery" and its accompanying characteristics were "virtues of the highest order" depicted through

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1. Bahrey, in Some Records of Ethiopia, p. 122.
 2. E. Cerulli, Folk literature of the Galla of southern Abyssinia, p. 68.
 3. E. Haberland, Galla Süd-Athiopiens, p. 394.
 4. Yelma Deressa, Ya Itopya Tarik, pp. 219-220.
 5. E. Cerulli, ibid., p. 58.

gerarsa. The following short and moving song describes a joyous welcome which was given to a valiant warrior after his return from a successful raid. During the ritual and emotional days of the grand feast, the successful hero recited his achievements and moved both young and old with tears of joy.

"The gucci¹ loves the sun. I have descended to the narrow valley and I have pulled down the horsemen ... the beautiful girls will adorn my comb My friends will kiss my mouth. The children will say to me, 'you have killed well' "2

Through farsa songs, eloquent heroes found their poetical expression, which set aflame with pride members of their tribes. Through these powerful songs the dead heroes of the nation were reincarnated and the living heroes were elevated to a higher plane, through the virtues of bravery which was almost worshipped as a religion. Through gerarsa, individual warriors won the hearts of their mistresses, and the respect and admiration of the participants. The meat feast and the emotionally charged war songs seem to have prepared the ground for immediate offensive. The war was ritual in form and economic in content. The immediate economic and psychological advantages were buried under a religious cover. Then "they attack a country which none of their predecessors have attacked."³ From this intelligent observation we may safely conclude that the direction of butta was decided by economic prospects of new country that had not previously been raided. Because of its far-reaching economic and psychological implications all the warrior classes seem to have participated in butta war. All the literature on Oromo society indicates that butta was the oldest form of warfare in this society. It was very different from the periodic nomadic raids. Since it was undertaken once in every eight years, and since it was offensive in character, we assume there was a lot of preparation, organisation and co-ordination. From the foregoing it seems to us that by the first half of the sixteenth century, butta wars were not merely meat feasts and small scale raids, but the main occasion for the great wars and the campaigns of the pastoral Oromo - the campaigns that changed both the course of the history of the Horn and that of the Oromo nation. Finally :

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1. Gucci (guchi) was an ostrich feather which a valiant warrior put in his hair.
 2. E. Cerulli, Folk literature of the Galla ... , p. 102 .
 3. Bahrey, In Some Records of Ethiopia, p. 122 .

Butta was the occasion on which the gada class was expected to go out into enemy territory and to bring back the spoils of war. It was the time when the warriors sought to punish those who raided the camps of their fathers and their ancestors. It was the time when young men sought to build up their prestige as warriors and thereby improve their prospects for marriage and political office.

In earlier centuries, the butta wars probably played a critical role in the evolution of the Oromo society. The vast expansion of the Galla in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries must be understood in part as a function of the structural requirements of the Gada system. Under normal circumstances, butta wars were nothing more than large scale cattle raids. In times of rapid population expansion, however, they turned into large scale campaigns.

Gada : (the stage of political and ritual leadership Borana) 40-48 years

The Gada stage was the heart of the system, the kernel of the whole complex institution. In the true sense of the term the Gada stage was a landmark in the history of the grade that was coming to power. It was at this stage that every "reigning set" left its mark on the nation through its political and ritual leadership. "The strongest indication that the class was in power is the fact that it imparted its name and its ritual attributes to the period of history when it was Gada (VI)"²

Gada government - Before we embark on discussion of the gada government we must make a few points clear. Among the Oromo of the sixteenth century different confederacies seem to have had a similar form of government. However, the similarities in the form of government within the confederacies seem in the practices of later centuries to have been many, and the variations from confederacy to confederacy pronounced enough to put one on guard against making sweeping generalisations. Two points of caution are mentioned below. The form of government which each confederacy adopted was based on a number of factors peculiar to itself, factors such as the size of its population and the geographical features of its region, and the predominant mode of production at the time. This means that although before the separation of the nation it probably had a common form of government, after the separation, and eventually after the migration, the different confederacies developed along slightly different lines, modifying their mode of life and government to suit their new environment and requirements.³

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1. Amaron Legesse, Gada : three approaches ... , p. 74.
 2. Ibid., p. 83.
 3. Infra, p. 345-50.

Secondly, government among the Oromo, both at the confederacy and the clan level, was essentially by assembly. The confederacy assembly had the power to legislate for the whole confederacy. This assembly concerned itself with matters of supreme importance - war and peace, legislation, the settlement of inter-confederacy or inter-clan disputes, hearing cases that were brought from the lower courts. The ordinary day-to-day functions of the society was left to the clan government, which was based on the model of bigger and wider government.

The composition of gada government, while varying from region to region, conformed to a certain general pattern which justifies us in speaking of the gada government. In all we are told that there was a very extensive election campaign, ranging from weeks to two months, extending over long distances among different clans.¹ The oratorical talent expected of the candidates, the traditional fund of knowledge which they were supposed to have acquired, the wisdom for settling disputes and taking quick action in difficult situations, tangible past military achievements that one could boast of during the election campaign, all these constituted criteria for leadership which seem to have precluded many from the offices. Three qualities - oratory, knowledge of history and the tradition of the society, the past military achievements with recognizable potential for future leadership, constituted these three major criteria.² In all there was Abba Gada ("the father of the Gada in power"). During the eight years period, the Abba Gada was a central authority, a single political head and the spokesman for the confederacy. His residence was the seat of the government and the capital of the confederacy for eight years. The assembly chaired under his presidency was held in the chafe ("the meadow") under the life-giving shade of the oda, ("the holy sycamore tree"), which was traditionally believed to be the most "respected" and the most "sacred" of trees, the shade of which was the source of peace and the centre of religion. The shade of the oda was not only the "office of the government", the meeting ground for the elders of the confederacy, but also the sacred place for the religious duties. Hence, all the sacrifices undertaken by the Gada class were performed at this spot. When the government met under the oda, "the president sat on

1. All the major sources we are using in this chapter underline that there were election campaigns.

2. de Salviac, Un peuple antique ... , pp. 190-191.

the right and the other dignitaries on the left. The "deputies" sat in hierarchical order of seniority of the tribe or clan and the age of the participants. The debate followed this hierarchical order of seniority.¹ When the assembly met, all those present participated in the debate and decision-making. Once a policy was adopted by the "reigning set" its implementation became the task of all. This was both the strength and the weakness of the gada government. Strength, because unity symbolised in a common political head was strengthened through a common action; weakness, because the power at the disposal of this government lasted only as long as the cause for which it was wanted lasted.²

In all there was the Abba Dula ("the father of war"), who was an orator and tactician, versed in the military exploits of the past generations. The history of the past military success was the material upon which the leaders drew in the psychological preparation for war. The Abba Dula marched at the head of the warriors and recited exciting war poems that put the brave aflame and hardened the coward. In all, there was the Abba Sera ("the father of the law"), an expert on traditional law, whose duty it was to memorise the results of the assemblies deliberations and furnish them when needed. In all, there was the Abba Alanga ("the father of the whip"), a well-built person who was responsible for the keeping of order at the chafe assembly, and also executed the decision of the assembly. In all, there was the saylan (Borana or Barentu), the nine judges who were elected from the retiring officers. In all, there was the lemmi (the messengers), the ambassadors of the president among the clans to resolve differences and settle disputes, preserve the peace and stability of the region. It was an inviolable Oromo law, next to that of the jila, that the ambassadors were not hurt. To hurt them was an insult to the whole clan or confederacy and the cause for war.³ In all, the Gada government was the government of "the reigning set". The election and the "transfer of power" took place at the time of Jarra ceremony. The noun jarra comes from the verb jarru, "to build, to start something new". It is used in the sense of building a new house, making a new law, contracting new

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1. de Salviac, Un peuple antique ..., p. 184.
 2. For a detailed analysis of the Gada system and government refer to Virginia Luling, "Government and social control among some peoples of the Horn of Africa", a thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Arts at the University of London, 1966, pp. 69-75 et passim.
 3. Among others, see de Salviac, ibid., pp. 182-190.

agreements, new relations. In this sense, the jarra ceremony was the event that ended the Gada of the previous eight years and started the new one. It was the beginning of the new period, the building of the new future, which the European travellers and missionaries of the last century compared with the Greek Olympiad.¹

Jarra was the end of one era and the beginning of another. It was the time of feasting and extensive ritual activities, during which the hopes for the next eight years were expressed, the strength and weaknesses of the past eight years were told. It was the time when the "soul" of the nation met under the oda. Jarra was the pivot of the Oromo calendar, the dividing line between gada periods.

After the "transfer of power" the preceding Abba Gada handed over the "constitution" to the new president, and that signalled the end of one Gada period and the beginning of the new one.² The Oromo unwritten constitution was kept in the Bokku ("the insignia of national authority"). Bokku was a very popular term in oral literature. It has two meanings. The first and most important was the one attached to the wooden sceptre kept by the president in his belt during all the assembly meetings. As the insignia of authority, the bokku represented the independence of a tribe, and it served as a symbol of unity,³ common law and common government. Secondly, it referred to the keeper of the bokku itself (the Abba Gada). Hence, the Abba Gada who kept the bokku was also called Abba Bokku.⁴ With the transfer of the bokku, the change of the government was completed. Then the new government and the leaders together with the assembly made a "new law" that lasted for the next eight years.

Before the debate on the substance of the new law commenced, the new Abba Gada (Abba Bokku), slaughtered his butta bull,⁵ and dipped a branch of green tree into the blood of the sacrificed victim and planted it in the assembly.⁶ The blood, which was generally considered as "sacred"

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1. Martial de Salviac, Les Gallas, pp. 188-9.
 2. E. Cerulli, Folk literature of the Galla ..., p. 179.
 3. *Infra*, pp. 326-8.
 4. Some authors seem to consider Abba Bokku as an official different from Abba Gada.
 5. Every one in the Gada grade (VI) had to slaughter a bull for his butta, the feast mentioned earlier.
 6. de Salviac, Un peuple antique ..., p. 191.

was used to symbolise the unity of the confederacy as brothers descending from a common founder, real or fictitious. The branch of a green tree represented peace, plenty, and fertility of Ilma Orma.

Once the debate started, the deputies spoke according to their seniority. Every important point raised by the speakers was scored by the sounding of wachafa (sling) by the person who was assigned to do this specific duty. The sounding of the wachafa was used for applauding the speaker and for counting his impressive points. It was the official registration of the valid scores (points to be taken into the "new law" and regulations). The public debate on the law served as a "practical school" for the young to learn proverbs, genealogy and local history. It was a forum for the future ambitious men to establish their reputation and the platform for the old to articulate their wisdom.¹ Each speaker was allowed a few minutes to recap and enumerate the points he forgot earlier. Once his speech was over, the president asked the assembly if there was a proposition for the law.²

Although unwritten, the Oromo law was a source of fascination. In the language there are two terms that express the concept of law. The first is ada, "custom, habit, tradition, way of life", etc., and the second is sera (or hera), the law in the real sense of the term. It is difficult to demarcate the boundary between the two. Both were kept in the "living constitution" of the nation, the hearts of the elders.³ The law seems to have embodied the spirit of unity, common identity and common internal peace. Baxter has shown that the Borana identity, unity and sense of oneness is strongly stressed in the ada. He says, "The Boran 'people' consists of all those persons who speak the Boran language, call themselves Boran and acknowledge the 'peace of Boran' ".⁴ The symbol of the law was kept in the bokku, the president's insignia of authority. In this context, the law, the national authority and the Abba Gada were interconnected by the bokku. The essence of Oromo law is expressed in the following quotation :

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1. de Salviac, Un peuple antique ... , p. 196; Asmarom Legesse, Gada : three approaches, pp. 215-220; see also Maurice Bloch, ed., Political language and oratory in traditional society, (London : 1975), pp. 50-53.
 2. de Salviac, ibid., pp. 196-7.
 3. See for instance, E. Haberland, Galla Sūd-Athiopiens, p. 204 et passim.
 4. Paul Baxter, "Social organization of the Galla ...", p. iii preface.

Sera is though not the whole of the law, the core and in a sense the symbol of it. Ada, custom, or a way of life, is however important and constantly present in peoples' awareness too diffuse a thing for the value which is attached to it to lie ritually expressed in a direct way. Sera - a more or less short list of important maxims in a memorable form, can be the object of such expression and thus act as a permanent symbol of law in the wider sense. Among these communities which lack kings, the law, like his insignia, is handed on from one Gada chief to the next, it reigns permanently, while its representatives come and go.¹

After the assembly finished "making law", the president led his Gada class and the nation in prayer. He prayed on behalf of the nation. Here the politics and the rituals intersect and overlap, one influencing and the other determining the duty of his office.² After the prayer, the president, and he alone, declared the law from the stage of piled stone which was known as daga koru sera labsu (the proclamation of the law from the stage of the piled stone). From the stage the president announced orally each article, and the assembly repeated after him in chorus, which symbolised signature. Now the law was "signed" and "passed" by the assembly. The stage of piled stones represented the supremacy of the new law. Once proclaimed it was not changed for the next eight years. From then on, the main duty of the Abba Gada (Abba Bokku) and his government was to guard and administer it.³ In the interpretation of the law, the new president was supported by legal experts known as haiyus. Throughout Oromo territory, haiyus were retired judges, who were old men. Because "old age in general was a sign of wisdom and associated with peace they contributed" to the maintenance of peace among the part of the whole. As they were recruited from the retired officers, they knew the law by heart. This underlined the importance and the continuity of the law.⁴

Finally, in the implementation of the law, the major force behind the president and his government was strong public opinion. This was during normal times. However, when the nation was on a war footing, as

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1. Virginia Luling, "Government and social control ... ", p. 87.
 2. Asmarom Legesse, Gada : Three approaches ... , p. 101.
 3. Virginia Luling, ibid., p. 89.
 4. Because of their age, political and ritual experience, legal and historical knowledge, they were also regarded as ritual experts, hence the tendency to regard them as religious leaders in the sources.

it was in the sixteenth century, we assume that it had "strong government" represented by the president. This was because it has been said that the Gada government "was suited more for the time of war than for the time of peace."¹

Circumcision - When the Gada grade was half way through its year "in power" the entire Gada class performed the circumcision ceremony collectively. Circumcision was part of the traditional religion, the mark of maturity and manhood, and the key to becoming "the man of Waqa". It was performed in the "sacred" meadow assembly where all government and ritual activities were undertaken. Circumcision was a landmark in the life of the Gada grade in one sense. After it, the role of the Gada class in the military aspect dramatically decreased, probably coming to an end by the finish of their tenure of office. When they transferred their power to the new incoming grade they retired from active political life and by extension military activities, thus becoming tarre, the council of elders. This brings to an end the part of the system which is relevant to our discussion.

In the above necessarily incomplete discussion, we have tried to show that the Gada system was a political, military and ritual institution at the same time. This complex system seems to have taken the form in which we now know it probably between the second half of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth century. Probably it was perfected under the pressure of population explosion. At its highest, the system seems to have been a unique mechanism for militarizing the Oromo society. "... It appears to have had a relatively well-defined beginning ... (with) explosive dynamism."²

Finally, we close this chapter by saying that between 1529 and 1543, when the Muslims and the Christians in north east Africa were engaged in wars of mutual destruction, the destruction that bled all white, including the sedentary agricultural Oromo who were in the zone of conflict, the pastoralists who were on the periphery of the zone pressed from within by population increase, perfected a complex system of warfare that operated on the principle of hit-and-run - a terribly effective attack

1. e.g. C.T. Beke, "On the countries south of Abyssinia", Journal of the Royal Geographical Society, vol. XIII, (1843), p. 255.

2. Asmarom Legesse, Gada : Three approaches ... , p. 159.

that unnerved the already ruined peasantry. From this it follows that the pastoral Oromo migration of the sixteenth century was part of the broader struggle between the Muslims and Christians in north-east Africa. It was also tremendously influential in the outcome.¹ The terror which the guerrilla warfare unleashed sent many tribes fleeing from the storm centre, both in the Muslim state of Harar and the Christian kingdom. This upheaval was accompanied in many cases by famine and epidemic diseases that added to the devastation. The next three chapters will discuss this process, which spread the pastoral Oromo up to the sea on the northern Somalia coast in the east, to Tigray in the north and the Sudan border in the west.

1. According to James Bruce, Travels to discover the source of the Nile, vol. III, p. 236, for the Muslim power in Harar the pastoral Oromo migration was the final blow from which that state never fully recovered. For the Christian kingdom, it has contributed more to weakening and reducing the empire than all its civil wars and foreign enemies put together.

Chapter Three

The Eastern Oromo Migration¹

The sixteenth century was one of turmoil and violent change in the Horn of Africa. This was because of two events, the jihad of Imam Ahmad and the pastoral Oromo migration. Both events were the results of processes which had been gathering momentum for over two centuries and which came to a head almost simultaneously. The jihad dramatically influenced the outcome of the Oromo migration. This was because the jihad was accompanied by warfare on a scale hitherto unwitnessed in the area. What is more, it sent different groups fleeing from the "storm centre", abandoning their ancestral homes. This process triggered off a chain reaction which spread its effects over wide areas. The dispersal of the fugitives was accompanied by carnage and destruction on an appalling scale. Many probably died from famine during the jihad and the anarchy that followed its failure. This was particularly true of the Harar and Charchar regions, which were devastated by famine and by the jihad led by Amir Nur in 1559, following which a great number of people seem to have abandoned their ancestral lands to seek refuge in difficult mountainous regions or other areas which held out hope of asylum.

... While some inhabitants fled to escape the sword, others fled famine and misery which had ruined much of the country ... In addition, aside from the war itself, mass movements and famine, epidemics played havoc in sections of the country as well. Whole villages were abandoned, the land left uncultivated and the survivors migrated to other areas in the hope of finding some means of subsistence.²

This phenomenon changed the pattern of population distribution, particularly in historical Bali, Dawaro, Hadiya and the Harar-Charchar region. Instead of a fairly even scatter of tribes, with population density varying according to the advantage of water and soil, great agglomerations of peoples emerged, often centred on relatively difficult terrain, and separated from one another by considerable tracts of virtually empty land.³

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1. The first part of this chapter deals with the Oromo migration to historical Bali, Dawaro, Hadiya and Fatagar. The second and larger part of the chapter concentrates on Oromo migration to the Harar region up to about 1600.
 2. J.A. Davis, "The sixteenth century jihad in Ethiopia and the impact on its culture", Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria, (1964) vol. iii, p. 113.
 3. For similar phenomenon, see J. Omer Cooper, The Zulu aftermath : a nineteenth century revolution in Bantu Africa, (London, 1966), pp. 1-7, et passim.

The history of the Hadiya people could be taken as a good example. These people, who now dwell in the region between Gurage and the upper Bilate river, are undoubtedly the scattered remnants of a formerly much larger ethnic complex, which probably constituted the majority of the once mighty Muslim principality called Hadiya. The history of this principality, and the people who got their ethnic name from it, were inextricably interconnected. The change in the fortunes of the former brought about an irreversible change in the fortunes of the latter. This Muslim principality, which won fame in the eastern world for its rich agricultural produce, its trade, and its large cavalry and infantry forces, and notoriety for its production of eunuchs,¹ was located "between southern Haragie, southern Arsi, and northern Bale and stretched for an unknown distance southwards into Sidamo province."² Hadiya formed the backbone of Muslim opposition against Christian domination for almost two centuries. When the victorious Imam Ahmad reached Hadiya in 1531, the Muslim ruler of the province submitted to his co-religionist without any resistance. The imam rewarded the Hadiya ruler by confirming him in his position, while the Hadiya chief cemented his tie with the imam by giving his daughter Muris as wife to Ahmad.³ Abdul-Nasir, the imam's famous general, also married the sister of a Hadiya chief, completing the marriage alliance between the ruling house of Hadiya and the jihadic leaders from Harar.⁴

After the formation of this alliance, the Hadiya people, especially the Gudela, who lived in the northern section of Dallo, left their country as auxiliaries to the above-mentioned general, who became the governor of Ganz. The Gudela occupied a new grazing area in Ganz, Kambata and Waj. It is important to note that the Gudela who left Dallo were small groups of nomads who were under the pressure of numerous other nomads. Thus, the transfer of Gudela nomads was inspired both by military and political considerations. Sections of other groups, such as the Alba and Kabana, two fractions of the Hadiya people, who occupied the area between the Charchar

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1. Al-Umari, ibn Fadl, Allah, Masalik al-Absar fi Mamlik el Amsar : pp. 1-3. See also Maqrizi, "The book of the true knowledge of the history of the kings in Abyssinia", pp. 9-10.
 2. Ulrich Braukämper, "Islamic principalities in southeast Ethiopia", EN vol. 1, no. 2, p. 15.
 3. She died a few months later.
 4. Arab Faqih, Futuh al-Habasha, p. 377.

range and eastern Arsi, joined the imam after his conquest of Dawaro. The turbulence of the jihad provoked such far-reaching migrations among the peoples of that area that the whole ethnic situation was radically altered. "A part of the Alaba and Kabana at first moved to the southwest, where they left some of their clans in Gadab and the present Sidama country".¹ Some of the Hadiya people still remember this time in their traditions as Daudi Galla (the time of dispersal, in their language). Braukämper claims that the name Galla originated from Daudi Galla,² which took place in the sixteenth century. This is historically incorrect, to say the least, since the term Galla was already in use by the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Thus, during the eventful jihadic years, Semitic and Cushitic-speaking populations from Hadiya shifted to the northwest and southwest, where some-time later they were either absorbed by the Oromo or pushed westward by them.

The Oromo migration, which started earlier, took considerable advantage of the situation created by the jihad. This was because the jihadic wars were disastrous for the defence of both the Christians and the Muslims. The Christian military colonies in the southern provinces were dislodged by the jihadic wars. These military colonies had acted as a powerful dam, which minimized the overflow of the Oromo flood. The break up of the dam at the most critical time was equally disastrous to both the Muslims and Christians. Before the Christian kingdom fully recuperated and re-established its military colonies in the southern provinces, the migrating Oromo dislodged what was left after the jihadic wars and thwarted new attempts at settlement. The regions which had been sparsely populated before the jihad were left empty by the shifting of population during the jihad. This explains why the Oromo easily overran huge areas in a short time.

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1. Ulrich Braukämper, "Islamic principalities ...", HN, vol. 1, no. 2, p. 12.
 2. Idem, Geschichte der Hadiya Süd-Ethiopiens, pp. 130-133. The author makes a few historical errors. First, he claims that the Hadiya people reached their climax by the middle of the sixteenth century by spreading to Bali, Dawaro, and Fatagar and this was presumably before the Oromo overran these provinces. As we shall soon see, by the middle of the sixteenth century, the Hadiya state itself had shrunk drastically in size, and the Oromo had already overrun Bali, Dawaro and Fatagar was under their attack. Secondly, the author connects Hadiya and Harla people, making them one people. But he does not substantiate this assertion with any concrete historical evidence. To all intents and purposes, the Hadiya and the Harla were separate people. Thirdly, he claims that the Karrayu Oromo call the Harla, the Hawasso ("the people around Awash river") The Oromo name for the River Awash is Hawash and the Oromo term Hawasho or Hawasso refers to the people who live around this river. In fact, Hawasho or Hawasso, was the general term by which the Oromo of Shawa and southwestern region were known in the land of Abba Muda during the last century. On Abba Muda, the spiritual leader of the Oromo, supra, pp. 110-6.

At the time of the sixteenth century migration, the Oromo people were divided into two major sections : Borana and Barentu. There was no such thing as a "pure" Borana or Barentu descended from a single founding father. It would seem rather that the history of the Oromo people is not a collection of histories of individual tribes or groups of tribes, but a story of fusion and interaction by which all tribes and groups had constantly been altered and transformed.¹

The Borana section of the Oromo was divided into three confederacies, namely, Tulama-Macha, the southern Borana,² and Gujji. The Tulama-Macha lived together under one chafe assembly at Harro Walabu located some 48 to 64 kilometres east of lake Margherita.³ The southern Borana lived in Tulul Wala while the Gujji lived around Harro Gerjja on both sides of the Ganale river. The migration of the southern Borana and Gujji are not discussed here, but only that of the Tulama-Macha. These migrated in two stages. During the first stage, they migrated in small numbers, while during the second stage they migrated in very large numbers. The linking thread through both stages was that their custom was to set out together to war, although after a period they eventually separated.⁴ This separation occurred only in the last quarter of the sixteenth century. Our sources are unanimous in claiming that after their migration from Harro Walabu, the two groups had a common chafe in Fatagar at a place called Oda Nabi, in Dukam, about 30 kilometres south-east of Addis Ababa. Bahrey makes a clear distinction between the first and the second stages. As for the first, he states that "the Galla came from the west and crossed the river of their country, which is called Galan, to the frontier of Bali in the time of the Hase Wang Sagad."⁵ On the basis of internal evidence this has been proved to be in 1522.

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1. Here we shall first deal with the Borana, who are not prominent in this chapter, and then with the Barentu, who are the central theme of it.
 2. As can be seen, Borana was both the name of the major section that spread to the north (Macha-Tulama) as well as the name of the group that spread over southern Ethiopia and northern Kenya. The one difference is that the Macha-Tulama section used the term Borana as the name of their common "father" in relation to the Barentu Oromo, while the southern group still use the term Borana as their own national name.
 3. C.F. Beckingham and G.W.B. Huntingford, Some Records of Ethiopia, (preface), p. lxxvi.
 4. Bahrey, in Some Records of Ethiopia, p. 112.
 5. Ibid., p. 111.

And for the second stage, he states that "those of the Borana who stayed came out of their country by way of Kuera, that was the time when Fasil attacked them and was killed by them."¹ Those who stayed behind came out of their country not by detouring several hundred kilometres towards Bali and returning once again to the west, as the earliest migrants did, but by directly pouring out of Harro Walabu and Wallal via the short and direct route through the Rift Valley to Waj and Batera Amora. This took place between 1578 and 1586, when the powerful Birmaje gada was in power. What is more, it was a section of this last Borana wave, known as Jawe,² that invaded Gamo, the homeland of Bahrey, thus forcing him to flee to the northern part of the Christian kingdom.³

Before discussing the movement of the Borana into Bali around 1522, it is necessary to examine briefly some errors which arose out of the extrapolation of the nineteenth century situation backwards into the sixteenth century and also examine some possible factors that sparked off the Borana migration.

As mentioned above, the Borana crossed the river of their country, Galana, to the frontier of Bali in 1522. Different identifications have been given to this river. Huntingford, followed by H.S. Lewis, has identified it with one of three rivers called Galana. "The first is the Galana Dulei, which flows into Lake Stefanie, the second is the Galan Sagan, which enters the Galan Dulei from the east, and the third is the Galana which enters Lake Margherita."⁴ (As can be seen from the map on p.148), all three rivers are far away from the frontiers of Bali. Hence, the attempt to identify one or all of them as the Galana of Bahrey is untenable. Merid has identified Bahrey's Galana with the Ganale Doria, or the Galana Dida, its main tributary.⁵ This identification with the Ganale is plausible, provided the reference is only to the upper Ganale. The lower Ganale is far away from historical Bali and any identification with it is untenable. An identifica-

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1. Bahrey, in Some Records of Ethiopia, p. 114.
 2. Bahrey, followed by numerous Christian chroniclers, called the Jawe "Dawe". The Oromo term Jawe is a name of a gossa ("clan") while the Amhara term dawe is a name of a very serious and incurable skin disease. According to Tasawo Merga "Senna Umatta Oromo ...", pp. 14-15, "The Oromo war on the Amhara had become an incurable skin disease with which they had to live."
 3. Since our concern here is with the first wave of Borana migration, we leave the second stage for the next chapter.
 4. G.W.B. Huntingford, in Some Records of Ethiopia, pp. lxxii-lxxiii. See also H.S. Lewis, "The Origins of Galla and Somale", Journal of African History, vol. vii (1966), p. 32.
 5. Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia and the Christian kingdom ...", p. 150.

tion with the upper Ganale would have the meaning that in the early 1520s the Borana crossed the upper part of this river and poured into the highlands of Dallo, the region inhabited by the Barentu.

Why did the Borana groups migrate to Bali, a province which was well defended,¹ instead of descending into the wide plains of the Rift Valley, a region well endowed with pasturage and water - the two essential items which pastoral Oromo wanted for their cattle? What is more, the Rift Valley was more convenient both for attack and retreat. The second wave of Borana (1578-1586) directly followed this path. In the light of these advantages, it is puzzling to see why the Borana migrated to Bali in the 1520s. Secondly, what sparked off the Borana migration at this time?

It is very difficult to give satisfactory scientific explanations to these crucial questions. Many scholars assume that both the Borana and Barentu migrated from west of Ganale to Bali at this time. However, we have already shown in the previous chapter that the Barentu lived east of the Ganale river. Besides, Bahrey's specific reference to the Borana coming to the frontier of Bali in 1522 excludes the Barentu section. So far two explanations have been given to the two questions raised above.

... It is probable that the migration of various peoples from Ifat, Adal, the Charchar-Harar highlands and the Danakil lowlands into the central plateau had forced a southward dislocation of the peoples of Hadiya, Kambata, Gamo and Kuera. This may also account for the fact that the Galla took the more difficult route through Bali, since at least until the wars of Ahmad Granh it was a well-defended province.²

In the above explanation, the dislocation of the various Cushitic and Semitic-speaking groups due to the jihad is claimed to have sparked off the Borana migration. However, this seems to be an anachronistic application of the situation in the 1530-1540s for that of the early 1520s. The explanation also fails to show how the dislocated and dispersed groups were able to put serious pressure on the people who would eventually engulf the powerful Christian kingdom and Muslim state. Secondly, other scholars claim that the Borana were forced to change their course of migration due to the resistance of the Sidama people in general and that of the Walamo state in particular. Of all the numerous Cushitic-speaking groups who were collectively, but wrongly, classified as "Sidama"³ there is only one group which

1. Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia and the Christian kingdom...", p. 156

2. Ibid.

3. The term Sidama was of Oromo origin. It means non-Oromo. It has all sorts of connotations.

has Sidama as the eponym. We use the term Sidama only with specific reference to this people here.

The Sidama people now dwell between Lake Abbaya, Lake Awasa and the upper Ganale. Originally, they were supposed to have had Bali as their ancestral home. Cerulli, followed by many others argued that the ancestors of the Sidama people were driven out from the north of the present province of Bale by the Oromo, thus migrating westward to their present dwelling areas.¹ However, this is incorrect. In fact, an opposite argument has been presented recently by Stanley, who claims that the Sidama people themselves pushed the Oromo from the highlands on the upper Ganale. In other words, where Cerulli makes Bali the ancestral home of the Sidama people, Stanley believes that the Sidama people lived outside historical Bali. Where Cerulli claims that the migrating Oromo expelled the ancestors of the Sidama from Bali, Stanley believes that the Sidama by pushing the Oromo from the highlands on the upper Ganale provided an important stimulus to their great expansion.² In short, where Cerulli makes the migrating Oromo the cause for the exodus of the ancestors of Sidama from Bali, Stanley believes that the fleeing Sidama themselves sparked off the Oromo migration. Some aspects of Stanley's argument seem partly correct. Partly, because there is evidence that the ancestors of the Sidama, who were fleeing from the storm centre following the failure of the jihad,³ assimilated Oromo groups such as the Hofa on the upper Ganale.⁴ The assimilated Oromo groups seem to have been either isolated groups or the remnants of those Oromo who earlier migrated towards Bali and beyond between 1522 and 1546.⁵ The other part of Stanley's argument does not stand on firm historical ground. First, the Oromo migration started before the jihad, though it was dramatically influenced by its consequences. Secondly, Stanley fails to explain how the divided and disunited small groups were able to put pressure on the Oromo, who unquestionably were larger and possessed the very effective Gada system that

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1. E. Cerulli, Studi etiopici I : la lingua e la storia di Harar, p. 2.
 2. S. Stanley, "History of the Sidama", MS, p. 19, cited in Braukämper, "Islamic principalities in southeast Ethiopia ...", EN, vol. I, no. ii, pp. 25-26.
 3. This may have taken place after 1543 in general and 1545 in particular, since the death of Abbas marked the end of a larger Islamic state in the southern region.
 4. Tasawo Merga, "Senna Umatta Oromo ...", pp. 6-8.
 5. On the Oromo migration to Bali and beyond between 1522 and 1546, *infra*, pp. 157-65.

mobilized all the able bodied men for warfare. It was the possession of this system which seems to have enabled the Oromo not only to conquer, but also easily to turn an enemy into an ally and partner in warfare through the practice of adoption, to be mentioned further in our discussion.¹ What is more, it was from the Oromo, according to Braukämper, that the Sidama adopted the Gada system. Third, and most important, the Sidama people, who are the amalgam of thirteen small groups did not form one ethnic body before 1650. There was no Sidama people to speak of in the 1520s.²

As for the strength of the Walamo state, which prevented the Borana migration directly to the north through the Rift Valley, it is stated that "fortifications were made on the frontier as a defence against the Galla. Ruins of some of them remain north of Lake Margherita between the rivers Wayo and Bilate and elsewhere."³ This again is an extrapolation of the eighteenth and nineteenth century situation into the early sixteenth century for the simple reason that there was no Walamo state at that time. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, Walamo, which the indigenous people popularly call Walayita, was part of the Christian kingdom. There is in fact an indication that one of the founders of the Walayita dynasty, which claims a Tigray origin, "may have been a renegade leader of an isolated group of Christian settlers cut off by the collapse of the empire in the south".⁴ The Walayita state, which was founded sometime between 1650 and 1700, centred around Kendo, from where it started expanding in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This state, like the Oromo Gibe states of the last century, was separated from its neighbours by strips of uncleared forest known as mogga (border land in Oromo language) where only outlaws and wild beasts lived. Like the contemporary kings of the Gibe states, the Walayita kings built trenches and walls to defend their boundaries from their neighbours. Of all the kings of Walayita, Damote, a famous nineteenth century king, is reported to have built bigger ditches and trenches to defend the land he won from Kambata and the Arsi Oromo.⁵ It is some of these fortifications of the

1. *Infra*, pp. 155-7.

2. Ulrich Braukämper, "The ethnogenesis of the Sidama", *Abbay* (1978), Cahier no. 9, p. 128.

3. Huntingford, in *Some Records of Ethiopia*, Preface, p. lxvi.

4. Tsehai Berhane Selassie, "The question of Damot and Walamo", *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, vol. 13 (1975), pp. 41-42.

5. The numerous wars the kings of Walayita conducted against the Arsi Oromo during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are depicted by Tasawo Menga, "Senna Umatta Oromo ... ", pp. 113-114.

nineteenth century, one of which was observed by Azais and Chambard in the 1920s north of Lake Abaya,¹ which are supposed to have prevented the Borana from migrating in that direction early in the sixteenth century.

Very recently another hypothesis which attempts to explain why the Borana did not directly migrate via the Rift Valley to Waj was put forward by Braukämper. According to him :

... The homeland of the Oromo could ... be identified as the highland area between the Darassa country and the upper Dawa in the west and the Ganale valley in the east ... In the north, notably in the region of the Awata head-waters, the Oromo were bordered by presumably rather densely populated domiciles of peoples of Hadiya-Sidama stock who prevented them from taking a direct northward route of expansion and induced them to turn to north-east via Dallo.²

Braukämper's view may be partially correct. Hadiya groups lived west of the Urgoma mountain range, in Gadab and Dallo, the western parts of the present province of Bale. Probably together with the support of the Christian military colonies, the Hadiya people may have helped to force the Borana to change the direction of their migration. However, other parts of Braukämper's argument suffer from serious shortcomings. First and foremost, the argument is based on an inaccurate reading of Bahrey. The author wants us to believe that according to Bahrey's text "the two main fractions of the Oromo, the Borana and Barentu, invaded the Ethiopian province of Bali from the west."³ But we know that Bahrey specifically mentioned only Borana. Second and equally important, the argument incorrectly assumes that "the fission into the two main fractions of the northern Oromo, Borana and Barentu, took place in Dallo."⁴ This assumed fission, we are told, took place between 1522, when they first invaded Bali, and 1530, when they presumably made their sera (triballaw) to invade the territory of the Christian empire at a place called Koss on the boundary between Dallo and Bali.⁵ This is historically incorrect, to say the least. The fission between

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1. Azais and Chambard, Cinq années de recherches archéologiques en Ethiopie, p. 272.
 2. Ulrich Braukämper, "Oromo country of origin : a reconsideration of hypothesis", unpublished paper presented to the fifth international conference of Ethiopian studies held at Tel-Aviv University, April 1980, p. 8. Idem, Geschichte der Hadiya Süd-Ethiopiens, pp. 136-139. Idem, "Islamic principalities in southeast Ethiopia ... ", ENN, vol. I, no. 2, pp. 27-28.
 4. Ibid., p. 8.
 5. Ibid., p. 7.

Borana and Barentu was a phenomenon of long standing which probably took several centuries to complete and certainly not ten or twenty years. Thirdly, also, this conclusion is based on the incorrect notion that the Oromo entered into documented history only in 1522.¹

The above explanation only attempts to answer unsatisfactorily the question why the Borana migrated to Bali. As to what sparked off the Borana migration, very little has been said. We now turn to Borana tradition itself in the hope that it may answer both questions.

Among the Borana, both in Ethiopia and northern Kenya, there is a strange legend which is difficult to explain. However, it holds the key to the understanding of a number of complicated questions. Stranger still, this legend, which has the appearance of national distribution among the Borana, is totally unknown among the Barentu Oromo. This is the legend of Liqimssa (the swallow), which is set in Walabu. Among the Borana the legend is widespread.² There are two contradictory episodes in it. On the one hand it is said that Walabu, the original home of the Borana people, was the land of plenty (milk, meat, butter and blood), peace and fertility. "It is the land of Abba Muda, where white cattle yielded so much milk and meat that men neither ploughed nor sowed". In this ideal land, which is characterized in the legend as "heaven on earth", the Borana lived in happiness under one Abba Bokku. On the other hand, this legend claims that the people left their "blessed" Walabu because of a "cursed" beast that ate men one by one. There is no particular name for this strange beast that could change its shape. It was called Liqimssa. The noun liqimssa is derived from the Oromo verb liqimssu meaning to swallow, to finish, or to destroy in the sense of wiping out every thing. It has also the implication of "hunger" in the sense that everything is "swallowed" by some powerful thing and therefore there is nothing left to eat. The concept embodied in the term is that hunger is an evil against which one cannot fight. "The beast

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1. Braukämper, "Oromo country of origin ...", p. 5. As we have already shown in Chapter One and will soon show again, the Oromo entered documented history much earlier than Braukämper suspects.
 2. E. Cerulli, Etiopia occidentale, vol. I & II, pp. 169-172; Idem, Somalia-Scritti vari editi ed inediti (Roma : 1964), vol. II, pp. 127. See also, Yelma Deressa, Ya Ityopya tarik, p. 212; B.W. Andrejewski, "Ideas about warfare in Borana Galla stories and fables", African language studies, III (1962), p. 127; Beckingham and Huntingford, in Some Records of Ethiopia, Preface, p. lxxvi; V. Grottanelli, "The peopling of the Horn of Africa" in H. Neville Chittick and Robert L. Rotberg (eds), East Africa and the Orient : cultural synthesis in pre-colonial times, p. 55.

eats men one by one and men cannot fight against it. So they run away from the beast."¹ Cerulli interpreted this legend as the "Somali pressure" on the Oromo, which forced the latter to abandon "their original home" in the central part of southern Somalia and to migrate to Ethiopia.² However, it has already been made abundantly clear that the theory of "Somali pressure" does not have any historical support.³ Huntingford, without contradicting Cerulli's interpretation, substitutes his "Somali pressure" by "Sidama pressure".⁴ The question of "Sidama pressure" is equally untenable as shown above. The absence of the "Somali and Sidama pressures" tempt one to interpret the legend as either "the pressure from the powerful Christian kingdom", most probably between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, when the warrior Christian kings were expanding the frontiers of their state in all directions, notably in the southern region, where their country bordered on the land inhabited by the Oromo people. Some sections of the Borana may have been the victims of the Christian state's southward expansion. This interpretation becomes plausible if we look at it in the light of an element in the legend, which seems to suggest a pressure of long standing, from the powerful "beast" that forced them to flee their country. Or the legend could equally be interpreted as "some kind of natural or ecological disaster". The natural disaster may have been war, with its far-reaching consequences, or it may even have been rinderpest that caused havoc to the animal and human population, or it may even have been an epidemic or a combination of some of the above factors. Whatever it was, the term liqimssa refers to an "invincible" force beyond one's control, be it warfare or famine, both causing catastrophic consequences.

It seems that liqimssa was a concentrated and dramatic retelling of a long history of "crises" that crystallized in a single event, the catastrophe caused by the "cursed beast".

The pressures of hard times and the opportunities of happier periods are reflected in historical demography like images in a camera obscura. The picture always needs interpretation and may lack the polychrome

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1. Andrejewski, "Ideas about warfare ..." in African language Studies III, p. 127; Grottanelli, "The peopling of the Horn of Africa" in Chittick and Rotberg (eds) East Africa and the Orient ... p. 55.
 2. E. Cerulli, Etiopia occidentale, vol. I & II, pp. 169-172.
 3. *Supra*, p. 76.
 4. Huntingford, in Some Records of Ethiopia, Preface, p. lxxvi.

fullness of historical reality, but it forms a clear and dependable outline, to which colour may be added as the population characteristics are related to their social and economic setting.¹

Finally, our interpretation of this strange Borana legend as the "pressure of the powerful Christian state", is strengthened by some valid historical records. We have already referred to the Fra Mauro's Galla river, which we have tried to identify with the headwaters of the Wabi Shabelle.² P. Zurla in his study of Fra Mauro's map of 1460, concludes that "the people described as fierce enemies of the Christians and located south of the Galla river were the Galla themselves."³ This important conclusion which demonstrates the presence of some Oromo groups on the border with the Christian kingdom just south of the province of Waj would have this meaning. By the first half of the fifteenth century, the Borana from their base in Walabu had already embarked on their migration to the north via the short route. However, the Christian defence system in the Rift Valley seems to have frustrated their migration at this stage. This conclusion is also supported by information from another source.⁴ What both conclusions have in common is that the presence of the Borana on the border with the Christian kingdom not only shows the persistent struggle between the Christian military colonists and the Oromo, but also hints at the possibility that as the Christian state checked the northward migration of pastoral Oromo, the latter may have slowed down the process of the Christian state's expansion to the south. The garrisoning of the frontier provinces did not totally stop the northward migration, since some elements of the Barentu section continued streaming to the north from the direction of Bali. In other words, the Borana were unable to migrate via the short route to the north while the Barentu did so. As a result, instead of directly migrating via the short route to the north, the Borana turned towards Bali. The main reasons why the Barentu Oromo were able to migrate, while the Borana were not, seem to have been twofold. First, the Barentu section lived in and spread over a huge area in and south of the province of Bali, and it was almost impossible to control their movement over such wide territory, while

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1. E.A. Wrigley, Population and History, (London : 1969), p. 28.
 2. See Chapter One, p. 41.
 3. P. Zurla, Il Mappamondo di Fra Mauro comaldolese, p. 136. Translation by Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia and the Christian kingdom ... ", pp. 149-150.
 4. Yelma Deressa, Ya Ityopya Tarik, p. 225.

the Borana movement through the narrow Rift Valley could easily be and was effectively controlled by the Christian defence establishments. Secondly, the Barentu were larger than the Borana, and consequently the former were stronger than the latter. This becomes clear from the fact that by the time of the sixteenth century migration, the Borana had three confederacies, although not yet full-fledged, while the Barentu had seven full-fledged confederacies. This means the Barentu were larger; and in a pastoral society large size means proportional strength. It is clear from our sources, that the Borana were not able to migrate directly to the north because the many Christian garrisons in the Rift Valley proved an impregnable wall for the weak Borana. Once that wall was demolished by the jihadic dynamite the Borana migrated to the north directly, without having recourse to the long detour, devastating the small Christian colonists in Waj and other provinces.¹

The beginning of the Barentu migration

The major sixteenth century migration was begun by the Barentu, and the Borana who migrated to Bali fought not in their own name to win a new territory for themselves, as they did after 1570, but only as a part of the Barentu confederacy. In other words, the Borana who joined the Barentu in the early phase of the migration fought as volunteers and adventurers who rallied to the call of their brothers. It seems that when the news of the Barentu migration reached Walabu, it stirred the Borana warriors to go and join them in the adventure.² From this it follows that during the first phase of the migration, the officers of the two major sections met, discussed the route to follow, and promised to help each other against the common enemy. This practice seems to have lasted up to the 1580s, before they began fighting each other over resources.³

As indicated earlier, the members of the Barentu confederacy lived east of the Ganale river in what is today the Bale province. They lived in two places. A section composed of three full-fledged confederacies lived in the highlands of Bale, with their common chafe at Bareda Kurkurittu, around

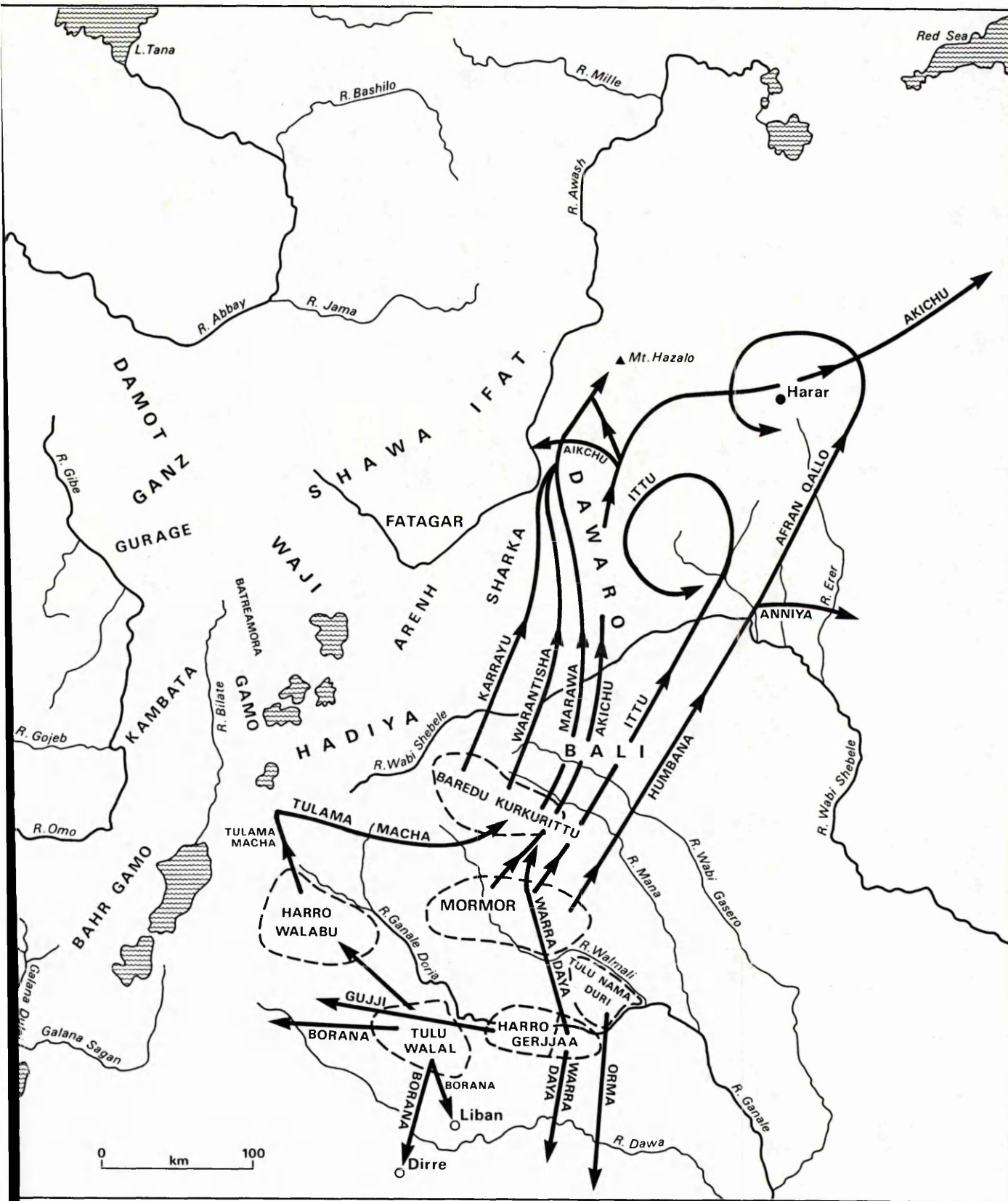
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1. *Infra*, pp. 242-4, 322.
 2. Yelma Deressa, Ya Ityopya Tarik, p. 228.
 3. *Infra*, pp. 328, 343-5.

the upper Ganale, the region which Haberland describes as the original home of the Arsi Oromo.¹ In all likelihood his conclusion is correct. It was from Bareda Kurkurittu that one section migrated to the lowlands of Bale, due to the transhumant nature of their economy. At first, those who lived in the highlands and lowlands seem to have had a common chafe at Bareda Kurkurittu. However, with the march of time, the importance and influence of the local chafe seems to have increased at the expense of the central chafe and the political and the ritual units were split up, each division becoming a confederacy with its own central chafe. Thus for all practical purposes, by the sixteenth century, there was no common chafe for all the Barentu. Instead there were three central chafes - one in the highlands and two in the lowlands of what is today Bale province. This explains why they migrated in two different directions, and why after the migration one section of the Barentu were sending their representatives to the spiritual leader at Dallo, in the lowlands of the present Bale province, while the other section were sending theirs to the spiritual leader at Bareda Kurkurittu in the highlands of Bale.





At least by the sixteenth century three major confederacies had one central chafe at Bareda Kurkurittu. These were the Karrayu, Marawa and Warantisha (Arsi). The Karrayu, who spearheaded the sixteenth century migration, are traditionally regarded as the first "son" of Barentu. Karrayu in turn had six "sons". These were Liban, the most powerful of all the Oromo according to Asma Giyorgis,² with its own numerous divisions and subdivisions. Wallo, another equally powerful group, Jele, Obo, Suba and Bala. All of these six "sons" of Karrayu were already independent confederacies by the time of Bahrey. Marawa, the second "son" of Barentu, had three "sons". These were Anna Uru, and Abati. Warantisha, from warrana spear (the warrior) so known for their fighting capacity, which is still proverbial among all Oromo, was popularly called Arsi, and formed the single largest and most powerful Oromo group. It spread over a huge territory. A section of Arsi spread to the northern and western part of the Christian kingdom, while the rest spread over three provinces in southern Ethiopia. It was these groups with their central chafe in the highlands of Bali that opened the theatre of sixteenth century migration.

1. E. Haberland, Galla Süd-Ethiopiens, see his map on p. 6.

2. Asma Giyorgis, Ya Galla Tarik, p. 30.



Map 4. THE BEGINNING OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY PASTORAL OROMO MIGRATION.

Migration route 
 Homelands 
 Important centres for Southern Borani 
 City 

The second central chafe, for the other sections of the Barentu, was located at Mormor in Dallo, in the lowlands of the present Bale, on the boundary between Dallo and historical Bali. To the chafe at Mormor belonged three major divisions, that migrated both to the north and east. These were the Akichu, the largest and the most powerful of this division. A section of the Akichu, that spearheaded the eastern migration eventually reached the sea coast in northern Somalia.¹ Another section of the Akichu migrated to the north through Dawaro, Fatagar and Amhara. Together with the Karrayu, Marawa and Arsi, the Akichu were the scourge of the Christian kingdom as well as the Muslim state of Harar. The second division at Mormor was Ittu, and the third Humbana. These three groups migrated to the Charchar-Harar region.

The Warra Daya was the seventh confederacy of the Barentu section. By the time of Bahrey, it was a very powerful and independent group which extended to the Christian kingdom in the north, to Harar region in the east, and to what is today northern Kenya in the south. The Warra Daya had its own central chafe in the lowlands of Dallo, by the side of river Ganale, at a place called Harro Gerjjaa.²

A few important points can be concluded from what has been said about migration. First, in the sixteenth century the pastoral Oromo migrated not in one direction, as is usually supposed, but in all directions. This massive migration in different directions may be taken as an unmistakable indication of the increase in population by the beginning of the sixteenth century. Secondly, on the eve of the major migration, not all the Oromo were under a common chafe assembly. Instead there were different central chafes, each with its own separate gada laws. The laws of different groups, in the final analysis, came under the two categories of either Barentu or Borana law. For instance, if Arsi and Humabana quarrelled, their dispute was settled according to Barentu law, since both were the "children" of Barentu. This was in regard to blood price, which varied according to the degree of relationship. The same goes for the Borana.³ Whether it was

1. *Infra*, p. 214.

2. Tasawo Merga, "Senna Umatta Oromo", pp. 8-12. According to this source, the Gujji and the Warra Daya lived in the same region, though they did not have a common chafe assembly. As we have already indicated, the Warra Daya belonged to the Barentu, while the Gujji belonged to the Borana section.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

due to this law or otherwise, the "children" of Barentu generally migrated in one direction, and lived near to one another. This was also true of Borana.¹

Finally, on the eve of the sixteenth century migrations, some sections of Barentu lived within historical Bali, while others lived within its immediate environs. The old Bali was located in the northern-eastern part of the present province, of the same name, between the Urgoma mountain range and the eastern Wabi bend. It was "bordered in the north by Dawaro, and Sharka, in the west by Hadiya, in the east by Adal and Dawaro, and in the south by regions which cannot be specified."² According to Braukämper, the major part of Bali territory was situated south of the Wabi Shabelle river, while Huntingford claims that the major part of Bali was situated north of the river.³ Both of these scholars claim that the Oromo lived outside of historical Bali. They even did not suspect that a pastoral society which was not subject to any law, save its own, could and did cross into a neighbouring territory earlier than the written record tells us. Cerulli, followed by Trimmingham, has extended the southward frontier of Bali up to the Ganale, which includes the lowlands of Dallo.⁴ If this is accepted, the entire Barentu Oromo seem to have been either within the old Bali or its immediate surroundings. However, it is very doubtful whether historical Bali had exercised any authority in the lowlands of Dallo. What is more, during the jihad, when Bali played a role as a strategically important theatre of the operations, there is no indication in Futuh al-Habasha that the Muslims had penetrated to the lowlands. Nevertheless, this is not to imply that the lowlands of Bale were not under the direct ideological influence of historical Bali.

With the sources so far at our disposal it is by no means easy to describe the beginning of the process of Barentu migration. The Christian chronicles are silent on the region south of historical Bali. However, it is hinted in these Christian chronicles, that the pressure of the Oromo on Bali increased even in the fifteenth century. For instance during the reign

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1. Tasawo Merga, "Senna Umatta Oromo", p. 12.
 2. Ulrich Braukämper, "Islamic principalities ... ", EN, vol. I, no. 2, p. 25
 3. G.W.B. Huntingford, tr. The Glorious Victories of Amda-Siyon, King of Ethiopia, p. 22.
 4. E. Cerulli, Studi etiopici II : la lingua e la storia dei Sidamo, p. 3. See also J.S. Trimmingham, Islam in Ethiopia, p. 67.

of Baeda-Maryam (1468-1478), the Christian governor of Bali, a certain Jan Zeg, is reported to have led an expedition into unknown country where he was killed with all his forces.¹ The crucial question is, where was this unknown country? It is very difficult to believe that either Adal, Hadiya, Dawaro or Sharka, the Muslim principalities that bordered with Bali on the east, north and west were unknown to the writers of the Christian chronicles. The most likely region which could not be known to the chroniclers was the region south of Bali. In such a case the account would mean that Christian governor of Bali led an expedition against the pastoral Oromo who lived in the lowlands south of the old Bali during the reign of Baeda-Maryam. This interpretation is reinforced by another piece of information which comes from the same reign. According to this version, during the reign of Baeda-Maryam, a certain "Franji" (white man) painted the picture of Mary and Christ which deeply irritated the Christian population.² As a result, the Gallas came, destroyed the picture, killed the priests and took men and women captive. On the surface, this tradition which links the Oromo attack with an offensive painting is nothing more than a legend. But beneath the legendary appearance, it reflects a concrete historical reality. As it stands, it lacks fullness of historical meaning, but it forms a clear and dependable outline to which

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1. R. Basset, "Etudes sur l'histoire d'Ethiopie", Première partie : Chronique Ethiopienne, d'après un manuscrit de la Bbl. Nat. de Paris. (Extrait du journal Asiatique, ser. 7, vol. xviii (1881), pp. 96, 139. (Hereafter cited as Basset, Journal Asiatique)
 2. There is reason to believe that the Oromo pressure on the southern Christian provinces especially Bali, at this time got its crystallisation in the theological dispute that characterized the reign of Baeda-Maryam. ... A Venetian painter ... (whose) skill was greatly appreciated ... was commissioned by the king to decorate the walls of many churches with his paintings. One of his pictures, a virgin and child, caused a great commotion. According to western convention he painted the infant Christ on the virgin's left arm. Now the left arm is in the Near East considered less honourable than the right, and the clergy raised a great outcry, declaring that our Lord was dishonoured and demanding that the picture be destroyed H.M. Jones and Elizabeth Monroe, A History of Ethiopia, (Oxford : the Clarendon Press, 1955), p. 58.

the story of the above-mentioned governor of Bali, has to be added so as to give a true historical picture. What is interesting about the tradition is that, when in the third year of his reign Baeda-Maryam quarrelled with a certain Tewodros (a religious man) the latter is supposed to have called the Galla for help. From this reference, Basset concludes that the Galla were in the Christian kingdom in the fifteenth century.¹ By the beginning of the sixteenth century, the pressure was already building up. In fact it has been said that the Oromo attacked Bali in 1514, eight years before the date of Bahrey's history.² This is supported by information from other sources.³ In fact, the chronicle of Libna Dingil makes a clear reference to the Oromo arrival early in his reign.⁴ The manner in which this was reported in the chronicle leaves no shadow of doubt that the Christian administration was worried by the Oromo pressure building up in the southern provinces. "By the early 1520s, Libna Dingil's camp was nearly always to be found in the southwestern Provinces (sic)⁵ of his kingdom ... It is possible that the king's presence in the area was necessitated by mounting Galla pressure from the south ...".⁶ One author claims that Libna Dingil's victory over Mahfuz in 1516 strengthened the Christian defence, thus deterring the Oromo migration.⁷ This probably may not be far from the truth. It seems the new self-confidence which the Christians gained by this victory,⁸ may have contributed towards checking the Barentu migration. This, and a number of other points to be discussed shortly, indicate that the Barentu were well informed about the situation both in the Christian kingdom and the Muslim state of Harar. What must be remembered is that the early Oromo

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1. R. Basset, "Etudes sur l'histoire d'Ethiopie", Journal Asiatique, pp. 96, 139.
 2. Yelma Deressa, Ya Ityopya Tarik, p. 226.
 3. A. d'Abbadie, Nouv. Acq. Fran. No. 21300, folio 785.
 4. See Huntingford's "Historical Geography of Ethiopia", p. 111.
 5. Probably the author means south-eastern provinces.
 6. M. Abir, Ethiopia and the Red Sea : the Rise and decline of the Solomonic dynasty and Muslim-European rivalry in the region, (London : Frank Cass, 1980), p. 86.
 7. Yelma Deressa, ibid.
 8. Mahfuz, as we saw in Chapter One, was the scourge of Dawaro, Bali and Fatagar from 1490 to 1516.

military confrontation both with the Christians and Muslims in Bali followed essentially the traditional methods of border raids by the neighbouring nomads, raids which were intended for booty and enlarging grazing grounds. This may have also encouraged the apparent lack of seriousness displayed at first towards the Oromo, both by the Christian governors of Bali and the Muslim leaders who replaced them by 1530.

However, this does not mean that Muslim rulers were not pre-occupied by the Oromo pressure on Bali. In fact, there is internal evidence within the Futuh al-Habasha itself, which shows that the jihadic leaders in response to the Oromo pressure on the Hadiya nomads, were forced to transfer the latter to Ganz, Kambata and Waj.¹ The transfer was inspired both by military and political considerations. The Muslim leaders from Harar, who seem to have had a long experience of the pressure which a powerful nomadic group could exert on their weaker neighbours, probably thought that the transfer of the weak group(s) was the remedy for easing the tension. However, the transfer backfired. Instead of easing the tension, it actually thinned the Hadiya population so much that those remaining were easily absorbed by the Oromo.

We assume that following the defeat of the Christian forces in Bali in 1532, the defence of the province was broken irreparably. This created a situation in which the Barentu groups were able to pour northwards, north-eastwards and north-westwards into Bali during the early phase of the jihad. Following this, it seems that an extraordinary process of assimilation took place, by which the Oromo tribes assimilated weak Hadiya nomadic groups. In certain areas strong Hadiya nomadic groups probably absorbed numerically weak Oromo clans, but were Oromized in the process. The settled cultivators also underwent Oromization, but they kept their distinctive Islamic ways of life, by which they superficially Islamized the Oromo, at least in name.² At this stage in their migration, the pastoral Oromo seem to have manifested unique characteristics of adaptability. They easily adapted themselves into another environment and coalesced with indigenous people, and at the

1. Arab Faqih, Futuh al-Habasha, p. 377 et passim.

2. Several genealogies of Wallo and Harar Oromo lineages begin with Muslim names, a fact which shows that the Oromo had absorbed Muslims in the course of their migration.

same time they imparted their language and the complex Gada system, which eventually replaced the Islam of Hadiya. The desire to participate in the spoils of the two states may have attracted various non-Oromo groups to join the aggressive Oromo bands. An unusual aspect of Oromization was that many of the absorbed groups were nomads. Gada, as a pastoral institution, facilitated the process. The Oromo genius for assimilation quickly claimed any non-Oromo, defeated or otherwise.¹

An important institution within the Gada system, which seems to have facilitated the process of the migration, was the process called mogassa (adoption). One form of mogassa is known as gudefach (to adopt a child as a foster parent). This still exists. Traditionally, the adopted son was looked upon as a real son,² and he enjoyed all rights of a true son. Even if foster parents got a son of their own after they had adopted a son, the first remained angafa (the oldest son) with all the rights and privileges.³ The second form of adoption, which has special relevance to our subject, is known as mogassa, adoption into a clan or tribe. The adopted individual or group could be either Oromo,⁴ or non-Oromo. The adoption was undertaken by the Abba Gada on behalf of his gossa (clan, tribe or confederacy).⁵ Before adoption, animal(s) were slaughtered and a knife was dipped in the blood of the victim and planted in the assembly composed of the elders of the gossa and the representatives of other gossas. Then the Abba Gada said a prayer blessing the new members and the adopted individual or groups

1. *Infra*, pp. 156-7.

2. Unfortunately, tradition speaks only of males within the category of those adopted. It appears as if girls were not adopted. But this is not true; girls or women too were adopted.

3. Tasawo Merga, "Senna Umatta Oromo", p. 78.

4. Apart from these two forms of adoption, there was also another form, which was more of protection.

... There was also a form of adoption called kolu, which only applied to Oromo. Those who were adopted by kolu were men who deliberately left their home and went to a man in another lineage and demanded to be adopted ... When the run-away had chosen such a man he went to his house and kneeled in front of him and said 'kolu', save me, help me, keep me, and the other man had to give him full protection and keep him in his house. Jan Hultin, "Man and land in Wallega, Ethiopia", Working papers of the Department of Social Anthropology, University of Gothenburg, (1977), No. 10, pp. 19-20.

5. e.g. The journals of C.W. Isenberg and J.L. Krapf, p. 256.

touched the knife planted in the assembly repeating in chorus what the Abba Gada had to say. "I hate what you hate, I like what you like, I fight whom you fight, I go where you go, I chase whom you chase", etc..¹ This oath was binding and "unbreakable" on both sides. The adopted groups now became collectively the "sons" of the gossa. The blood symbolized the brotherly unity of the gossa and its new "sons" and the knife symbolized the readiness of the gossa to fight for the right of its new members, while the new members pledged themselves to fight for the rights and the cause of their new gossa. By this oath of mutual responsibility and obligation, clans or tribes quickly enlarged their members, while the weak Oromo or non-Oromo groups gained both protection and material benefit. Material benefit, because at the time of adoption the clan contributed whatever was available for the support of new members. Any property or cattle given to the adopted members were considered as andura² and therefore untouchable by others. Andura means umbilical cord, and in this sense it is a special gift which a father gives to his son at his birth. This is the only property over which the son has full authority before the death of his father. However, in the case of adoption, andura symbolized a father-son relationship between the clan and its new members. Thus mogassa was inspired by political, military and economic considerations on both sides. This may explain why the Oromo assimilated more than they were assimilated by others. After adoption, the concept of belonging was extended to include not only the clan that adopted, but also to the tribe or confederacy to which the clan belonged. Through the new genealogy, the new members now became part of the Oromo people, counting their ancestors several generations back to the hypothetical founder of the confederacy.

What all this amounts to is that Oromo tribes were fluid groupings : some members were lost and others incorporated through the continual process of migration, conquest, assimilation and interaction with their neighbours. Thus there was no such thing as a "pure" Oromo derived from a single founding father. It would seem to us that the history of the Oromo people is not a collection of histories of individual tribes or groups of

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1. Tasawo Merga, "Senna Umatta Oromo", p. 78.
 2. Ibid. See also, Angelo Mizzi, Cenni Etnografici Galla ossia organizzazione civile, Usi e costumi Oromonici, p. 82; Idem, Semplici constatazioni filologico-etnologiche Galla, pp. 62-63.

tribes, but a story of fusion and interaction by which all tribes and groups had constantly altered and transformed. This was made possible by the fact that the migrant Oromo speakers seem to have been especially well equipped with qualities that made the adjustment of their own culture to new conditions easy. If any features seem to have been widespread among the Oromo speaking groups at this time "it was their flexibility among new peoples, their ability to adopt and to absorb".¹

This explains why adoption was accompanied by Oromization. The wide dispersal of the pastoral Oromo from the southern region was mainly responsible for the Oromization which embraced many tribes. Oromo nomads absorbed Cushitic and Semitic-speaking tribes as clients or serfs (gabbaro) into their tribal structure. The importance of adoption is that it brought gada from the periphery into the centre of communal life for the new members.² The Oromo pastoralists penetrated easily and assimilated quickly where there were already pockets of Oromo-speaking communities. This was particularly true of old Bali, Dawaro, Hadiya, Waj and other provinces. Finally, by the time the first huge wave of Oromo migration was under way, the following picture was observable. The different Cushitic and Semitic-speaking peoples who formerly fought each other under the flag of either Islam or Christianity for two centuries had now reached the stage where they had to fight for a new flag that opposed both. The population of Bali, Dawaro and Hadiya, with their warlike habits, who had earlier furnished "volunteers, warriors of the faith" who defended the frontiers of either the Christian or Muslim states, now furnished warriors and not "volunteers", who fought not for the defence of the frontiers of the states but for the destruction of those states.

According to the chronology of the Oromo migration recorded by Bahrey, it was during the period of the Melbah. gada (1522-1530) that the Borana invaded Bali. Since the last part of the Melbah's years in office coincided with the period of major confrontation between the Christians and

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1. I have drawn on D.W. Cohen, "Two speakers" in Zamani : A survey of East African History, ed. B.A. Ogot (Nairobi : 1974), pp. 136-149.
 2. Although the adopted members were excluded from holding the office of Abba Gada, and from sending pilgrims to the spiritual father in the southern region they fully participated in the assembly as well as in other ritual activities.

the Muslims, the Oromo seem to have consciously avoided the zone of conflicts. They do not appear to have harassed either Muslims or Christians. What they did was probably no more than to dislodge a few isolated communities. Since Bali was the theatre of jihadic operations between 1529 and 1532, the pressure from pastoral Oromo was probably limited.

During the time when the Mudana gada was in power (1530-1538), the Oromo crossed the Wabi. The reference is certainly to the Shabelle, which means the northern "frontier of Bali proper".¹ The inference from this is that by this time the pastoral Oromo had already overrun the province of Bali. Two factors could have made that possible. First, after the fall of Dawaro to the Muslims in August 1532, the Christian force was wiped out by Wazir Adole, the Muslim general who became the first governor of Bali.² Second, once the people accepted Islam, the Muslim leader leaving behind only skeletal force, moved on to the central and northern parts of the Christian kingdom. The Muslim leaders, who were accustomed to pastoral raids in their own country did not develop any coherent policy towards the troublesome Oromo in Bali, whether by involving them in large numbers in their jihadic wars, or by containing them in that province. On the contrary, they hastily deported some Hadiya nomads from the zone of conflict. This not only thinned the already sparse population of the region, but also contributed to the further weakening of the defences. Thus, it is safe to assume that between 1530 and 1538 the path for Oromo migration both to the north and north-east was wide open.

Even at this early stage, a three-stage process of migration can be discerned from what Bahrey tells us. These stages were scouting, surprise attack and settlement. Scouts seem to have been sent a long distance, sometimes taking many days, from the Oromo base area. Scouting was a preparatory stage during which information was gathered about the neighbouring territory, concerning its strong and weak points, the presence and absence of organized resistance forces, and its economic resources. Scouting seems to have played an extremely important role in the early phase of Oromo migration, when pastoral Oromo seem to have been bent on avoiding direct contact with both the Christian and Muslim forces because of their possession of fire-arms and iron weapons.

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1. Huntingford, in Some Records of Ethiopia, Preface, pp. lxxiv-lxxv.
 2. Arab Faqih, Futuh al-Habasha, pp. 380-381, 390 et passim.

The second stage was characterized by lightning surprise attacks carried out mainly during the night. The purpose of these attacks was to collect booty and trophies as soon as possible, while at the same time unnerving the enemy. The attacks were carried out during the night so as to avoid detection while they were coming and pursuit while they were retreating. Since these attacks were carried out at a long distance and under cover of darkness, their enemies were not able to repay in kind by following them to their base areas. Safe base areas, where women, children and animals were kept formed a corner-stone in Oromo strategy, and it seems this effective policy was adopted after a long period of trial and error. This strategy itself is a strong indication that pastoral Oromo had long experience of border warfare, with the Christian kingdom. Bahrey makes it abundantly clear that up to 1554, after every campaign the Oromo were returning to their safe base area near the Wabi Shabelle river.¹ This highly useful piece of information demonstrates beyond any doubt that once the Oromo crossed the Wabi between 1530 and 1538, the Muslim force in Bali was not able to repulse them, so much so that the Wabi Shabelle area, the boundary between Bali and Dawaro, became a safe base area during the time when Imam Ahmad was at the height of his power.

The second stage in the process of migration was very important in a double sense. First and foremost, the evening surprise attacks were repeated on selected weak targets at intervals, until the resistance of the victim was broken. The victims either evacuated their own territory, fleeing to safer areas, or they submitted to the pastoral Oromo, accepting their supremacy, which was more apparent than real. The defeated and subjected groups were turned into fighting units through adoption. Thus the conquered people joined the Oromo in the next attack on other groups. The conquered people increased the fighting capacity of the Oromo, and widened their knowledge of the terrain. Adoption marked the loyalty of the vanquished and their eventual assimilation with the conquerors, while it assured safety, protection and equal sharing of booty in the next raids. Secondly, the evening surprise attack made the Oromo an invincible enemy. Neither peasants nor traders in settlements and towns were prepared for the Oromo war of attrition. It was only after the Oromo discovered their muscle, that they started changing their tactics into those of conventional warfare, in which they suffered repeatedly from the enemy's fire power.

1. Bahrey, in Some Records of Ethiopia, pp. 116-117.

The third stage in the process of migration involved the culmination of the first two. Now the former frontier and enemy territory, which had been won during the second stage, was turned into the base from which the next war for new territory would be launched. The process would repeat itself, until the Oromo had vastly increased both the size of their territory and their people. It was these processes, coupled with the in-built dynamism of continual expansion within gada, that seem to have taken the pastoral Oromo through the length and breadth of their huge territory.¹

The period of the Mudana gada (1530-1538) took the campaign beyond the Wabi. According to Tasawo Marga, a law was passed that "each new gada must pass beyond the territory already conquered and occupied by the previous gada".² However, this is rationalization. In the first place, we do not see how the Mudana gada passed this "fundamental law", which was a built-in mechanism entailed by the gada system. Secondly, Tasawo does not cite his source of information. What this gada did in all probability was to establish the safe base area around Wabi Shabelle, and that in itself was a considerable achievement. It opened the path for subsequent migration.

The period of the Kilole gada (1538-1546) coincided with the drastic change in the fortunes of the jihad. Imam Ahmad, who was not defeated between 1529 and 1542, was utterly routed in March 1543. The imam was slain, and a large proportion of his force put to the sword. So ended abruptly as it started the reign of the most powerful Ethiopian Muslim leader of the time. His death ended his empire. Wazir Abbas managed to regroup around himself the surviving elements of the once mighty Muslim force and to retreat to the south, where he established Muslim authority for two years.³ He restored some sort of authority in the provinces of Dawaro and Fatagar. But this does not seem to have altered the progress of the Oromo migration. There is every indication that Abbas did not wage war against the Oromo, who had by now fully occupied Bali and in the words of Bahrey, the Kilole gada "carried war towards the lowlands of Dawaro".⁴ This region was

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1. These three stages seem to form the general pattern, especially during the early phase of the migration.
 2. Tasawo Merga, "Senna Umatta Oromo", pp. 14-15.
 3. Abbas was the son of Garad Abun, the elder brother of Imam Ahmad.
 4. Bahrey, in Some Records of Ethiopia, p. 115.

defined by Huntingford as including the area between the Wabi Shabelle and the Harar plateau.¹

What this implies is that Abbas, who was pre-occupied by the menacing threat from Galawdewos, did not attempt to push back the Oromo out of the areas they occupied, while the Muslim force was pinned down in the north. Abbas left Bali to its fate and left the Oromo there undisturbed. They in turn appear not to have harassed his well-armed small force.² Abbas, with his headquarters in Dawaro, may have exercised some authority in Fatagar. However, the evidence for his effective control of Bali is lacking.³

When Galawdewos⁴, after two years of establishing his authority in the north and north-west came to the south in 1545, he was greeted with the threatening letter of Abbas warning him not to "... consider that the imam was dead, as he was his successor, and lest he should think these the words of a coward who threatens and does not act, he would come in search of him at once."⁵ True to his words, Abbas marched from Dawaro to Waj. It seems he too believed that God was on his side, but he lacked firearms and a disciplined force. And the Portuguese musketeers with their iron determination and ruthlessness, and the Christian eagerness to revenge the humiliation they had suffered during the jihad, easily carried the day. Abbas was killed and the Muslim force routed.⁶ With his death and the disintegration of the Muslim force, what was left of the Muslim empire was divided into two parts : a small enclave in the south, and Harar. The first was overwhelmed by the stream of Muslim refugees, while the second was beset by an internal power struggle. The Muslims in Bali, lowland Dawaro and Hadiya, who were astounded by the Christian victory and harassed by migrating Oromo, fled to the mountainous region between the Bilate river and the Gurage highlands. Those who remained in Bali accepted the fait accompli and soon became part of the Oromo nation.

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1. Huntingford, in Some Records of Ethiopia, Preface, pp. lxxiv-lxxv.
 2. It was probably his obsession with Galawdewos that forced Abbas to relegate the defence of Bali against the Oromo pressure to such an unimportant position.
 3. The claim of the Christian chronicle, that Abbas declared himself the king of the Muslims in Bali was probably theoretical rather than actual.
 4. Galawdewos seems to have been very hesitant to fight with Abbas.
 5. R.S. Whiteway, The Portuguese expedition to Abyssinia, 1541-1543, pp. 199-200.
 6. Abbas was outnumbered both in men and in fire power.

The victorious emperor, who seems to have been alarmed at the rapid spread of the pastoral Oromo in lowland Dawaro, ordered his famous regiment Adal Mabraq, to drive the Oromo out of the province or to stop them there. Unfortunately, for Galawdewos it was already too late. The Kilole gada defeated and drove Adal Mabraq out of lowland Dawaro. This was the first major Oromo victory over a Christian force. Adal Mabraq was forced to cross the Awash river into Fatagar. It was at this stage that Galawdewos realized the seriousness of the situation and immediately acted. Bali was gone and so were the lowlands of Dawaro. He was determined to save highland Dawaro. Thus he built his palace in Dawaro and established his court at Agraro, a very fertile region where he stayed from 1545 to 1548.¹ Cerulli rightly concludes that Galawdewos stayed in Dawaro for so long in order to defend it from the Oromo incursion from Bali.² During his three years stay in Dawaro, the emperor did not set his foot in Bali, either to demand tribute or to punish its people for its non-payment. At least in his chronicle there is no hint that he did so. To all intents and purposes Galawdewos seems to have accepted the fait accompli. As a realistic and practical man, he concentrated on saving Dawaro rather than trying to retrieve Bali.³ In fact, according to Bermudez, after Galawdewos defeated and killed Abbas, he made Ayres Dias, the mulatto commander of the Portuguese force, the governor of Dawaro, Fatagar and Bali.⁴ This is the first hint of the appointment of a governor over Bali, although it is not supported by the emperor's own chronicle. But this does not affect the argument. The emperor's subsequent concentration on the building of settlements for the refugees from Bali and lowland Dawaro and his pre-occupation with the Oromo question indicate the correctness of Bermudez's claim.

When the Adal Mabraq regiment was defeated by the Kilole gada in 1545, Galawdewos himself led an expedition against the Oromo; and his chronicler claims that he defeated them.⁵ What is particularly interesting

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1. W.E. Conzelman, Le chronique de Galawdewos, (Paris : 1895), p. 141-3.
 2. E. Cerulli, Studi etiopici II : la lingua e la storia dei sidamo, p. 30.
 3. According to James Bruce, Travels to discover the sources of the Nile, vol. III, p. 197, Galawdewos was born in 1522, the year in which the Borana attacked Bali.
 4. R.S. Whiteway, The Portuguese expedition to Abyssinia, 1541-1543, p. 202. Ayres Dias not only inherited Abbas's three provinces, but also his wife, who was christened.
 5. W.E. Conzelman, ibid., pp. 141-142.

to note here is that the chronicler adds that Galawdewos made the Oromo into obedient, tribute-paying subjects. This phrase is important, not only because it shows that the Oromo were not newcomers to the chronicler, but rather troublesome subjects who had to be disciplined. It is also important because it reveals that the objective of Galawdewos was not to drive them out, but to stop them where they were. This means that the Oromo remained in the areas they had won so far.

As far as the Oromo migration is concerned, by 1545 three directions are clearly discernible. First, the spearhead of the northern migration, the Karrayu, closely followed by some sections of the Akichu, Arsi and Marawa, were on the border of highland Dawaro, preparing for the investiture of the new gada. Secondly, the major part of the Akichu, that spearheaded the eastern direction, closely followed by the Humbana and Ittu, were in the lowlands of Dawaro at striking distance from the highland of Harar, preparing for the investiture of the new gada. This wing had not yet adopted an aggressive policy towards the Harar emirate. At least they had not yet attacked the towns. The third direction was charted by the Borana from Walabu. By this time, the Borana had slowly but surely started migrating to the region lying immediately to the north, from where their pressure had already started to be felt in Waj. The rapid success of the Barentu must have indirectly encouraged the Borana to adopt an aggressive attitude. This, coupled with the rebellion in Hadiya, occupied the emperor's time and consumed his meagre resources.¹ Galawdewos's difficult situation must have created favourable conditions for the spread of the Borana. It was at this juncture, when three provinces of the Christian kingdom - highland Dawaro, Fatagar and Hadiya on the one hand, and the Muslim state of Harar on the other, were under real threat, that the period of the Kilole gada expired and a new gada came to power.

In the words of Bahrey, "it was the Bifole gada (1546-1554) which devastated the whole of Dawaro and began to make war on Fatagar." He began to enslave the inhabitants and made of them the slaves called gabare."² At the start of the Oromo raids around 1522, enslaving the captives was probably both dangerous and valueless. Dangerous, because they could keep the

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1. W.E. Conzelman, Le chronique de Galawdewos, pp. 141-142.
 2. Bahrey, in Some Records of Ethiopia, p. 116.

enslaved captives only in the safe base areas, which could mean that they could act as the trojan horses for the Christian force. If they managed to escape, the Christian captives could not only supply useful information about the nature and geography of the base area, the size of human and animal population, to the Christian military leaders, but also they could direct the Christian force unnoticed to the area, thus providing the indispensable element of surprise attack for the Christian force.¹ Valueless, because there is abundant evidence which shows that there was no manpower shortage in the Oromo base areas. As a result, for almost two decades when new areas were attacked, the men were killed and animals were captured.² Probably the killing was intended to spread terror among the resisting population while the taking of cattle booty was to enrich themselves. Once the newly conquered areas were turned into safe bases coupled with the increase of animal population, extra hands were needed for herding the cattle, producing grain and contributing fighting men. Now enslaving the vanquished people was an economic as well as military necessity. Only resisting men were killed, and the rest were made gabare, though they were eventually adopted as brothers into the gossa. Bahrey's information brings up a number of important points. First and foremost, this gada not only overran the whole of Dawaro, but also pushed the war across the Awash into Fatagar. The latter would soon become the theatre of Borana operations, while Dawaro became the headquarters whence Barentu migrants radiated to the north, to the east and to the west. Secondly, making the inhabitants gabare is an important indication of the development already taking place. Gabare seems to be derived from the Oromo word gabara. This is the term used to describe the compulsory service and gifts owed by a man to the family of his would-be-wife. It also describes the relationship between a landlord and a tenant, an authority and a common man. In this sense, Bahrey's gabare describes the obligatory relationship between the conquerors and the conquered. The vanquished, still owners of their plots of land, became the serfs or clients of the pastoral Oromo, who demanded service and tribute from them. The Oromo term for the conquered people was Gabbro. The Oromo adopted the gabbro into the gada system, giving them a clan genealogy, while the able-bodied men were recruited for military service. What all this tells us is that, while the frontier of the Christian kingdom was shrinking, a new nation was being formed out of its debris.

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1. Coupled with this potential danger, there was probably mutual absence of communication owing to the language differences, which may have widened the gulf of mutual suspicion and fear.
 2. Bahrey, in Some Records of Ethiopia, p. 116

During the Bifole gada, the Christian emperor lost two more provinces. These were Dawaro and Hadiya. This conclusion is supported by the report of a Portuguese who lived in the region at this period of very considerable historical change. It has already been stated that since 1545 Galawdewos had been preoccupied with the Oromo question. His appointment of Ayres Diz, the prominent mulatto, who commanded the Portuguese force at the battle of Wayna Dega in March 1543¹, as the governor of Bali, Dawaro and Fatagar, must be seen in this light. This Portuguese mulatto, who had a special attachment to the emperor, not only changed his religion and embraced the Orthodox faith, but also changed his difficult name to a very popular Ethiopian Christian name, Marcos.²

Marcos, the commander-in-chief of the Portuguese force, and the emperor himself, fought against the Oromo sometime in late 1547 or early 1548. The emperor lost many men. Marcos himself was wounded in this battle and later died.³ Thus his death makes Marcos the first prominent foreign casualty of the Oromo war. His death must have deprived the emperor of a talented and absolutely loyal servant who championed his cause. Marcos's attachment to the emperor and the respect, admiration and love he gained among Ethiopian Christians was great.

... I was seven months in that land (Gafate) during which the king went to make war on the Gallas, as he had told me; but he returned wearied and almost defeated without having accomplished anything of value. A short time after Marcos died, and had him buried with great pomp in a church where the kings of that country are buried; he, at his death as if it had been their own brother or father; and they said that with him died all their defence and the protection of their country.⁴

One might say Bermudez exaggerated events since he had his own axe to grind. However, subsequent daunting problems amply demonstrate that Galawdewos was in a critical situation. The emperor's preoccupation with the Oromo was confounded by the repeated Muslim incursion from Harar. Nevertheless, the ease with which the Christian governor of highland Dawaro routed the invaders in 1548,⁵ must have given him some time to concentrate on the methods to be followed and new strategy to be adopted against the ever-mounting pressure of the pastoral Oromo. The new policy did not appear to have aimed at driving the Oromo from Bali and lowland Dawaro, but to

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1. Imam Ahmad was killed in this battle.
 2. Takla Sadeq Makuria, Ya gran Ahmad warara, p. 748.
 3. Ibid., p. 760.
 4. R.S. Whiteway, The Portuguese expedition ..., p. 218.
 5. W.E. Conzelman, Le chronique de Galawdewos, pp. 141-142.

contain them there or to minimize the effect of their incursion into a new territory by strengthening the defence system. He was determined to save highland Dawaro. Accordingly, in 1548 he gave land and settled the entire Portuguese force in Dawaro, where he hoped their cannon and muskets would prove an impregnable wall to the pastoral Oromo. However, the new arrangement did not last for more than four months. Bermudez describes the situation he observed during those months, which incidentally shows how the pastoral Oromo managed to exhaust and then crumble the defences of the Christian provinces.¹

...The Gallas are fierce and cruel people who make a war on their neighbours and on all only to destroy and depopulate their countries. In the places they conquer they slay all men, cut off the privy parts of the boys, kill the old women and keep the young for their own use and services.²

In the above, reference is made not only to the exodus of sedentary communities from the region conquered by pastoral Oromo, but also to their practice of taking trophies from the enemy's genital organs and of their keeping of young women for their use and services. All this is true as far as it goes. Probably what can be disputed is about the killing of old women. According to unanimous Oromo oral tradition, which is supported in the main by the royal chronicles of the time, and by Amhara tradition, old women were not killed. On the contrary old women were regarded as the torch of peace, who acted as intermediaries between two fighting forces and led caravans in a danger zone, even during the height of war. Furthermore, the killing of women in general and that of old women in particular was regarded as the most unrewarding and shameful act a warrior could commit. Such a man remained an object of ridicule and a laughing stock for the rest of his life.³ What is more, even Christian kings on a number of occasions had to resort to the Oromo practice of sending old women to an enemy when one party wanted to stop fighting or to make peace. Emperor Susenyos is reported to have used this strategy.⁴

Bermudez brings to the surface why the area attacked by the pastoral Oromo was quickly depopulated through the rapid exodus of the inhabitants

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1. This and a number of other points to be discussed show that Bermudez's information is more trustworthy than hitherto acknowledged.
 2. R.S. Whiteway, The Portuguese expedition ..., p. 228-229.
 3. Asma Giyorgis, "Ya Galla Tarik", p. 124.
 4. F.M.E. Pereira, Chronica de Susenyos Rei de Ethiopia, p. 143. See also Chapter Four, p. 282.

to other safer areas.

We also cleared the country of women, boys and everyone who could not fight, with these went nearly all the inhabitants, great and small, from fear of the cruelty of the Gallas. A country like that is quickly depopulated for the inhabited places have no buildings that are defensible nor which cost much to rebuild, as they are all of wattle and straw. They have no other walls or fortresses.

The absence of walls and fortifications around settlements made the inhabitants an easy prey to the surprise night attack. An extremely important point which is hinted at but not expressed in the above quotation is the fact that the region was thinly populated. The widely dispersed inhabitants were unable to marshal their resources to build walls, ditches and fortifications so as to resist the night attack. Their flight from their region not only made the task of the pastoral Oromo much easier, but unwittingly contributed to their rapid spread, which soon overtook the unfortunate refugees in their new "haven". What is important to observe here is that it was only in the region densely populated before attack, where the inhabitants were able to build walls and fortifications, which greatly contributed to the safety of the indigenous inhabitants.

Bermudez also brings to light an equally important point which demonstrates beyond any shadow of doubt that by 1548 the Oromo had already begun to abandon their policy of avoiding an enemy that possessed firearms. Incidentally, it also shows how the Oromo warriors besieged an enemy with fire power in their own fortification, without risking total war with them, but by maintaining constant pressure on the enemy, eventually forcing them either to flee or to submit.

... We were ready sometime, awaiting the Gallas, when one day they appeared. They were innumerable and did not come on without order like barbarians, but advanced collected in bodies, like squadrons. When they saw us they halted, some waiting for the rest, and then marched in one mass and camped near us, at a distance where our shots could do them no harm. As they were many and we were few, we did not go out to attack them, but waited in our camp. At the most there were one hundred and fifty of us, as the rest were already dead, nearly all in war, some few of sickness ... Our camp was pitched on rising ground, whence we commanded the rest of the country, and stood over those that fought against us. We defended ourselves here for ten or twelve days, awaiting the king. During this time we killed many of them by shot, and by our artifices of fire because they approached so fearlessly that we could aim every cast and shot. Meanwhile our powder failed and as the king did not come, we had to leave the position in search of him. The Gallas did not pursue us. Perchance because they also did not desire our company.

1. R.S. Whiteway, The Portuguese expedition ... , pp. 229-230.

Bermudez adds that when Galawdewos heard that the Oromo had become masters of Dawaro he lost command of himself and wept like a child. Certainly it seems there is an element of exaggeration in what Bermudez tells us. However, the shock from the loss of Dawaro must have been great. It was not only Dawaro that was lost, but Hadiya too. As we have seen above, Bahrey leaves no doubt about the loss of Bali and Dawaro, but does not mention Hadiya. Nevertheless, we know from other sources that after 1545 the Muslim forces split into two, one part returning to Harar and the other part taking refuge in the small mountainous region between the Bilate river and the Gurage highlands. To all intents and purposes, the once mighty Muslim state of Hadiya, the richest and the biggest province of the Christian kingdom, shrank in size and population to such an extent that it becomes anachronistic to talk of Hadiya as a big political entity after 1545. What existed after this time was a small entity that bore the historical name of Hadiya. However, even this small entity resisted the Christian domination bearing the brunt of the struggle against Galawdewos.

Bali and lowland Dawaro were now totally occupied by the pastoral Oromo. The Christian emperor neither collected tribute from the two provinces nor returned refugees. Meanwhile the once large, powerful and rich Christian province of Hadiya was reduced in size to a fraction of what it had been. Thereafter effective political control, i.e. collection of tribute and punishment for its absence, was limited only to this small entity which, with the grandiose name of Hadiya, projected an image out of proportion to its real size and importance. In highland Dawaro, it means the Christian defence system had crumbled, but was not yet ruined. There was still some Christian political control exercised in the province, since the last remnants of Christian military colonists were not yet dislodged. By 1548, however, the Christian defence system in highland Dawaro was on the verge of collapse. This conclusion is supported by two important facts. First, after the Oromo drove the Portuguese force out of Dawaro, in 1548, Galawdewos settled them in Beta Amhara, the province considered as the heart of the empire.

... Here the king made good to us the income we had lost in Doaro (Dawaro) by the incursions of the Gallas. The province of Bethmariam (Beta Amhara) is large and well peopled, the receipts from it are considerable, all these the king gave to the Portuguese. The land was divided among us according to the recipient's position.¹

1. R.S. Whiteway, The Portuguese expedition ... , p. 246.

Secondly, according to the chronicle of Galawdewos, the emperor appointed "Fanuel to govern in his place, the eastern provinces, Dawaro and the dependents, with full power and himself went to attack the people who lived on the borders of Damot."¹ This was a critical time when the emperor himself should have remained in the province to defend it. Considering the gravity of the situation which nobody knew better than the emperor himself,² it seems Bermudez is not exaggerating when he states that after the fall of Bali, Hadiya and Dawaro "... as he considered the Galla war unlucky, he determined to visit certain kingdoms of his empire which he had not yet seen."³ It was not only a visit, Galawdewos abandoned his beautiful palace in Dawaro and his court at Agraro, the country which in the words of the chronicler "is famous in all Ethiopia for its richness and prosperity."⁴

Shortly after Galawdewos built a city in Waj, where he settled permanently, abandoning the practice of roving capitals. He built his palace with stone and built stone fortifications around his capital.⁵ This was the first practical measure which he took in protecting Waj, a safe headquarters from where the campaigns for making the Oromo into tribute-paying subjects were to be directed. Even though he failed to implement this strategy, he did succeed in making Waj a safe capital until his death in 1559.

Compared with his campaigns against the pastoral Oromo, Galawdewos achieved spectacular results against the Muslims. By defeating and killing Abbas in 1545, he not only devastated the Muslim force, but also contributed to the wilting of what was left of it. In 1548, Fanuel, his governor of Dawaro, easily routed the invading Muslim force, capturing two of their prominent leaders. The following year Fanuel himself led an expedition into Harar, where he is reported to have scored a brilliant victory over

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1. W.E. Conzelman, Le chronique de Galadewos, p. 144.
 2. R.S. Whiteway, The Portuguese expedition ..., p. 216. Galawdewos is reported to have said to Bermudez, "Father no outrage will be done; but as you ... know it is necessary to attend to the war which the Gallas are making on me."
 3. Ibid., p. 231.
 4. Conzelman, ibid., pp. 141-142.
 5. Ibid., p. 149.

the Muslims. Encouraged by this, Galawdewos himself led an expedition into Harar in 1550, where he stayed for five months causing considerable damage. "He destroyed their strong castle, and burned their wooden houses, took their king's property."¹ After him no other Christian king ever set foot in Harar either to demand tribute or punish the Muslims for their incursion. Thus his expedition of 1550 to Harar marks the last invasion of any Christian emperor up to 1887, when Menilek brought to an end the independence of the city-state by colonizing the province.

According to his chronicler, upon his return from the successful expedition the emperor was troubled by the new incursions of the Oromo who were living near the frontier of Waj. "Then the king treated with kindness those people affected by the Galla incursion. He provided the refugees with whatever was possible. And he gave them a place to settle."² It was at this time that he built a fortified city in Waj. In 1554 when the period of the Bifole gada was coming to an end "Galawdewos fought against the Gallas, killing many and taking captives both animals and men. They fled to their country in the forest."³ Galawdewos did not follow up his victory with the aim of driving them out or returning the refugees back to their country in the lost provinces. The reason for his success against the Muslims and not against the Oromo is quite simple, it was due to the nature of the war he conducted against each. The Muslims fought in a conventional style, in which he seems to have had considerable advantages both in men and fire power. Over and above, the Muslims were settled communities, who could be pursued and punished in their own homes, for their attack and incursion into Christian territory. With the Oromo the situation was entirely different. The emperor had trained manpower, considerable fire power and large iron weapons, both of which the Oromo lacked. However, the elusive character of Oromo warriors made this considerable advantage insignificant. Whenever possible they avoided engagement with his highly destructive striking force. But the repeated Oromo attack on the settled Christian military colonists proved impossible to stop. Their night attacks caused considerable damage to men and property, and also eroded

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1. W.E. Conzelman, Le chronique de Galawdewos, pp. 145-147. It has also been reported by another source "that Galawdewos burnt the grand mosque except one minaret, which was seen by Caghne Taurin in the early 1880s. See Papiers d'Abbadie, V., Lettres par la mission catholique au pays des Gallas 1845-1895, II Nouv. Acq. Fran. No. 23852 fol. 329.
 2. Conzelman, ibid., p. 149.
 3. Ibid., p. 157.

the morale of the Christian forces. By the time the local Christian troops recovered from the shock and wanted to hit back, the Oromo warriors would have disappeared from the area, taking away its spoils, usually consisting of many head of cattle and trophies. It was this elusive character of the Oromo warriors that gave urgency to the resettlement of the Christian victims in Waj, where the emperor had his fortified permanent capital. This was the first time, after the restoration of the so-called "Solomonic dynasty" in 1270 that an Amhara emperor had a permanent capital. It was a positive development if it had been continued by his successors. However, following his death in 1559, the Amhara kings reverted to their nomadic behaviour until Gondar was built about a century later.¹

The period of Michelle gada(1554-1562) was a real land-mark in the whole history of the Oromo migration. A land-mark, because the power of both the Christians and the Muslims dramatically decreased during this period, while the power of the pastoral Oromo drastically increased by the same proportion. The sudden and radical transformation in the balance of power quickly brought to an end two centuries of struggle between the Muslims and Christians, replacing it by the struggle of both against the Oromo for the next three centuries. In short, the period of this gada opened the chapter of rapid spread for the pastoral Oromo which changed the course of history in the region. In the words of Bahrey :

It was he who killed the Jan Amora corps and fought against Hamalmal at Dago; he devastated all the towns and ruled them, remaining there with his troops, whereas previously the Galla invading from the Wabi had returned there at the end of each campaign.²

A number of these developments mentioned by Bahrey require further discussion. First, the Michelle gada which destroyed Jan Amora corps in Fatagar, also fought with Hamalmal at Dago. This signalled not only the disintegration of Christian administration in Fatagar, but also, it laid open the path to Shawa, Ifat, Geshe and Ganh.³ Secondly, Dawaro and Fatagar now became the operational headquarters of the pastoral Oromo, the former for the Barentu and the latter for the Borana. Dawaro, located in

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1. Gondar was built in the 1630s, but the Christian royal court continued using it only for a winter residence, at least till 1706.
 2. Bahrey, in Some Records of Ethiopia, pp. 116-7.
 3. Tasawo Merga, "Senna Umatta Oromo", p. 17.

the Rift Valley, occupied an important strategic position, and it served as a safe base area from where the different regions were invested. This province, which one historian describes as having been at one time "virtually a military camp teaming with regiments",¹ became the Barentu country that divided the two old enemies, the Muslims of Harar and the Christian kingdom. Fatagar, the headquarters of the Christian court for almost a century now became the headquarters of the Borana, with their famous chafe at Oda Nabe.

For reasons to be discussed shortly, the Oromo became very aggressive during the period of the Michelle gada. They continued with their practice of terrorizing the peasants, while at the same time they abandoned totally their policy of avoiding imperial soldiers. On the contrary, the Christian regiments started avoiding the Oromo warriors. If a single event would demonstrate a tilt in the balance of power in favour of the Oromo, this is the unmistakable one. Among the first casualties of the aggressive pastoral Oromo was the already mentioned Jan Amora corps stationed in Fatagar.²

Thirdly, Bahrey's claim that the Michelle gada "devastated all the towns and ruled them, remaining there with his troops" implies not only the end of the Christian administration, but also its replacement by an Oromo one. Replacing an old-established administration by a new one requires a high degree of organisation and effective communication.

Writers on Ethiopian history of the period normally observe little but ruin in the Oromo migration. The only real exception is Merid, who states that the Christian soldiery in some cases brought more ruin to the peasantry than the migrating pastoral Oromo. What is more, "judging from the evidence of the chronicles, the brutality of the professional soldiers, be it to decapitate or emasculate men or to enslave women and children, does not seem to have been matched by the reputed savagery of the Galla".³ These writers do not consider the continuous enslaving and pillaging to which

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1. Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia and the Christian kingdom ... " pp. 88, 199.
 2. The Oromo victory over the Jan Amora corps has been described by one writer as a psychological material from which the fireworks for the great later victories were derived. See for instant Tasawo Merga, "Senna Umata Oromo ... ", p. 17.
 3. Merid Wolde Aregay, ibid., pp. 282, 311 et passim.

both the Christians and Muslims subjected each other. Also both Christians and Muslims spared only those who accepted their respective faiths. The pagans were fair game and easy victims for plunder and enslaving by both sides. From early times the people of the four provinces of Bali, Dawaro, Hadiya and Fatagar, in which both the Christian and Muslim administration gave way to a pastoral "administration", had witnessed intense and warring rivalry for the control of the area between the Muslim and Christian rulers. The people of the region who were caught between these two forces had their own experiences with the Christian and Muslim rulers' collection of tribute, slave raids and sometimes wanton pillaging. At all events, after their recovery from the initial shock and attack of the migrating Oromo, the people in the region seem to have come to terms with their new masters. Adoption may have facilitated the process of integration. What cannot be doubted is that the people in the region were left to manage their own affairs. They must have also been recruited in large numbers to staff the new administration. Without such recruitment we cannot see how the pastoral people could have remained in towns and ruled them.

Of the five gada that ruled between 1522 and 1562, Michelle was the most aggressive and the most successful in defeating, and in some cases routing, both the Christian and Muslim forces. Bahrey hints at the reason why this gada was so aggressive and successful when he says "this luba mesele (Michelle gada began the custom of riding horses and mules, which the Galla had not done previously".¹ Although Bahrey's claim that the Oromo did not ride horses and mules before this gada is open to question, one thing remains certain. It was probably at this time that their use of large cavalry formations became most obvious. Before this the Oromo had avoided royal regiments and their use of cavalry was probably unnoticeable. Also if there had been any previous use of Oromo cavalry it must have been negligible because so far most of the Oromo campaigns had been conducted on the basis of evening guerilla attacks, which made horses less important, if not irrelevant. Be that as it may, once horses were employed in battles the Oromo seem to have made effective use of them. The horses enabled them to move fast and far. Between 1522 and 1554 the pastoral Oromo overran

1. Bahrey, in Some Recrods of Ethiopia, p. 117.

only Bali, Dawaro and Hadiya. But between 1554 and 1562 they repeatedly attacked Waj, overran Fatagar and the whole of Harar, Ifat, Angot, Gedem and the path to Shawa and Damot was laid open. This spectacular expansion within a mere eight years must have been greatly facilitated by the use of cavalry. Once they were in Dawaro, Fatagar, Angot, Ifat, Gedem, Amhara, Charchar and Harar, where horses were bred, the Oromo must have employed the animals on a large scale. Horses were used for their speed in scouting and for charging in battles, and to retreat quickly when overwhelmed by a superior enemy. Up to 1538 the Oromo fought on the edge of the border so that if defeated they could disappear into the nearby forests. Both Christians and Muslims who were usually mounted on horses were thus unable to follow the withdrawing Oromo, even if they had won the battle.

Whether because of the horses or not, aggressiveness characterized the Michelle gada. In 1555 they fought with Galawdewos in Waj. He seems to have forced the Borana to retreat, but he did not reap any lasting benefit from this victory, since their threat prevented him from attending to problems in the other provinces. In 1556 he fought another campaign from a base at Asa Zanab. In the words of one historian "he did not harm them, instead he quickly returned from the campaign."¹ According to the monk Pawlos, in the seventeenth year of his reign (i.e. 1557), Galawdewos "devastated the Galla settlement area."² This settlement must have been on the frontier with Waj. What is very interesting about Pawlos's information is that it contains no hint whatever that the Oromo were regarded as an alien people who were previously unknown. On the contrary, the general impression one gets from his material is that the Oromo were well known, rebellious and unruly nomads. In 1557 and 1558 the Borana descended into the Rift Valley plains, raiding several areas. According to the chronicle of Galawdewos, in 1559, shortly before his death, the emperor was building a town for the refugees who fled from the new Oromo incursion.³ He made no attempt whatsoever to return the refugees to where they had come from. What is more, the pressure from both the Borana and Barentu was mounting simultaneously. The pessimism expressed in the court at this time, which

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1. Asma Giyorgis, "Ya Galla Tarik", pp. 32-33.
 2. Conti-Rossini, "Lautobiografia de Pawlos monaco Abissino del secolo xvi" Rendiconti della Reale Accademia dei Lincei, vol. xxvii (1918), pp. 285-86.
 3. W.E. Conzelman, Le chronique de Galawdewos, p. 173. It appears that by 1559 Galawdewos was in a real dilemma which he met by concentrating on helping the disaffected people.

is depicted in the chronicle, seems to reflect the grave situation created by the burden of refugees in the capital, the news of the approaching Muslim force, and the ever mounting pressure of the Borana and Barentu.

Conditions in the Muslim state of Harar on the eve of the Oromo migration.

Imam Ahmad's quick rise to power, his numerous victories, and his sudden death, had catastrophic consequences for the Harar Emirate. Before he embarked on his destructive jihadic wars in 1529 he had succeeded in uniting the entire Harar highlands and the lowlands down to the sea under a central administration based on Harar. The enlarged political entity he created included most of northern Somalia, as far as Cape Gardafui,¹ if not to Mogadishu, and the highlands of Harar up to Dawaro and Bali. This was the first real unity of the Harar region under one central authority. He managed to unite this region by revolutionizing the military traditions of Adal. Before his time, the Muslim soldiers of Adal had been a heterogeneous mass, composed for the most part of nomads who spoke different languages and whose commanders' loyalty was dependent on the strength of the sultan. It was the common faith and opposition to the Christian kingdom that rallied them around the sultan. When misfortune came, communication broke down, and the Muslim army fell into disarray, enabling the Christians to turn defeat into victory. The Muslim army lacked not only discipline in battle, but also a core of crack troops who could maintain discipline and police the wavering Muslim forces by severely punishing those who took to their heels at the crucial moment, and by keeping up the morale of the force by performing miracles of valour at the decisive moment. As we saw in Chapter One,² Imam Ahmad succeeded in overcoming this debilitating weakness of Adal by creating a new type of army. This army was better than any other army the Muslim leaders had been able to raise in the past, because of its superior organization. Thus, out of the heterogeneous mass of men who constituted the Muslim army, the imam created an efficient striking force with which he united the region.

When the imam was at the height of his power, the administration of Harar was under his brother, Muhammed Ibrahim, with full authority over

1. Arab Faqih, Futuh al-Habasha, pp. 119-120.

2. See Chapter One, pp. 33-5.

several principalities in the highlands of Harar. The peoples living under his administration were artificially divided into two : cultivators and traders of the highlands, and the nomads of the lowlands. The artificiality of this division was that a number of nomads lived on the fringes of the highlands; again some of them were engaged in trading, and finally cultivators could and did become nomads by circumstance, while nomads also became cultivators.

In the highlands of Harar lived essentially three groups of people who spoke closely related Semitic languages. The Argobba people lived about fifteen kilometres southeast of Harar. The Gatouri, the original inhabitants of the land,¹ lived in the region of mount Kondodo and Babile, the region that formed part of the little principality of Dawaro. The Adare people, who probably constituted the largest group of sedentary farmers in the Horn, lived in the richest zone around the city of Harar. The Harla people lived in Hubat, and Sim, and in a number of small principalities in one region of Gara Mulata and Charchar. This sedentary population was bounded by the Kondodo mountain in the north, the valley of Babile in the east, the valley of Gobelle and Mt. Gara Mulata in the south and southwest, and the fertile highland region in the west. Of the heterogeneous inhabitants of Harar, the Adare and the Harla were engaged in extensive farming and trading. From all available literature, it appears that agriculture and urban life were fairly well developed in the highlands. Owing to the proximity of this region to the major commercial routes of the Horn, trade flourished. In fact the axis of the trade routes that funneled the commerce of southern Ethiopia and the Horn passed through this region. In this flourishing trade three groups actively participated. The Adare and the Harla seem to have monopolized the highland trade, while the Somali merchants "provided the main chain of trade connections between the sea and the highland."² On the eastern fringes of the highlands lived some elements of sedentary Somali, such as Girri, Marrehen and probably a number of others. On the north-western fringes of the highland lived some Afar sedentary communities. Among the sedentary agricultural population a peculiar type of hierarchically evolved landed nobility dominated the political scene. The order of the landed nobility was represented by a hierarchy of officials

1. W. Leslau, Ethiopians speak I : Studies in cultural background Harari, (Los Angeles : 1965), p. 62.

2. I.M. Lewis, ed., Islam in tropical Africa, (London : 1966), pp. 23-24.

at the apex of which stood the head of the state. The lowest officers were malaga¹, a sort of district administrator, who settled disputes, collected taxes, regulated irrigation and were responsible for the maintenance of law and order. Above the malaga stood the highly prestigious office of garad, a hereditary provincial governorship. This was the office most coveted by the traditional landed nobility. The most famous garads were Aftal garad (Zeila garad), Harar garad, Hubat garad, Sim garad and Girri garad. Almost all the prominent sixteenth century jihadic leaders, including Imam Ahmad, were either garads or the sons of garads.²

It is difficult to draw a distinction between the duties and responsibilities of an amir and a garad.³ It seems that the two offices overlapped. Differences probably lay in the number of men each commanded. Originally the amir was the commander of the provincial army, including that of the garad. Hence the title amir was used for centrally appointed officers and governors, while garad was used for hereditary governors who commanded some force. The amir organised the army, maintained its discipline, distributed pay and rewards and led expeditions on his own behalf or that of the head of the state. He also led prayers, built mosques, spread Islam, appointed garads to administer justice and maintained peace and order in the provinces.⁴ In general from the records of Arab Faqih⁵ the amirs were the de facto masters of their provinces who before Imam Ahmad came to power paid tribute only to the sultan at Dakar. Once Ahmad seized power he drastically curbed the power of the amirs. Instead, the imam invested with supreme power the office of wazir or first minister, which he filled very sparingly with his relatives or close friends and loyal servants. Sultan was the title used by the Walasma dynasty from its inception in 1285 in Ifat up to its disintegration in 1559 in Harar, when the last sultan was killed. Imam Ahmad divested the sultan of all powers but the sultan remained the titular head of state.

The nomadic lowland population of Harar could be divided into four groups : first, the Somali nomads who lived in the north, northeast, east,

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1. This is the summary from Yusuf Ahmad, "The household economy of the amirs of Harar 1825-1875", Ethnological Society, No. 10 (Addis Ababa : 1960) pp. 22-24. See also Muhammad Hassen, "The relation between Harar town and the surrounding Oromos", pp. 28-30.
 2. The only two outstanding exceptions to this were Wazir Adole, the famous general of the imam, who was a freed slave and Amir Uthman, the freed slave of Amir Nur.
 3. E. Cerulli, Studi etiopici I ... , p. 18.
 4. For further information on the duties of an amir in the Muslim world, refer to Encyclopedia of Islam, (1936), p. 18.
 5. Arab Faqih, Futuh al-Habasha. p. 12.

and southeast of the city of Harar. Second, the Afar nomads who lived in the northwest and west of the city. Thirdly the Harla and Adare nomads lived in the central highlands and on its fringes. Fourth, there were a number of other nomadic groups who did not belong to the above-mentioned linguistic groups who lived in the west and southwestern part of the highlands, where Harar bordered with Bali and Dawaro. Among these nomadic groups, the Worjih, who now speak the Oromo language, seem to have been fairly large and spread over a wide territory.

According to one Harari tradition recently published, there had been a constant struggle between the nomads and the sedentary cultivators for a long time over the ownership and use of land.¹ This tradition makes it clear that in this region the primary task of any government consisted in protecting the cultivated lands from the raids of the nomads. The struggle against the nomads seems to have been connected with the gradual spread of agriculture. The nomads impelled from within by pressures unclear to us, and from without by the constant pressure from other powerful nomadic groups, wanted the agricultural land for grazing ground. The rivalry among the nomads over grazing grounds on the one hand, and the struggle between the nomads and the sedentary communities on the other hand, involved two interconnected interests : those of the farmers in the countryside, and those of the merchants in the towns and settlements. The protection of one interest sometimes endangered the safety of the other. It was this dualism which made the history of Harar inherently unstable and eventually contributed to the dramatic disappearance of the sedentary agricultural population. However, Imam Ahmad temporarily created a good relationship between the sedentary population and the nomads by the use of force and diplomacy, and above all by uniting them through the intoxicating spirit of jihad. The jihad on the one hand brought immediate benefit in the form of booty, while on the other hand it promised salvation in the world to come. This lasted only as long as the originator of the jihad lived. With his death, not only the unity of the motley subjects crumbled, but also the powerful striking force with which that unity was maintained totally disintegrated. The effect of the disintegration of the imam's army on Harar was quite drastic and deadly.

The death of the imam and the disintegration of his force stirred up

1. Ewald Wagner (ed.), Legende und Geschichte der Fath Madinat Harar von Yahya Nasralla, (Wiesbaden : 1978), pp. 62-63. Arabic text et passim.

strong feelings that were fuelled by the propaganda of the mercantile class that had been silently opposed to the jihad. Above all the disintegration of the Muslim force revived the old struggle between the nomads and the sedentary communities, with much intensity, so much so that it eventually contributed to the destruction of many settlements and towns. The temporary collapse of central authority in Harar freed its nomadic subjects, while independent nomads preyed on the caravan routes.

At this juncture, in 1543 when Harar was in confusion, Del Wambara, the widow of the imam, her son Ali garad and Nur the nephew of the imam, arrived in Harar with about 300 cavalry.¹ This force was all that was left of the once mighty Muslim army, but its arrival must have created some degree of order within the towns. These soldiers served as attendants who waited upon this extraordinary woman and acted as her escort within Harar. However, the force was dangerously small and too insignificant to give her the image of a powerful and an invincible leader. Thus beyond the walls lawlessness prevailed. The different nomadic groups continued harassing the sedentary population.

What may have confounded the situation was the absence of a male successor. The imam died suddenly in the prime of his life, without making any provision for his successor. The primary function of a leader at this critical moment was to provide military leadership. None of the imam's children was able to shoulder this responsibility. His first son Ahmad Nagash died in Tigre during the plague and famine of 1535.² His second son, Muhammed, was taken captive in the battle of Wayna Daga, in March 1543, and was not returned to his mother before late 1544. His third son, Ali, seems to have been no more than ten or twelve. Naturally, after Del Wambara's return to Harar, power fell into her hands, as she must have been ruling on behalf of her son, Ali. But as a woman in a male-dominated Muslim society she proved unable to provide the military leadership demanded of her office.

For almost a decade, Harar was characterized by instability and anarchy generated by the power struggle within the ruling class. It was Amir Nur

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1. Takla Sadeq Makuria, Ya gran Ahmad warara, p. 813. See also James Bruce, Travels to discover the source of the Nile, vol. III, p. 213.
 2. Arab Faqih, Futuh al-Habasha, p. 416.

who restored order and established strong central authority in Harar. Nur was the son of Wazir Mujahid, one of the brilliant cavalry generals of Imam Ahmad. Mujahid¹, the son of Garad Ali, was from a well established Adare landed noble family. Mujahid married Ahmad's sister, from which marriage Nur was born. Described as "just and God-fearing leader", Nur was well-connected within the ruling Harari nobility. However, in spite of his family connections, his link with the Harari ulema, his experience in the jihad and his maturity of age,² it took him many years to establish his authority.

It was around 1550 that Nur came to the centre of an intense power struggle which lasted for two years. Space does not permit us to describe the internecine power struggle of those two years. Here it should suffice to say that the struggle involved three conflicting ideas, represented by three parties. The first party was represented by the nominal Walasma sultan and supported by the mercantile class. In Harar history, the mercantile class always tended to stress the need to play down the jihadic line which only brought ruin to commerce. This is true of both the pre- and post-jihadic situation.³ The second party, represented by hot-headed militants, insisted on continuing with the jihad at whatever cost. The third party, which was represented by Nur, favoured continuing the jihad, but insisted on the pragmatic approach of first uniting the heterogeneous people of Harar and then patiently building a new striking force on the model of the imam, before repeating the attack on the Christian country.⁴ As was always the case in the history of Harar, the extremist militants won the day and their

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1. Mujahid distinguished himself in several battles. Most of all he was remembered for storming the royal prison of Amba Geshan, where he is reported to have put everybody to the sword.
 2. Arab Faqih, Futuh al-Habasha, p. 92, refers to Nur as Amir Nur, the son of Wazir Mujahid, which undoubtedly establishes that Nur was already amir under the imam, which in turn implies that he was a mature man.
 3. Refer to Chapter One, pp. 28-9 and also see the following discussion.
 4. Nur must have capitalized on his considerable experience. The campaigns during the days of the imam would have provided him with immense experience in attack and retreat; choice of time; elements of surprise attack; determination at the most decisive moment; the strength and weakness of the Muslims; the role of religious propaganda, and above all the importance of having reliable striking force with which to maintain discipline.

policy brought ruin to Harar.¹ The sultan was opposed to the militants' policy, while Nur did not oppose it openly, but seems to have stressed the need for creating a new army before making an attack. The struggle between the first two parties prepared the ground for the rise of Nur to power.

Nur seems to have married Del Wambara, at the latest between 1548 and 1550; and there is no doubt that by 1552 when he became the effective leader, the two were living together.² Nur's marriage to Del Wambara seems to have been politically motivated. Through it he inherited the mantle of leadership, which established him among the supporters of the imam, especially the ulema. The Harar chronicle depicts Nur as an intensely religious man who abstained from every act forbidden by the Sharia. He was determined to administer impartial justice to all people in his realm. He also wanted the people to follow his example in their lives. Therefore, he did not permit the use of prohibited things among the nobility.³ Although the above information comes from the pen of a partisan of Nur, there are numerous other hints that Nur, after establishing himself in power in Harar, did not give himself up to pleasure and amusements. Many Harari manuscripts that censure several amirs of the time for giving themselves up to "unIslamic things" for the pleasure of life, heap upon Nur all praises and make him an outstanding saint, second only to Abadir, the legendary founder of the city of Harar.

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1. In 1545 and 1548 the militant party sent expeditionary forces to Dawaro and both were routed by the Christian forces. The Christian victories encouraged Fanuel, the governor of Dawaro, and for the first time since 1527, a Christian general invaded Harar either in late 1548 or early 1549, and managed to kill one of the two Muslim "kings". The presence of two leaders whom the Christian chronicle calls "kings", is an acute reflection of the power struggle in Harar. Nur managed to escape from Fanuel's punishment. When Galawdewos invaded Harar in 1550 again Nur escaped "with all his property". See for instance, W.E. Conzelman, Le chronique de Galawdewos, pp. 141-142, 145-147. See also Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia ...", pp. 161-167.
 2. Many scholars uncritically repeat the claim of the Christian chronicle which asserts that Nur fought with Galawdewos in order to marry Del Wambara, whom he loved so much. According to this version, this remarkable lady refused to marry unless she saw the head of Galawdewos who had killed her husband. As a result this account goes on, she did not marry for sixteen years - from 1543, when the imam was killed, up to 1559 - when Galawdewos was killed. This is incorrect historically.
 3. E. Cerulli, "Documenti arabi per la storia dell'Etioopia", Memorie della Reale Accademia dei Lincei, (MRAL), pp. 55-57.

Having "removed all his enemies", Nur became the first man invested with authority. The title given to him was amir al-muminin (Commander of the faithful). With his victory over Galawdewos, he added another prestigious title, sahib al Futuh al-tani (the second conqueror).¹ Being desirous of legalising his position, Nur put on the throne a puppet sultan of the old Walasma dynasty and cloaked his acts with his authority. Cerulli is correct that Nur was in the same position in 1552 as Imam Ahmad had been in 1527.²

Imam Ahmad had sultan Abu Bakur killed, but he replaced him by his brother Umar Din as the titular head of state. Umar Din remained in Harar up to 1531, without any authority. The sultan, weak, docile and timid, imposed "self exile" on himself and retired to Zeila where he stayed for many years. It is not known what authority he exercised over the surrounding Somali nomads. From our source it is not clear what happened to the sultan. However, between 1543 and 1552, rival leaders seem to have declared themselves sultan. Once Nur came to power, he restored the old Walasma line of rulers. Accordingly on 24 December 1552 Umar Din was succeeded by his son Sultan Ali Umar Din.³ What is very important to note here is that Ali became sultan at the very time when Nur was establishing his authority. It is not out of place to assume that Nur may have revived the tradition of the Walasma dynasty in order to placate the opposition to his authority. The new sultan, who seems to have been a man of strong character, wanted more power than Nur was willing to give him. He died on 8 May 1555 in uncertain circumstances. He was succeeded by his brother Sultan Barakat ibn Umar Din, ten days later. The interval between the death of Ali and the accession of Barakat suggests that the death was probably not natural. Could it be possible that Nur was repeating the history of Imam Ahmad's rise to power? Cerulli suggests so.⁴ Nur's subsequent activities confirm Cerulli's assertion. Nur, after having placed Barakat on the throne, directed his efforts to pacifying the neighbouring tribes. In fact it appears that Nur revived the Walasma tradition in order to use the prestige of the dynasty to rally Somali nomads around him-

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1. E. Cerulli, "Documenti arabi ...", MRAL, pp. 55-57.
 2. Ibid.,
 3. Ibid., p. 49, note 2.
 4. Ibid.,

self. Traditionally the Walasma dynasty had its power base among the Somali,¹ while the jihadic leaders had their power base among the sedentary communities.

The nineteenth century Amharic history of the amirs strongly claims that Nur made extensive campaigns to pacify the country before turning his attention to fight against the Christians.² It is not known how much he succeeded in subduing them. On the contrary, it appears that he was unable to bring them under the control of the city. Even for the powerful imam, to conciliate the interests of his Somali nomads and the sedentary population proved a very difficult task. It was only the imam's personality, the prospect of booty and their religious zeal that kept the nomads under the control of the city. With the death of the imam the disintegration of his army and the weakening of the central authority, the Somali nomads affected the welfare of the sedentary communities. To all intents and purposes Nur was unable to bring the nomads under the control of the city.³

However, among the sedentary population, Nur established undisputed authority. It was the agricultural population that bore the brunt of his jihad. It took Nur seven years to create a new army with which he defeated the Christians in 1559. He did this by reconstituting the Malasy, a new crack force on the pattern of the imam's army, drawn from the sedentary population. The ease with which he defeated and killed Galawdewos in 1559 can be attributed both to the Oromo pressure on the southern provinces of the Christian kingdom and the superior organization of the Muslim force. Nur effectively used gifts in arms that came from across the Red Sea before he embarked on the second jihad. The strictly disciplined Malasy faithfully carried out the will of their commanders, who included faithful friends and loyal servants of Nur, the able executors of his will.

It was this vital crack force, built up over seven years, with which Nur intended to occupy the Christian kingdom, which was suddenly and unexpectedly annihilated at Hazalo. The destruction of the Malasy hastened the disintegration of the Muslim power in Harar, which in turn facilitated the Oromo advance. This brings us to the question of the Oromo migration to Harar.

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1. Arab Faqih, Futuh al-Habasha, pp. 15-19 makes it clear that the Walasma sultan had his power base among the Somali nomads, while the imam had his among the sedentary agriculturalists.
 2. K. Wendt, "Amharische Geschichte eines Emirs von Harar im XVI Jahrhundert", Orientalia IV (1935), pp. 493-494.
 3. With the arrival of other nomads (the Oromo), many towns disappeared and several agricultural lands turned into pasture lands.

The Oromo migration to Harar up to the beginning of the seventeenth century

It has already been indicated that when the Kilole gada (1538-1546) advanced over the lowlands of Dawaro, the Oromo were within the territory of Harar proper. For some reason unclear to us, the Oromo stayed quietly here for some time, avoiding contact with the Muslim forces. Even during the next, Bifole gada (1546-1554), when there is no doubt about their presence in Harar territory, they did not attack. However, during the Michelle gada (1554-1562) the Oromo suddenly attacked and quickly spread over a much larger extent of Harar territory. This was connected with the activities of Amir Nur, and this fact more than anything else demonstrates, once again beyond doubt, that the Oromo were avoiding the Muslim force that possessed firearms.

In March 1559 with his newly created Malasy army, which included 1800 cavalry, 500 musketeers and with many archers and spearmen, Nur challenged Galawdewos, who had 270 cavalry, 700 foot soldiers, 100 musketeers and 500 archers.¹ Victory was a foregone conclusion. Nur not only killed and cut off the head of his arch-enemy, who had killed several of his relatives, but also killed a large number of Portuguese soldiers and several Christian military and religious leaders.²

Following his resounding victory on 23 March, 1559, in Fatagar, Nur crossed over into Waj to loot the palace and the capital of the unfortunate emperor. In Waj, he seems to have put to the sword many Christians. Bahrey implies a great slaughter.³ Nur's activities in Waj leaves no doubt as to his intention of occupying the southern part of the Christian kingdom. While Nur was celebrating his victory and collecting booty, news came to him that :

... while they (the Muslims) were marching with the intention of conquering the empire, there came to them news of how (Abetohun Hamalmal) entered through their kingdom and killed their king and how after he had withdrawn, the kaffir Galla entered through the lands and went devastating and destroying them.⁴

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1. Takla Sedeq Makuria, Ya Gran Ahmad Warara, p. 815.
 2. Ibid., p. 822; see also, James Bruce, Travels ..., p. 224.
 3. Bahrey, in Some Records of Ethiopia, p. 117.
 4. Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia ...", pp. 195-196.

Hamalmal, the governor of Dawaro, who had been forced out of Fatagar to Shawa by the Michelle gadain 1559, tactfully avoided Nur and instead marched on Harar. So he also avoided meeting with the Oromo who were preparing to launch an offensive against Harar at that very moment. Hamalmal suddenly surprised the city, and sultan Barakat retired to the country side. Hamalmal followed and killed Barakat before he had time to raise a resisting force from the surrounding population.¹ The death of Barakat brought to an end the line of the Walasma sultans. After his return from Waj, Nur did not find it politically expedient to enthrone another nominal Walasma sultan. That closed the chapter of the Walasma dynasty, which had survived for almost three centuries (from 1285 in Ifat to 1559 in Harar) through all historical vicissitudes.

The victorious Hamalmal hurriedly returned to Shawa. No reason was given for his hasty return. However, it is not far-fetched to assume that he wanted to avoid the Oromo who were by now in the neighbourhood of the city. Soon after his withdrawal from Harar, the Oromo poured on the several towns like a flood. On receiving this sad news, Nur left behind a section of his force in Waj and started his quick return to Harar with the elite of his malasy. The big force he left behind in Waj and Fatagar leaves no doubt as to his intention to continue with his conquest of the Christian kingdom.

Nur could not go back to Harar from Fatagar through highland Dawaro, since it was occupied by Karrayu, Marawa and bands of Akichu and Arsi. He was not even safe in Fatagar, because bands of Borana had already occupied the province. Even if Nur had been able to pass through Dawaro by fighting with or avoiding the various groups, he still ran the risk of meeting the aggressive Akichu, closely followed by the Humbana and Ittu in the Char-char highlands. Nur was bent on avoiding them by making a long detour. Hence, he started his return journey from Fatagar by following the course of the River Awash, thereby making a considerable detour through Ifat. He crossed the Awash river not far from the present Awash station of the railway line that runs from Addis Ababa to Djibouti. Once in the Adal lowlands, Nur must have felt that he was safe. As a result his force may have relaxed their vigilance. This would have been a grave error of judgement at a

1. E. Cerulli, "Documenti arabi ... ", MRAL, p. 91.

crucial moment. The scouting Oromo band, which must have been spying on his movements for a long time, would have realised that the moment they had been waiting for was at hand. The scouting band alerted the Karrayu, Marawa and Akichu bands of the Michelle gada, which was probably following Nur at a distance. From lowland Dawaro, they crossed over to Adal and waited in hiding in the forests of Mount Hazalo. Nur deceived by a false sense of safety, unsuspecting of the thunderbolt out of the blue, seems to have been particularly careless at night. One may deduce from the unlikelihood of the Oromo attacking during the day an army so well provided with firearms. In any case, the attack was made with lightning speed which hurled the entire Muslim force into utter confusion. In the words of Bahrey, "... when Nur came down into his country ... Mesle (Michelle gada) met him near Hazalo and killed a very large number of his men. Since the Galla first invaded our country there had been no such slaughter."¹ In this slaughter, the Muslim cannon, muskets, swords, spears and arrows must have knocked off several heads of their own comrades, as they did those of the Oromo. Under the cover of bullets and darkness only a few, whose horses and mules had not been killed, managed to escape. And once again, Nur was among those who took the news of the disastrous rout to Harar.

On his arrival in Harar, Nur is reported to have ridden on "a donkey as a sign of humility ... The incident of the donkey may have taken place when Nur was returning to Harar city after losing his horses at Hazalo."² After that Nur never tried to come back to continue with his conquest of the Christian kingdom. The Muslim bands left behind in Waj and Fatagar were left to their own fate. Nur concentrated on saving the city. If an event were to change the course of history by bringing to an end unceremoniously the era of dramatic conflicts between the Muslims and Christians in the Horn, the battle of Hazalo, in every sense of the word, was such an event.³ After Nur's malasy army melted under that unexpected sudden attack, Harar was never able to create a new striking force with which to open a new gamble. The Christians, too, were exhausted; their territory shrank, and they

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1. Bahrey, in Some Records of Ethiopia, p. 117.
 2. Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia ...", p. 317.
 3. In 1575, the Muslims of Harar again tried to invade the Christian kingdom, but the gamble turned out to be an utter failure.

were never able to put in the field any army that would invade Harar. The two traditional enemies were separated for the next three centuries by the Oromo, who occupied the land over which they had fought for so long. The new Oromo land separated the Cross from the Crescent.¹

Nur returned to Harar with what was left from the Hazalo disaster. In Harar he found that the agricultural population was very much disaffected, while the city had been attacked many times. The sudden Oromo attack had come at the season of sowing, in some cases preventing the people from undertaking their yearly planting. The people of Harar had soon to pay dearly for the failure to sow in 1559. Nur also found lawlessness in Harar city. The first thing he did was to restore law and order. During the anarchy which followed the Oromo attack, the Harari chronicle implies that the law of the jungle reigned in Harar "... Amir Nur showed extreme patience ... What is more he increased his face and his respect of the goods of others."² This seems to suggest the breakdown of law and order in the city. Nur also supported the people displaced from the countryside from the state treasury. Thus, Nur's return must have raised the morale of the populace, if it did not immediately remove the Oromo threat. His family connection, his link with the ulema, his long experience in the jihad and the politics of Harar, his patience and attempts to alleviate the plights of the refugees, must have helped to restore the confidence of the people in him. With the head of Galawdewos in his hand, Nur could have appealed to Muslim nationalism and stirred up strong feelings which would have enabled him to adopt two positive policies.

On the one hand, he followed an offensive policy of meeting the Oromo in the countryside rather than defending the towns; while on the other hand, he adopted the pragmatic policy of strengthening the walls of the towns.³ Unfortunately for Nur and the sedentary population of Harar, the task of defending the towns and caravan routes became extremely difficult because of the Oromo pressure and general disturbance by the Somali nomads. Between

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1. M. de Salviac, Un peuple antique au pays de Menelik ... , p. 33. See also R.P. Azais et R. Chambard, Cinq années de recherches archéologiques, p. 5.
 2. E. Cerulli, "Documenti arabi ... ", MRAL, p. 57.
 3. Harar was already a walled town before Nur built his famous, bigger and stronger wall which still exists.

them these two nomadic peoples threatened to cut off all trade routes between the sea and the Harar interior. This situation was exacerbated by the devastating famine that engulfed Harar between late 1559 and early 1562. The famine must have been sparked off by a number of interrelated factors. First, the Oromo infested the farming lands during the season of sowing, which probably led to the failure of that year's crop. There was also catastrophic rinderpest, followed by drought, locusts and epidemic diseases which put into question the very survival of Harari society.

It is not out of place to assume that the sudden aggressiveness of the Oromo was a response to the deep crisis caused by the famine. Otherwise it is difficult to explain how a people who had already reached the Harar plateau and the country east of the Goreis hills¹ between 1538 and 1554, suddenly turned into dangerous bands by 1560. The Goreis hills mark the limit of the central highlands in the east, "descending in a series of disconnected foot hills at the edge of the almost featureless Marar plain. Only a few miles west of the Marar plain is the chain of Goreis mountains, which run north-west to south-east for a distance of twenty-five miles."² This means that even before the time of the Michelle gada (1554-1562), the Oromo had already reached the eastern limit of Harar proper on the way to the sea. However, since none of the Harari manuscripts mentions Oromo aggression before 1559, we may assume that the earlier migration was peaceful in character. Why did the Oromo suddenly become aggressive at this time?³

According to the contemporary chronicler, at the height of the famine about 1560-1561 "the price of one saa'a⁴ of sorghum reached 12 asharif. The price of salt reached 25 asharif, while the price of oxen reached 300 or more asharif."⁵ Asharif was a unit of Harari money. Twenty-two small copper pieces of coinage known as mahalaq were equivalent to one asharif. According to the same manuscript the price of one saa'a of sorghum during

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1. Huntingford, in Some Records of Ethiopia, Preface, pp.lxxiv-lxxvi.
 2. C.H.Brooke, "Settlements of the eastern Galla, Hararge province of Ethiopia", University of Nebraska, (1956), Ph.D. thesis, p. 36.
 3. We may never be able fully to document the cause of this sudden aggressiveness. But it seems the devastating animal disease, coupled by the three-year famine may have played some role in such a change. See below.
 4. Saa'a was a Harari measurement of weight used mainly in earlier centuries. We are not able to tell its equivalent in kilogrammes.
 5. E. Cerulli, "Documenti arabi ...", MRAL, p. 57.

the year of plenty was four mahalaq. This means at the height of the famine the price of sorghum sky-rocketed from four to 26 $\frac{1}{2}$ mahalaq. It increased sixty-six times. This spectacular rise indicated the failure of the crop of 1559 and the subsequent anarchy that in turn broke down commerce. This is reflected more than anything else in the price of salt. Unfortunately, our manuscript does not mention the price of salt in normal times. But it may not have been more than one asharif.¹ If so, it would mean that the price of salt had increased twenty-five times. Such a rise would indicate that salt was no longer being imported, because of the general insecurity and the disruption of commerce. The price of oxen is said to have increased almost a hundred times.² Three things can be deduced from such unheard-of price rises. First, the jump in the price of salt was brought about by disruption of commerce. The breakdown in the exchange of goods and services must have increased the intensity of the famine. Secondly, there was an extreme shortage of sorghum, the main staple crop, which in turn reflects the severity of the famine, and thirdly, there was an even more terrifying shortage of ploughing oxen, which in turn would not have failed to exacerbate the famine. In fact, the astronomical jump in the price of oxen may reflect the non-existence of ploughing animals. According to the nineteenth century Amharic history of the amirs :

A serious cattle disease wiped out almost the entire herds including ploughing oxen. Because all the ploughing oxen were killed people were forced to plough with horses and donkeys. The devastating cattle disease was followed by a serious drought that destroyed crops sowed by hand. What was left from the drought was devastated by the swarms of locusts that invaded the country.³

The above does not seem merely religious rhetoric, but reality on the ground. Considering the severity of the famine, the chains of devastating events that engulfed Harar, these stories may have been sad memories of the actual events. The extremity of the situation is reflected in the following story of cannibalism, possibly true, in which a mother is reported to have eaten her child and so did the husband eat his wife.

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1. The use of asharif and mahalaq indicate the degree to which the Harari urban economy was monetarised in the sixteenth century.
 2. Unfortunately, our document does not give us the price of oxen at normal times. Judging by the abundance of cattle in the region, and by the chronicler's astonishing surprise at the jump of the price of oxen, we may assume that the price of an average ox may have been not more than three asharif. Even by the middle of the nineteenth century, when R. Burton visited Harar, the price of an average ox was only three to four asharif.
 3. K. Wendt, "Amharische Geschichte eines Emirs ...", Orientalia, p. 492.

One day while I was sitting in the court of our qadi Shaikh Gamal-Din, a man was brought before the qadi. This man was carrying something tied to his shoulder. Then the person who brought this man said 'This man had killed his wife and had cut her into pieces to eat her'. And when the tied thing was put down, it was a woman whose joints were cut into pieces like a sheep slaughtered for consumption. This horrified our qadi who immediately ordered the burial of the remains.

According to the disgruntled chronicler, at this darkest moment in the history of Harari society, the Oromo were kidnapping people and grabbing whatever they found. This seems to have been inspired by the famine itself. From the manner in which the chronicler describes the Oromo raids, it seems to have been a weak assault by weak people on weak people. We put Oromo also in the category of weak people, since they equally must have been the victims of the devastating cattle disease. In fact, it is not far-fetched to suggest that the terrible cattle disease, drought and famine that succeeded each other, must have turned the less aggressive pastoral Oromo into dangerous hungry bands.

It was during this dark hour that the far-sighted Nur realized the necessity of building durable walls around the city. Harar had always been a walled city at least since the fourteenth century. However, the new wall built by Nur was radically different from the old in that it was strong stone walling that has survived the ups and downs of the last four centuries. The work on the wall must have started by 1560 and was completed at the latest by early 1567.² This stone wall with five gates, and twenty-four rounds of trenches dug around it made the defence of the city dependable.³ The many towers for observation, the strong doors defended with muskets, and above all the iron determination of the people to save their city proved to the Oromo that their city was impregnable. The trenches made the Oromo cavalry ineffective. The wall made the Oromo spears, arrows and stone missiles useless. The firearms the Oromo dreaded so much,⁴ prevented them

1. E. Cerulli, "Documenti arabi ...", MRAL, p. 57.

2. The stone wall which R. Burton in 1855 estimated to be "... about one mile long and half that breadth" was completed during the lifetime of Nur. See R. Burton, First footsteps in East Africa (London: 1856), vol. II, p. 13. According to Yusuf Ahmad, "enquiry into some aspects of the economy of Harar and the records of the household economy of the amirs of Harar (1825-1875)", p. 13, Burton's figure is too big an estimate. "Actual figures are about three fourths of a mile long and one half mile at broadest point. Azais and Chambard, Cinq années ..., p. 4, claim that the wall was completed by 1580. However, their assumption was based on an incorrect dating. And in fact many of their dates about the history of the time are not correct.

3. M. de Salviac, Un peuple antique ..., pp. 32-33.

4. R. Burton, ibid., p. 20.

from coming nearer to the city. These defensive measures were even more effective against sudden night attack. With the gates heavily defended and closed at night the Oromo had to leave the city and attack less defended areas.

Finally, by 1562, when Harari society, including the Oromo, was slowly but surely recovering from the effects of the devastating famine, the period of the Michelle gada came to an end and was succeeded by a new gada which was even more aggressive. Hence, neither did Nur get respite from the daunting problems nor did Harar fare better from the burden of refugees under the new situation.

Undeterred by any geographical barriers, new groups that belonged to the succeeding Harmufa gada (1562-1570), poured into the region. The three-year famine seems to have caused a considerable shifting of the sedentary population from the Harar and Charchar region towards Dawaro, from where it proceeded to Fatagar and Waj. This exodus of famine refugees from Harar to the southern provinces had nothing to do with the Muslim Christian struggle.¹ Thus in the Charchar and Harar regions the Harmufa gada did no more than dislodge the remaining people. This explains the speed with which they gobbled up the huge area. This does not mean that the surviving people did not resist. In fact they resisted brilliantly and continued the struggle for some more years. According to the Harari manuscript of the period, the Oromo continued devastating Sim, Nagab, Jidaya, Dakar and the land of Hargaya, which according to our source was totally ruined. At this point, apart from Hargaya which was wasted and laid ruin, the rest of the principalities were still under the nominal control of the city administration. All the six principalities were among the rich and famous agricultural provinces of Harar. Nur did everything humanly possible to alleviate the plight of the refugees, and appealed to the people of the various principalities to follow his example of building walls and trenches around their settlements and towns. The appeal fell on sympathetic ears and the people hastily erected fortifications and dug trenches around their towns. They also continued resisting bravely until 1566, when famine struck again. This second famine (which followed the three previous bumper years during which the price of one saa'a of sorghum went down to four or five mahalaq) was not

1. This was an exodus caused by famine, and they went in the hope of finding asylum from hunger.

as severe as the previous one. By this time the people must have learned the art of fighting and farming simultaneously. In fact, the price of one saa'a of sorghum reached two asharif and the price of salt went to five asharif.¹ According to this figure the price of sorghum increased eleven times, while that of salt rose five times. Compared with the earlier phenomenal figures this rise was only a small one. However, taken by itself, it presents a grotesque picture. And coming as it did, at the time when the people had not fully recovered from the earlier crises, and above all when the new aggressive gada was in office, it must have been very ruinous. The rise in the price of salt indicates the general disturbance in commerce and the insecurity along the caravan routes.

No matter how much Nur gallantly tried to fight the Oromo in the countryside, and how much he encouraged the people to remain in their respective regions, they were unable to stop the irresistible flood-like irruption of the Harmufa gada. For Nur, the offensive policy of meeting the Oromo in the field proved a herculean task. According to the Harari chronicle, Nur led the most memorable three months campaigns in early 1567. It is not known with certainty whether it was during this long campaign or earlier, but Nur is reported to have met a big band of the Harmufa gada at the famous battlefield of Midaga lola, about thirty-two kilometres southeast of the city.² The battle of Midaga lola is reported to have been inconclusive but very costly on both sides. For Harar, such losses were unacceptable if the city was to survive. For the Oromo such losses were only a small setback that had to be avenged. It must have been this consideration that forced the Harari leadership to look for an alternative, but Nur was not destined to live longer and the new alternative had to wait for his immediate successor.

Amir Nur, the longest surviving statesman of sixteenth century Harar, a man who earned the titles of "the prince of the Faith", the second conqueror and "the right and just ruler", exhausted by the insurmountable chains of crises, weakened by eight years of campaigns against the Oromo, frustrated by the failure of his three months campaigns to reverse the irreversible process, at last succumbed to the epidemic plague that raged in Harar in 1567.³

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1. E. Cerulli, "Documenti arabi ... ", MRAL, p. 57.
 2. Azais and Chambard, Cinq années ... , p. 48.
 3. E. Cerulli, ibid., p. 58.

Although it is impossible to document the exact nature of this epidemic, it may have been caused by the congested condition of the city and the absence of elementary sanitary facilities such as dry-latrines, depositories for the collection of garbage, lack of knowledge of preventive measures and the famine itself which weakened the people's resistance to diseases.

The merchants of the trading centres behind their walls and fortifications continued resistance. It was the sedentary cultivators who were scattered by the famine and the Oromo attack. Large numbers of Harla and Adare who did not die in the famine, and who did not seek refuge elsewhere, submitted to the new masters and became part of them. Those Harla and Adare who fled to the surrounding lowlands were absorbed by the Somali and Afar nations, while those who fled to Bali, Dawaro and Fatagar eventually became part of the Oromo nation.

We have reports which show the declines of agriculture and the conversion of agricultural land into pasture. In the region of Harar proper, and Charchar, one can still see many remains of earth ramparts and other ruins.¹ This again points to the process which gradually led to the disappearance of agriculture and trading in this region. The main explanation of this phenomenon lies probably in the excellence of the pastures which had always attracted the nomads of the region.

..... The area of uplands throughout Chercher is oriented from southwest to northeast and forms the watershed between drainage to the south into the basin of the Webi Shabeli of the Somali plateau and to the north into the Afar basin. The divide varies between approximately 6500 feet and 8000 feet elevation ... at such places called 'rare' the water level drops soon after the rains cease, but enough moisture is retained through the dry months to support a luxuriant cover of grass. The rare are the important grazing grounds for the inhabitants.²

The above quotation describes the conditions of our own century. It may have some relevance to our subject. However, one thing cannot be doubted. The conversion of ploughed land to pasture land was a major blow

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1. See for instance Azais and Chambard, Cinq années ... , pp. 30, 35, 120, 130 et passim.
 2. C.H. Brooke, "Settlements of the eastern Galla ...", pp. 30-33.

to the agricultural economy of Harar. The famine and general insecurity would soon lead to the withering away of trade-based urban communities. The literary civilization of the sedentary population that had flourished in the commercial towns disappeared. Settled life, the arts of building stone houses, mosques and towns, government houses, town walls, in short the technology of building, which is the symbol of the civilization of these communities, was soon to be abandoned. To summarise, the period between the 1530s and 1560s was one of the most disastrous in the entire history of Harar. From 1529 to 1543, the jihadic gamble exhausted both its human and material resources. From 1543 to 1552 civil war and the struggle with the Christian kingdom further consumed the energy of Harar. From 1552 to 1559 the inability of Nur to bring the surrounding Somali nomads under the control of the city, his jihad of 1559, which achieved little apart from the head of the unfortunate emperor, the massacre of malasy at Hazalo, all consumed the flower of Harari society. The arrival of aggressive Oromo bands in 1559, the three-year famine that turned even less aggressive Oromo pastoralists into hungry wolves, the arrival of other more aggressive bands from 1562 to 1566, the second famine, all brought ruin to Harar, reduced the size of the Harari population, and irreparably damaged Harari power. Hereafter Harar was a spent force. All this must have convinced Nur shortly before his death that the real battle was lost and what remained was to try to save the "city of saints",¹ and his farsighted measures saved it. It was this glorious part of Nur's history which immortalised and canonized his name, which shines through the written and oral tradition of Harar. He still stands second only to Abadir in the long lists of Harari saints.

Amir Uthman (July 1567- 16 June 1569) and the Oromo

Nur, who died at the moment when the people of Harar were virtual prisoners within their wall, when plague was raging, and when the countryside was under the control of the Oromo, was succeeded by a certain Uthman,

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1. This is the other name for the city of Harar. Harar is also known as the city of Abadir, the legendary founder. In the popular memories, Abadir was the founder of Harar, but also its protector and the first teacher of Islam. He remains the single most accomplished missionary saint, the ultimate paradigm of saintly virtues and powers, baraka. He is supposed to have "surrounded the city with seven impregnable walls of saints which have defended Harar from all enemies through all ages." See for instance, Ewald Wagner, Legende und Geschichte der Fath Madinat Harar von Yahya Nasrallah, Arabic text, p. 12 et passim. See also S.R. Woldron, "A Farewell to Bab haji: city symbolism of Harari identity 1887-1977", a paper presented at the workshop of society and history of the south Ethiopian periphery, July 20, 1979, Cambridge Univ. p. 77; E. Cerulli, "Documenti arabi ... ", MRAL, pp. 49-50.

a man of wide experience. Uthman was to Nur, what Adole was to Imam Ahmad. He was a freed slave who probably had championed the cause of Nur for a long time. Originally Uthman must have been either captured or bought in the Christian kingdom during the jihad. During Nur's fifteen years in power, Uthman seems to have served in different capacities, even becoming wazir towards the end of Nur's reign. As a politico-military officer with long experience, he knew the weakness of the Muslims and strength of their numerous enemies. Nur, who knew well the danger which was hanging over the very survival of the city, seems to have realized that Uthman alone could save it. Thus, he bypassed his own sons and appointed Uthman as his successor. There is no ground whatever for supposing that Uthman was a usurper.¹ On the contrary a variant of the History of the kings specifically states that Uthman was made big by Amir Nur.² This means that Uthman was appointed by Nur. What is more, Uthman seems to have been popular at the time of his accession. According to the Amharic history of the amirs Uthman came to power at the gravest moment. He improved that grave situation, and as we shall now see, he stopped bad activities that brought ruin to the country.³

Nur had instituted the tradition of the state's giving a maintenance allowance to the refugees. We do not know how he managed it, but he does not seem to have alienated the wealthy merchants by the burden of heavy taxation. Under the insurmountable burdens, Uthman made the refugees the problem both of the state and the people. He taxed the wealthy merchants at Zeila, including the foreigners. Among those affected by this measure were the orphans whose father had died while fighting the Oromo. Nur had left the wealth of these orphans with the respected qadi Gamal ad-Din. According to the chronicle, Uthman took from the qadi the property of the orphans. "The amount which Amir Uthman appropriated for himself was 35,000 and out of each thousand fifty were pure gold."⁴ The chronicler who was adamantly opposed to Uthman seems to suggest that he snatched this sum from

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1. Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia ... ", p. 343, suggests that Uthman was probably a usurper.
 2. E. Cerulli, "Documenti arabi ... ", MRAL, p. 69.
 3. K. Wendt, "Amharische Geschichte ... ", Orientalia, pp. 494-495.
 4. E. Cerulli, Ibid., pp. 57-58.

from the weak orphans. However, the phrase "appropriated for himself" seems to have been an euphemism for Uthman's act of taxing even the wealth of the weak. This becomes clear from the chronicle itself, which says the opposition was advising Uthman "not to transgress the path of God until the punishment was over."¹ What is more, Uthman appears to have diverted to the refugees the customary one-fifth share from the raids which would have been paid to the sherifs (the descendants of the prophet). These measures brought Uthman into deep hatred.

As soon as the famine abated in 1568, Uthman seems to have relaxed the tense atmosphere to help the business community. Thus the chronicle declares that "he was the first to give permission for wine drinking ... He became a victim of passion and neglected religious duties and made it permissible to give way to temptation."² The opposition felt crushed under the weight of his "irreligious" behaviour. For this reason they outrightly condemned him for his deviation from the "true" path, openly calling him a man opposed to Islam. The angry chronicler who seems to have been the partisan of the opposition, finds nothing praiseworthy in Uthman. To him, Uthman was an enemy of Allah and the Muslims. Therefore, he justified rebellion against him and claimed that his overthrow was a religious duty.

Despite the insults and imprecations which the outraged chronicler heaped upon him, Uthman was one of the most far-sighted leaders of Harar who ruled after Nur. Admittedly, he was the victim of the time, and his radical policy, which departed from that of his predecessors and those of his successors was misunderstood and much hated. Unlike the sixteenth century rulers of Harar, who saw their greatness in the self-destructive jihads, Uthman saw the salvation of the city in commerce and commercial transactions. He seems to have been the first conscientious and economically-minded politician, one who realized that Harar owed its existence to its local advantages. Without these advantages Harar could not have survived under the pressure of heavy and various misfortunes which united to distress it for over thirty years. Uthman realized wisely that commerce was the essential support of Harar and that the city would not survive unless its government

1. E. Cerulli, "Documenti arabi ... ", MRAL, pp. 57-58.

2. Ibid.

was favourable to mercantile people. He seems to have believed that despite the military misfortune and political disasters, Harar could survive on commerce. He knew that the commerce of Harar was greatly dependent on imports of foreign goods and exports of local produce. In other words, he knew the prosperity and survival of Harar depended on commerce and agriculture. He realized that it was an impossible task to guarantee the safety of the agricultural sector, since the pastoral Oromo had taken the cultivated land for the grazing grounds. However, with commerce the matter was different. Protecting commerce was within the means of Harar and also the benefit of the Oromo. If merchants were welcomed and favoured in their travel, through Oromo held territory, if their bodies and property were protected while en route and in different towns, and if the merchants were encouraged to travel frequently without any apprehension, it would pull the Oromo into the mercantile economy of Harar. With the channels of commercial intercourse wide open, the trade of Muslim merchants would have diffused its beneficial influence over the pastoral Oromo in the form of cheap cotton clothes and products of local manufacture, which in turn would have encouraged the expansion of local industry guaranteeing employment and prosperity for the citizens of Harar. Uthman made peace treaty with the Oromo, which bears the mark of a far-sighted statesman who wanted to protect the interest of a trading nation. This fact alone makes him one of the more realistic leaders of the Horn, one who wanted to pacify the Oromo not through warfare, as his Christian contemporaries did, but through peaceful exchange of goods, which would have tended gradually to soften the feelings of alienation between the Muslims and their non-Muslim and troublesome neighbours. It took almost another century and a half of destructive warfare for the Christian leaders to realize the wisdom of pacifying the Oromo by other means than warfare. In this sense Uthman was far ahead of his time. He seems also to have been a very pragmatic Muslim leader, who realized that commerce was a never-failing source of wealth for Harar, one which if protected would render the city richer and more flourishing than any in the region. The key to the protection of commerce was securing peace and Uthman's greatest achievement was making peace with the Oromo.

According to the Harari manuscript, the treaty which Uthman negotiated with the leaders of the Harmufa gada contains five articles.¹ First, the Oromo were allowed to come to the Muslim market centres and buy "cotton clothes

1. E. Cerulli, "Documenti arabi ... ", MRAL, p. 58.

at a fixed price." The phrase "at a fixed price"¹ seems to suggest that the Oromo were probably affected with the inflated price of cotton clothes. The inflation was caused probably by a shortage, due to the disruption of the imported foreign goods and the inability of the local industries to meet the demands of the large numbers of Oromo who poured into the Harar region at this time. The protest against the high cost of the cotton cloth on the part of the Oromo demonstrates two things. First, it shows their knowledge of the market value of this item, which in turn implies their earlier presence in the region and their interest in the preservation of the market centre. Secondly, it shows that the interest in cotton cloth on the part of the Oromo was a response to their earlier use of this item. Although it is impossible to establish with certainty just when the Oromo started to change their traditional skin clothing in favour of cotton cloth, this information shows that cotton cloth was popular among the Oromo at this time. What can be said with certainty is that this demand for cotton cloth covered only men and not women. Only men, because women continued using their traditional skin dress which was regarded as a "mark of beauty" for at least another century. It is noteworthy that at this time the numerous Harari walled market centres were not yet abandoned. Uthman wanted to save these centres, by making the Oromo realize in a very practical way that they needed the market centres for their own benefit. By allowing the Oromo to come to the centres he was demolishing the wall of enmity and suspicion between the two groups. On the one hand, he was demonstrating to the Muslims that the walls were not the real security, which lay in commerce and physical contact. On the other hand, by opening the walls to the Oromo he was demonstrating to the latter that they equally needed peace to derive benefit from the markets.

Secondly, the Oromo were allowed to come to all the market centres freely not only to buy cotton clothes, but also to sell. The phrase "to sell" indicates that the commercial centres were already dependent on Oromo produce such as cheap animal products, and other natural items such as ivory and ostrich feathers. The market centres also depended on the grain produced by the people the Oromo kept on the land. All this shows how much Uthman wanted to pull the Oromo into the mercantile economy and guarantee the survival and prosperity of the Muslims.

1. On the surface this seems to suggest that there was no bargaining and no quarrel. However, there is an indication within the text itself which shows that this was a protest against the high cost of cotton cloth which characterized Harari market centres at this time.

The third and equally important article dealt with the movement of persons and goods, which was the main artery for the continuation and survival of commerce. Accordingly, the Oromo allowed Muslim caravans to pass through their newly won territory without any harassment or extracting any undue profit from them. This certainly was a considerable achievement on the part of Uthman and a great concession on the part of the Oromo. As can be seen these three basic articles of the treaty dealt with commerce. The articles express not only victory for commerce but also a spirit of compromise, which took into consideration the interest of the other party. Herein lies the realistic statesmanship of the leaders on both sides, who negotiated the treaty, and by it accepted the doctrine of "peaceful" co-existence based on mutual self interest.

The fourth article dealt with the movement of Muslim soldiers. According to this article, the Muslim soldiers were allowed to patrol the markets and caravan routes within Oromo held territory.¹ By this concession, the Oromo agreed to allow all the market centres to remain under the control of the Muslim administration. It was a considerable victory on the part of Uthman, and had this policy been given a chance to survive a little longer probably the history of the region would have been somewhat changed.

The fifth and the final article of the treaty which Uthman concluded with the Oromo dealt with a matter which provided Uthman's opponents with an admirable opportunity for openly calling for his overthrow. This article, the only one which did not deal with commercial matters, was more important to the Oromo than to the Harari administration. According to this "all those Oromo who have taken and will take refuge among the Muslims in commercial towns should be repatriated to the Oromo".² This article tells us several things. First, the sedentary agricultural population were running from the tyrannical rule of their new masters, who were making repatriation the price of peace with their weak neighbours. This was like saying "return our refugees if you want peace, or face liquidation in your walls". To agree to repatriation must have been a bitter decision for the Muslims, since the people to be repatriated had only a few years earlier been a part of the Muslim nation in Harar. Uthman seems to have entered into this bitter undertaking only after considering the other alternative. His view also may

1. E. Cerulli, "Documentia arabi ... ", MRAL, p. 58.

2. Ibid.

have been influenced by a long-term hope that, through the presence of Muslims among the Oromo, Islam would have an opportunity to spread itself among them, thus transforming the non-Muslim enemy into a Muslim ally. Had that happened, the history of north-east Africa would have been different. Where the Muslims failed in the sixteenth century, the Christians succeeded in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in proselytizing some Oromo, whom they recruited as effective fighters against the non-Christian Oromo¹

Secondly, this article shows that the Oromo wanted to keep on the land under their control the people they conquered. This was a common practice in different places, as the next chapter will show. The conquered people were adopted en masse by the Abba Gada. Once adopted, they became part of the clan or tribe to which their genealogy belonged, and to which their rights, responsibilities, safety and security were tied. Once they became the "sons" of a clan it was not easy to break that agreement. It could be broken only if these "sons" were to become "the sons" of another more powerful clan or tribe. The Muslims were not such a powerful party. Incidentally this article also helps us to see how the Oromo defined themselves. For them any body whom they had either conquered or kidnapped, and subsequently adopted, was part of them. This shows the ease with which the non-Oromo were turned into Oromo, irrespective of all barriers. This reflects the dynamism of the gada system which sustained the urge for further adoption. According to the wide and loose Oromo "definition of themselves", which the Muslims did not understand, any Muslims who had lived among the Oromo, even for a short time, were regarded as part of the Oromo people, who were subject to repatriation, while some Muslim leaders believed that Muslims were not subject to repatriation unless they had voluntarily abandoned their religion. This diametrically opposed interpretation of who was to be repatriated, was to be one of the main causes which led to the failure of the peace agreement.

Thirdly, this final article also shows that women,² and farm labourers, were in short supply in Oromo society. Women were wanted to be wives for the numerous young unmarried men, while farm labourers were wanted to produce grain which the Oromo used as staple food, together with milk, butter, blood and meat. One wonders if the whole idea of this article was not inspired and motivated by the desire to pre-empt a mass exodus of women and farm labourers from the Oromo held territory once peace and order was restored.

1. *Infra*, pp. 343-4.

2. *Infra*, pp. 202-3.

From the Harari manuscript itself, it appears that commercial activities flourished in the Harar region following Uthman's peace treaty with the Oromo. As a result foreign manufactured goods continued to arrive, while the local produce continued to be exported. Compared with the earlier volume of import and export, what Uthman's progressive policy achieved immediately was probably inconsiderable. However, it had materially increased since the making of the peace, and the Muslims started organising large caravans that went towards Awssa and Zeila, and towards the interior. The late increase in the trade of Harar, though small, had proved advantageous to the city and had awakened in the merchants a spirit of commercial enterprise, and probably encouraged them to organize large caravans that visited distant and rich provinces like Bali, Dawaro, Fatagar, Hadiya, Waj and Shawa. Although the success of long distance caravans to the above-mentioned places is very doubtful, one thing remains certain. Uthman's policy of coming to terms with the Oromo gave protection to commerce, though it was short lived. The reversal of Uthman's pragmatic policy by his successors, and the series of crises that united to distress Harar, exposed commerce and the merchant class to every species of extortion and rapine, from different corners. Demoralized by continual defeats of the Muslims at the hand of the Oromo, the mercantile class took the earliest opportunity of abandoning Harar,¹ in which they, with reason, believed neither their persons nor their property to be any longer secure. By abandoning Harar and flying to Awssa, Farfara, Waraba and Zeila, the merchants sought security for their trade. However, unfortunately history took its own course.² Harar, depopulated, militarily defeated, commercially ruined, decayed for several decades, but eventually survived only because Uthman's pragmatic policy was resuscitated in a muted form. Therein lies Uthman's considerable contribution to the survival of Harar.

Finally, Uthman seems to have used his peace agreement with the Oromo for strengthening his position within Harar. He presented it as a concrete achievement for the safety of the traders, trade centres and trade routes, on which the survival of Harar depended so much. It was through this agreement which brought peace that Uthman was able "to improve the grave situation and stop the bad activities which ruined the country"³, all of which he had inherited from his predecessors.

1. *Infra*, p. 208.

2. *Infra*, p. 212.

3. K. Wendt, "Amharische Geschichte ...", *Orientalia*, pp. 494-495.

This short-lived but spectacular achievement made Uthman's position strong in Harar. Thus, not suspecting the treachery of his opponents, and assured of his peace, Uthman dispatched about 500 Malasy, the best force he had, to Hadiya to help his co-religionists in their struggle against Sarsa Dengel. After they had left, his opponents, who had kept their heads low while his crack force was in Harar, started accusing him of making a pact with the "infidels". The opposition concentrated on the last article, which they condemned as a sell-out of the first magnitude. From our source it does not appear that the propaganda of this power-hungry, fanatical group succeeded in eroding Uthman's support within the capital. The difference between his policy and that of the opposition was one of peace or war. He was for peace, and the opposition was for war. The leader of the opposition was Garad Gebril, the father-in-law of Amir Nur and one of his gallant fighters.¹ Gebril, as a member of the land-owning nobility, represented the interest of the sedentary population, who were very much displaced by the Oromo conquest.²

In order to placate the leader of the opposition, and probably to disengage him from refugee politics in the city, Uthman appointed Gebril to the lucrative post of chief of the men patrolling the Oromo markets and caravan routes, a job made possible by Uthman's agreement with the Oromo. Gebril used the appointment as an opportunity for going out of Harar. On 17 April 1569, almost nineteen months after Uthman became the head of state, Gebril established himself in one of the Oromo market centres called Zagrabar.³ While at this place, Gebril found a ready-made pretext for an open rebellion. He used the case of a Muslim woman of noble origin. Some years earlier this woman had been captured by the Oromo and had changed her religion. She married an Oromo and lived with them, but some time later she escaped from the Oromo and took refuge in one of the market towns, where she returned to her former religion. The nobility to which this lady belonged handed her over to Gebril and urged him to save her from being sent back to the "infidels". Gebril, who had his own axe to grind, decided to defend her with his life. For the Oromo, this lady was part of them both by their own "definition", and by the terms of the peace treaty. Accordingly,

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1. E. Cerulli, "Documenti arabi ... ", MRAL, p. 67.
 2. It seems that Gebril and his refugee supporters from the countryside failed to reconcile themselves with the idea of abandoning the countryside to the new masters. They failed to realize that an irreversible change had taken place.
 3. Cerulli, ibid.

they immediately demanded that Gebril repatriate the woman. Gebril was not strong enough to fight with the Oromo alone, and wanted either to pull in Uthman in his fight against the infidels, thus destroying the agreement, or failing that to expose Uthman as the enemy of Islam, who returned the Muslims to the pagans. With this design, he wrote to Uthman the following letter, in which he appealed to the words of Allah which Uthman must take seriously in his decision. Meanwhile, he seems to have defied the Oromo demand with impunity, since the agreement was with Uthman, and not with him.

... The Galla had demanded us to return a Muslim woman of noble origin. The woman had repented and had returned to Islam. Since she is Muslim now it is not permissible to return her to them, because God has prohibited us to do so with these words : 'If you have known believers do not return them to unbelievers to which they are not permissible.' Quran sura 60 number 10.¹

Uthman, true to the letter and the spirit of his agreement with the Oromo, ordered Gebril to return the woman immediately, upon which Gebril refused to comply, and rebelled, calling the amir an enemy of God. Since the people of Zagrabar,² did not rally to his call, Gebril was forced to migrate to Awssa, the desert commercial town governed by his brother, a certain Ahmad. The latter joined the ranks of the rebels, and the two brothers marched on Zeila in order to capture this lucrative port and deprive Uthman of economic resources, as well as stop the importation of cotton clothes to Harar, with which he bought peace. The brothers' inability to march on Harar shows the strength of Uthman in the capital. However, at this juncture the amir made a mistake. He divided his force into three parts. He sent one part to Zeila under the command of Balaw Muhammed, the son of the brother of Imam Ahmad.³ The second part he left behind in Harar under the command of the garad of Hargay, while he himself went to Awssa with the rest of the force. On 21 May, 1569, Balaw Muhammed fought against Gebril and Ahmad and killed about 300 men, including the two brothers.⁴

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1. E. Cerulli, "Documenti arabi ...", MRAL, p. 59, It is very difficult to render the Arabic text into a meaningful English translation. However, we hope the incomplete translation would make it appear that Gebril's ideological struggle against Uthman was an open attack on the peace with the Oromo.
 2. From Gebril's failure to elicit support in Zagrabar, two things could be concluded : first, that Uthman was strong not only in the capital, but also in other market centres as well; secondly, that it took some time for the opposition against Uthman to come to the surface.
 3. Muhammed Ibrahim was the governor of the whole of Harar administration, when his brother Imam Ahmad was at the height of his power.
 4. K. Wendt, "Amharische Geschichte ...", Orientalia, p. 494.

The news of the death of the two brothers and their followers caused considerable commotion in Harar. This severe punishment of the opponents of Uthman displeased different sections of Muslim society. By their death, Gebril and Ahmad became martyrs, and Uthman the enemy of God, who shed rivers of Muslim blood. This seems to have made the people doubtful about his sincerity towards Islam. Among those outraged by the death of the two brothers and their followers were Talha, the son of Wazir Abbas, the brother of the Imam Ahmad, brothers of Garad Gebril, and the sons of Amir Nur.¹ Talha and the sons of Amir Nur seem to have turned against Uthman only at the eleventh hour. The death of the father-in-law of Amir Nur divided the family of Imam Ahmad. Here, blood feuds and bickerings within the ruling families became a cancer on the body politic of Harar society.

While Uthman was in Awssa, Talha and the brothers of Gebril and the son of Amir Nur, who is not identified by name, went towards Zeila, where they met Balaw Muhammed, whom they easily defeated. It seems the propaganda of the opposition effectively disarmed the supporters of Uthman, for the chronicler specifically states that :

... They chased Sim garad (i.e. Balaw Muhammed) and they took the soldiers he had and they came to Harar. They achieved victory over Garad Muhammed Hargay, left behind by Uthman in Harar. Uthman was sitting in Awssa not knowing the defeat of his army and the taking over of his country ... the ulema of Harar agreed to the accession of Talha. The soldiers of Amir Uthman left in Harar also accepted the decision.²

Thus on 16th June 1569 Talha became the sultan of Harar. When Uthman heard the news of his overthrow, he accepted the fait accompli. Once again he showed his wisdom by refusing to continue with the futile power struggle.

Uthman's fall from power meant the end of peace with the Oromo, an act by which the short-sighted Harari leaders sealed the fate of all the market towns in the Oromo held territory. That was a self-defeating policy

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1. E. Cerulli, "Documenti arabi ... ", MRAL, . 59. Perhaps the sons of Amir Nur may have also their own axes to grind against Uthman, whom their father appointed bypassing all of them.
 2. Ibid., pp. 59-60.

for which Harar paid dearly. This inaugurated the sad repetitive later history of Harar, in which the fanatical power-hungry and bickering leaders time and again abandoned the citizens of the city to the mercy of their numerous Oromo enemies, only to maintain themselves in power. At the time, the people of Harar successfully repulsed the Oromo attacks, but eventually they fell to the treachery of these leaders who had lulled their vigilance by expressions of confidence and gratitude for the successful defence of the city. This began with Talha (16 June 1559-2 May 1571), who had none of the qualities of the amir he replaced. From our source Talha was the first amir who adopted the title of sultan, which was traditionally reserved for the members of the Walasma dynasty. He was also the first to be deposed for not having gone on the jihad against the Oromo, the platform on which he came to power.¹

The Robale gada (1570-1578) came to power at the time when the leadership in Harar was very weak, indecisive and erratic. The deposed Talha was succeeded by an aged surviving soldier of Amir Nur, named Nasir, the son of Uthman Badlay, a member of the landed nobility. Sultan Nasir (2 May 1571-1573) died without fighting with the Oromo, at least so far as our source tells us. He was succeeded by his son Sultan Muhammed (2 May 1573-1576/7). To all intents and purposes, it was probably Sultan Muhammed who broke the pact, not simply in words but in open hostilities. But in this he fared no better than his predecessors.²

His attempts to recapture the farmlands may have failed and knowledge of the nostalgia of the nobility and of the religious men for the glorious days before the Humbana made their appearance, may have made him want to silence their criticism and save his throne by leading them into Ethiopia.³

As a preparation for the grand plan, he revitalized the administration. He made his brother Hamid wazir of Harar. Haygan Hashim was made the governor of Awssa, while Hashim was made governor of Zeila. Sultan Muhammed is also credited with having commissioned the building of a wall around the port of

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1. E. Cerulli, "Documenti arabi ...", MRAL, pp. 59-60.
 2. From our source, it is not clear whether Talha and his successor had openly broken the pact. When we consider the fact Talha was overthrown precisely because he did not fight against the Oromo, plus the fact that neither he nor Nasir were able to devise an effective means of mobilizing and organizing the people so as to deliver the Muslims from the oppression of the infidels, it is very doubtful whether they did.
 3. Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia ...", p. 348.

Zeila, as a precautionary measure against Somali restlessness.¹ Sultan Muhammed's jihadic rhetoric lulled the vigilance of the people to the immediate dangers. Without realizing his grave error of judgment, Muhammed embarked upon the Bali expedition in 1575, which turned out to be a total fiasco. The Sultan's departure from Harar invited one of the most devastating Oromo attacks ever mounted :

... When the Galla knew that the Muslim army had gone to Abyssinia they devastated the land of Sa'adin and destroyed a hundred Muslim villages ... Until they reached the city of Harar, and besieged the population for many days. The battles were fought on the gate of Harar so that the gate was full of corpses. The trench failed and the Galla broke the defence system of the city. It was in this battle that wazir Hamid was wounded with a spear twenty times ... After that the region was devastated and dominated by the race of the oppressors.²

Although the trenches fell to the Oromo and the defence system of the city was broken, Harar was saved miraculously. What may have forced the Oromo to leave the city was probably the iron determination of its people to fight to the bitter end. The several market towns that dotted Oromo-held territory, which Uthman sought to safeguard through peaceful means, were totally destroyed and disappeared. This was the last major blow to urban culture in the region and their fate was sealed when Sultan Muhammed opened hostilities with the Oromo, and went on that futile expedition. In the campaign in Bali, in which the Christians and Muslims fought over the land over which neither had control, Sultan Muhammed, deserted by some of his men, was captured and executed with the elite of his army. That put to an end Harar's pretences as a military power forever.³ This last disaster ended the era of Harar as a large territorial state. Thereafter Harar was reduced to being a city-state within its walls, which was besieged by the enemy on all sides.

The devastating attacks on commercial towns forced their inhabitants to fly towards Harar, Awssa, Farfara, Waraba and Zeila. The last three towns were in the Afar desert. Harar was filled by the refugees, whose

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1. E. Cerulli, "Documenti arabi ... ", MRAL, p. 90.
 2. Ibid., p. 61.
 3. J.S. Trimingham, Islam in Ethiopia, p. 96.

timely arrival provided much needed manpower. The refugees not only provided fighting material but also leadership. After the death of Wazir Hamid, the brother of the unfortunate sultan, who was speared several times, a certain Mansur, the son of Ayyub, an ambitious refugee, took over the leadership of the city on 6 September 1575. Mansur, an energetic and able organizer, quickly established himself and reorganized the defence of the city on a new pattern. He was the first leader after Amir Nur to call on the Somalis to come to the rescue of the city. The Somali responded quickly and favourably. They furnished the city with both manpower and cavalry. Their quick response may have been inspired more by the necessity to ally themselves against a common enemy,¹ than by their concern for the safety of "the city of saints", and the centre of Islamic learning. Mansur's reorganization of the defence of the city was so effective that the second Oromo attack was less costly in terms of human lives. Repeated failure to penetrate the defence lines of the city seems to have forced the Oromo to relax their seige. By March 1576 Mansur was so confident of the safety of the city that he went to Zeila with 150 Somali horses² and 300 men where he easily defeated Hashim and appointed his own governor. By May 1577 Mansur easily routed the governor of Awssa, and appointed his own governor there, too. He was killed by one of his own followers in September 1577, before he declared himself sultan.³

The Birmaje gada (1578-1586), one of the most powerful in the annals of Oromo migration, came to power after the Robale gada devastated the entire countryside around Harar. Of all the numerous commercial towns of the region only Harar survived in the highlands. This gada took the war to the Afar and Somali deserts. Muhammed Jassa, from the family of Imam Ahmad, was elected imam in September 1577. The people of Harar hoped that Muhammed, because of his illustrious lineage, would create a new sense of unity, and inspire them to resist within the walls, if not lead them to victory outside of them. To their great disappointment, the first thing Muhammed did when he came to power was to transfer the capital from Harar to Awssa in the Afar desert in September 1577.⁴ There is reason to believe that Muhammed was strongly influenced in his decision by the major disasters Harar had recently suffered. The repeated disasters had destroyed the old spirit. The capture and execution of Sultan Muhammed, the death of Hamid, all added up to frustrate its revival.

1. E. Cerulli, "Documenti arabi ...", MRAL, pp. 61-62. As we shall see below, the Somali nomads themselves were under the pressure of the migrating Oromo nomads at this time.

2. & 3. Ibid.

4. Harar was the capital of the Muslim state for 57 years from 1520 to 1577.

There are reasons to believe that the transfer was dictated by military, political and economic consideration. Military, because the war with the Oromo continued, with much more intensity. Imam Muhammed, who was himself among the gallant defenders of the city during the years of trial both under Wazir Hamid and Mansur, seems to have come to the conclusion that with the surrounding towns fallen, the farm land occupied, and Harar under siege, it was very difficult if not impossible to feed the soldiers and maintain order in the city. Muhammed realized that the military machine of Harar was reduced to the last degree of weakness, and was dying. It could only be saved if it found breathing space to recuperate and manpower to replace the losses. With the population drained of its most virile elements, Harar was not a safe place for recuperation and lacked the manpower for replacement of its losses. The political consideration was that the disintegration of the army meant the end of the throne. Above all, it was an economic consideration, because Harar, with the loss of its farm lands and the surrounding towns, and with the disruption of caravan routes, had become unimportant and commercially bankrupt. This economic factor can be demonstrated by the fact that the majority of the merchants in Harar voted with their feet by moving either to Awssa or Zeila. It appears that of the merchants who fled and the people who followed Imam Muhammed, the majority were of the Harla ethnic group. The Imam himself was Harla. This seems to suggest that the transfer of the capital was inspired among other things by ethnic conflict within Harar. A large section of Adare people remained in Harar, while a large section of Harla left the city. It is essential to note here that these two sedentary, agricultural populations, who spoke closely-related Semitic languages, were united during the first and the second jihad. Imam Ahmad who led the first jihad belonged to the Harla ethnic group, while Amir Nur, who led the second jihad was an Adare. After the collapse of the jihad, one could observe a veiled ethnic conflict between these two groups. While Islam was the main well-spring of nationalism for both, the quarrel among the ruling families of Harla and Adare caused doubt to creep into their hearts. It seems each group began to depart to its own ethnic camp, saying each for itself and Islam for all. So the bulk of the Harla departed to Awssa, where they took the leadership, and continued to dominate the sultanate until the late eighteenth century, when the Afar nomads from the north, supported by the peasant in the delta, overthrew the Harla dynasty and established the Afar sultanate.¹

1. I am indebted to Maknun Jamaludin, an Afar research student at Cambridge university, England, for this valuable piece of information. See also E. Chedeville "Quelques faites de l'organisation sociale des Afar", Africa 36 (1966), pp. 173-196.

The transfer of the capital from Harar to Awssa marked the formal end of the glorious history of the most powerful Muslim state in North East Africa. In the short term, it began the miserable history of the imamate of Awssa, characterized by rivalries, internecine conflicts, intrigues, usurpation and permanent instability.¹

When Muhammed made the painful decision for the transfer, in the pangs of the constant crises, he promised the remaining population of Harar two things : first, to leave his own brother as wazir in Harar, an act which assured the people that they were not totally abandoned; and secondly that he would soon raise a new army and open the caravan routes between Harar and Awssa and Zeila. He fulfilled both. In Awssa, Muhammed succeeded in organizing an army of 600 cavalry, 2000 infantry and 70 musketeers, mainly composed of Harla. With this formidable army in the desert, he managed to force to submission the surrounding Afar nomads who preyed on the caravans.² He also succeeded in opening the caravan routes from Awssa to Harar and Zeila. He concentrated on the safety of the caravan routes which were the main arteries for the survival of Harar. Left to themselves, the people of Harar gained the bitter experience of surviving within the confines of the city walls through defeats and the constant apprehension of assault. Once the people of the city abandoned their claim on the surrounding farm lands, the Oromo seem to have relaxed their seige on the city. It is impossible satisfactorily to document how this came about, but it appears that the Oromo, once they had become the masters of the land all around the city, wanted to save the city for their own benefit, since it was the only market where they could buy and sell. What Burton writes for the middle of the nineteenth century may have relevance to the situation of the late sixteenth century : "they might easily capture the place, but they preserve it for their own convenience."³

Imam Muhammed's formidable force was able to keep the caravan routes open and the sparsely populated Afar nomads under control. However, he

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1. In Awssa it seems the Muslims equally turned their weapons for external enemies against each other in internecine strife, which eventually annihilated their power base.
 2. E. Cerulli, "Documenti arabi ... ", MRAL, p. 69.
 3. R. Burton, First footsteps in East Africa, II, p. 20.

was unable to keep out of the realm of Awssa the flood-like irruption of WarraDaya Oromo "who from their base in the Ifat and Gadem plains along the Awash river had been scouring the watered lowlands between the rivers and lake Abbe".¹ Hammered between the Harar Oromo, who drove him out of Harar, and the Warra Daya, who now invested the Awssa state from another direction, the imam now became a prisoner in his supposed desert haven. During his reign, according to the chronicle :

the Galla got the upper hand on the land of Awssa, and besieged the population of the two towns of Farfara and Waraba, ... so that the people and the Muslim soldiers could not get out of Farfara and Warba except at night, and the people were so distressed that 'their hearts reached to their throat'.²

According to a recently discovered chronicle of Awssa,³ Imam Muhammed appealed for help to the Muslims who were living in Bali, Fatagar and Ifat, and many volunteered to go to Awssa to help their co-religionists. Upon their arrival they seem to have increased the imam's force, thus encouraging him to try to break the siege of Warra Daya, on the town of Farfara. To excite his force into action the imam seems to have advanced himself before his soldiers and threw himself on the first group of Warra Daya he met with great courage. His example was followed and the Muslims poured on their enemies. The WarraDaya group, unable to stand this vigorous assault, saved themselves by flight. The imam resolved to profit by this early advantage and followed the group into the desert, where other Warra Daya bands came to the support of their brethren and outnumbered the Muslims, who soon found themselves in a number of ambushes. Although the Muslims fought with the utmost courage, panic seized them, probably when the irresistible stone missiles of the Oromo rained down upon them. Accordingly, the Muslims seem to have suffered a considerable loss, a large section of their force perishing in the flight. Those of the cavalry who had escaped the massacre because of the speed of their horses returned to the capital and became the first messengers of their defeat. This unexpected Oromo victory decided by the rout and dispersal of the Muslims, became still more notable in the

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1. Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia and the Christian kingdom", p. 250.
 2. E. Cerulli, "Documenti arabi ... ", MRAL, p. 74.
 3. E. Wagner, "Neues Material zur AUSA-Chronik", Die Islamische Welt zwischen Mittelalter und Neuzeit, Festschrift für Hans Robert Roemer zum 65 Geburtstag (1979), p. 660.

aftermath that followed it. The imam and his top leaders fell among the fleeing cavalry. In other words the much-hoped for gallant attempt to break the siege of Farfara did not succeed but boomeranged with serious losses and attendant destabilizing political repercussions. The imam along with the elite of his soldiers perished on 22 November 1582.¹ Temporarily Awssa was divided into three parts. In the capital itself, Garad Umar Din, the one-time governor of Sim, made himself wazir. In Farfara, where the gallant attempt forced the Oromo to relax the siege, a certain Hizana Hzohl gofil gota (the chief of the market and caravan patrols) made himself sultan, without sufficient force to bolster his image. Neither Umar Din nor Haizana was able to come to the rescue of the people of Mount Waraba. The latter, unable to break the Oromo siege single-handed, appealed to the Muslims in Bali, who soon sent a force captained by one Abbas, the son of Kabir Muhammed. Abbas broke the siege, in return for which he was given full administrative powers by the grateful people of Mt. Waraba. He made himself wazir. This means that the little desert state of Awssa had two wazirs and one sultan, all competing for power. The sultan attacked Abbas in Mt. Waraba, but the clash was inconclusive. Umar Din attacked both after they had exhausted each other, and drove both from Awssa.² Abbas managed to escape to Zeila, from where he went to Harar, and encouraged Wazir Muhammed, the brother of the imam killed in 1582, to march on Awssa and take over the leadership of the desert state. Accordingly Muhammed marched on Awssa and easily drove out Umar Din, who took refuge among the Somali nomads.³ Muhammed made himself imam in 1585 and ended the anarchy which characterized Awssa for two years. Of the new imam the chronicle says "Justice flourished and the Muslims were joyous under his administration."⁴ The new imam was able to unite not only the three towns of the desert state, but also Zeila and Harar under one administration for a while. He made Abbas his wazir and appointed Amir Sad-Din as the lord of the city of Harar. However, unfortunately, Wazir Abbas rebelled against the imam, and made himself the master of the land on 12 June 1585. Luckily the imam escaped with his Harla followers to Harar, from where he went to Zeila and having raised a sufficient force easily punished Abbas for his rebellion.

1. Cerulli, "Documenti arabi ... ", MRAL, pp. 62, 73.

2. This part of the account in the chronicle is somewhat confused.

3. Umar Din rallied around himself a lot of agitated Somali nomads and sacked the port of Zeila, where according to the chronicle "the port was plundered and women and girls were sexually assaulted". Cerulli, ibid, p. 73.

4. Cerulli, ibid., p. 75.

During the period of the Mulata gada (1586-1594) numerous big bands of pastoral Oromo arrived in Harar. Of this gada a considerable section settled in the region of Gara Mulata, the highest peak in the region, which they seem to have named after their gada. During the Mulata gada, the war with the Oromo continued on both fronts of the Awssa state. From one side the Harar Oromo were harassing, while from the other side the Warra Daya and Wallo Oromo placed the desert towns virtually under siege. Imam Muhammed died on 13 May 1589, while Awssa was under siege. He was succeeded by Wazir Abbas ibn Abun, during whose short reign "the Galla gained the upper hand."¹ The most devastating Oromo attack on Awssa came in September 1590, during the reign of Amir Ahmad. This attack was carried out by the Wallo Oromo,² who from their base in Beta Amhara raided the Awssa delta. The amir left the capital with the apparent intention of stopping the Wallo band from reaching Awssa. It was a courageous offensive policy of meeting the Oromo in the field rather than defending the towns. The plan miscarried, since the Wallo band was larger than expected. The Muslims beat a hasty retreat after sustaining heavy losses. In a hot pursuit the Wallo cavalry scattered the retreating Muslim force. Among those who perished in the desert because of thirst were the amir, his secretary Kabir Hamid ibn Ibrahim, the chief of the market and caravan patrols, and the fagi Kabir Hamid ibn Abdalha, who is described by the chronicler as "the wisest and the sea of knowledge."³ In other words, the entire top leadership of the beleaguered state perished.

Finally, the sad and depressing state to which Awssa was reduced at this time can be gleaned from the fact that within five years eight rulers succeeded one after the other, out of whom two were killed, five deposed on various pretexts, mainly for their inability to devise means of stopping the Afar and Oromo attacks, and one died.⁴ Reduced to the last degree of decadence Awssa, under the Harla leadership from Harar, survived on sufferance until it was replaced by the Afar sultanate in the late eighteenth century.

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1. E. Cerulli, "Documenti arabi ...", MRAL, p. 75.
 2. Conti-Rossini, "Domenico Brielli-Ricordi storici di Wallo", in Studi Etiopici Raccolta da C. Conti-Rossini, pp. 87-88.
 3. E. Cerulli, "Documenti arabi ...", MRAL, pp. 78-80.
 4. Ibid.

Harar also continued with the intermittent struggle with the Oromo. However, by the beginning of the seventeenth century the pressure on Harar seems to have abated, due to several reasons, chief among which three are worth mentioning. First, we have already indicated that after the Oromo hunger for land was satisfied, and they became the owners of the land around the city, they minimized their pressure on the city, since they wanted to save it for their own benefit. Secondly, the defence system of the city became an impregnable fortress against the Oromo cavalry, while the land beyond the wall became a distant land for the Adare people, who eventually adopted the name that reflected the small limit of their world. The people of Harar, who are referred to as Hararis in both Arabic and European sources, are still called Adare by their neighbours, the Oromo and Somali, especially by the former who surround the city on all sides. The name Adare, as we have seen, is an old historical one for the Semitic-speaking Muslim people, who, before the middle of the sixteenth century used to live in a much larger territory in the highlands of Harar. Today, the Adare (Hararis) call themselves Gesu, (the people of the city), their language Gesenan (the language of the city), and describe their one city culture as ge'ada (the way of life of the city). The appellation "of the city" gained currency probably after the upheaval of the second half of the sixteenth century which devastated the Adare people and reduced the land they controlled to a town exerting little influence beyond its walls, deprived of its historical functions and thrown back on its own resources.¹ However, within the wall, the Gesu (the people of the city) developed a very strong and proud identity, supported by Islamic ideology, commerce and a rich urban culture. The proud and resilient Gesu identity, and their social organisation, which sustained it, were based on three key institutions. These were, ahli, (the family network), marinet (the friendship group) and Afocha (the community organisations).² Through these institutions, each gesu was ultimately tied to every other gesu and closely tied to a great many. In short, the city's defence system, the unique social organization of its people, the useful commercial role they played in the region, all contributed in saving Harar (the centre of Islamic learning and civilization in north-east Africa) and its citizens from passing into historical oblivion, like their brethren the Harla.

1. Mohammed Hassen, "Menelik's conquest of Harar, 1887 and its effect on the political organization of the surrounding Oromos up to 1900", in Working papers on Society and History in Imperial Ethiopia: the southern periphery from the 1880s to 1974, ed., D.L. Donham and Wendy James, (African Studies Centre, Cambridge, 1979), p. 228.

2. P. Koehn and Sidney R. Waldron, Afocha: a link between community and administration in Harar, Ethiopia, (Maxwell School of citizenship and public affairs, Syracuse University), p. 7.

Thirdly, from the time of the Birraja gada (1578-1586), a large wave of Oromo migration was directed towards the lowlands inhabited by Somali nomads. This wave became visible during the Mulata gada (1586-1594), when large bands of Akichu, Gallan, Warra Daya, Warra Ittu, Jarso, and a number of other groups poured on to the Somali held territory crossing via the valleys of Erer, the river Dakta, and the plains of Babile. The Oromo migrants of the Mulata and Dulo gadas (1594-1602), and probably several subsequent ones, carried the raids deeply into Somali territory, sometimes penetrating as far as the sea. Three separate sources claim the arrival of the Oromo on the sea coast, probably by the closing years of the sixteenth century or the beginning of the next.

When Antoine d'Abbadie was in Massawa in 1840, he met an Arabic-speaking Somali merchant from Berbera, who told him that "some centuries earlier the Galla arrived on the coast and destroyed a number of things near Berbera."¹ Secondly, Shaikh Ahmad Rirash "claims that the Oromo reached the coast somewhere between Berbera and Zeila, devastating hundreds of Muslim villages on their march."² Thirdly, I.M. Lewis, in his "The Galla in northern Somaliland", refers to a local Somali manuscript which claims Oromo defeats at the hands of Somali leaders not very far from the coast.

A later leader of the clan, Ugas Ali Makahil, who was born in 1575 at Dobo, north of the present town of Borama in the west of the British protectorate, is recorded as having inflicted a heavy defeat on the Galla forces at Nabardid, a village in the protectorate on the boundary between the Habar Awal and Gadaburis clans in their present distribution.³

This Somali claim may well be correct; because by this time, as the result of their wide dispersal, the Oromo numbers were thinned, and their striking ability reduced. What is more, in the Somali territory they were fighting with nomads who had a militaristic social structure of their own. While the Oromo number, strength and efficiency in warfare was declining, due to the sheer size of the land over which they had spread themselves, the Somali in their own territory, with full knowledge of the terrain, with their large

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1. A d'Abbadie, Nouv. Acq. Fran. No. 21300, folio, 161.
 2. Shaikh Ahmad Abdullahi Rirash, Kashf as Sudul can Tarikh as-Sumal wa Hamalikahum as-Sabca, p. 75. See also, Ali Abdurahman Hersi, "The Arab factor in Somali History ...", pp. 223-229.
 3. I.M. Lewis, "The Galla in Northern Somaliland", Rassegna di studi etiopici, XV (Roma : 1959), p. 31. Dr. Lewis wrote his article on the assumption that the pockets of Oromo-speaking groups in northern Somalia were the remnants of the earlier Oromo who had been expelled from the region by the Somali between the tenth and twelfth centuries.

cavalry and their eagerness to unite in the face of a common enemy, must have been superior to the Oromo in every sense. Unlike the sedentary population in Harar, the Somali nomads were free to move and act according to the circumstances in which they found themselves. This means the Somali nomads moved easily and quickly from regions of danger, thus making ineffective the Oromo tactic of weakening an enemy by repeated raids. Moreover, the Oromo migration in this direction seems to have been inspired more by cattle raids than by the need for settlement. The Somali nomads were themselves expert cattle raiders who were always on the lookout for an approaching enemy, and skilled pursuers in retrieving booty taken by an enemy. In short, the migration into Somali territory did not appear sufficiently rewarding to attract a continuous stream of new comers. Be that as it may, one thing can be said with certainty. At the beginning, the Oromo migration must have caused considerable confusion and disturbance among the Somali.

... The Oromo invasions hurled the whole countryside into confusion into an area of ceaseless warfare in which Somali fought against Oromo, Somali battled Somali, and both Somali and Oromo nomads ravaged the settled urbanized communities. In these conditions of warfare of each against all, and all against all, many Somali clans took up arms and their march to, or flight away from,¹ the battle zone effected internal migrations and shifts of residences.

This created a chain reaction which spilt over into Ogaden, where in conditions of anarchy Somali and Oromo bands harassed settled trading communities in their walled towns. Cut off from the interior sources of commercial goods by the conditions of anarchy reigning in the Harar hinterlands, the thriving urban centres "in north-western Somaliland went through a period of decay and ultimate ruin. This disaster, coupled with drought, famine and pestilence, finally forced the residents of these towns to abandon urban life and to take to independent nomadism."² There are at least twenty-one sites of medieval settlement in northern Somalia. Cursory archaeological investigations have shown that these sites thrived in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.³ When Burton visited one of them in 1854 he recorded a tradition which claims that this particular site had been destroyed by war about three hundred years earlier.⁴

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1. Ali Abdurahman Hersi, "The Arab factor in Somali history ... ", p. 230.
 2. Ibid., pp. 228-229.
 3. A.J. Curle, "The ruined towns of Somaliland", Antiquity, (September, 1977), pp. 315-327.
 4. R. Burton, First footsteps in East Africa, pp. 48-54, 146, et passim.

Finally, the sixteenth century Oromo migration to northern Somalia left its mark on the land by the following unmistakable Oromo place names and the presence of pockets of Oromo-speaking groups. The Oromo place names include, Borama, the name of a town in northern Somalia. There is another Borama, a name of a place in Charchar. Laga Wucchale, (the river of Wucchale, i.e. dry river bed) on the border between Ethiopia and Northern Somalia. Wucchale was a very large Oromo tribal group which spread to Wallo, Arsi and Charchar. Qabir Nonno (the grave of Nonno) is a place name near Laga Wucchale in Northern Somalia. Nonno was a large Oromo tribal group which spread over a wide territory in the region of Gara Mulata in Harar. Ija Wacchu, a place name of Oromo origin is found around the town of Gebile, not far from the town of Wucchale, the already-mentioned Laga Wucchale. Around the town of Gebile there are still remnants of Oromo-speaking groups, the Warra Kiyyo, who claim that their grandfathers used to go to Adale near Harar every eight years for gada ceremonies.¹ Gofa, near the town of Gebile, Hallyo, around the town of Hargessa, Manna Dagga, between Berbera and Hargessa, and Bula Harbi, a name of a town near the sea on the north Somali coast, are all of Oromo origin. Hargessa (the name of a very bitter plant in Oromo), the capital of what used to be the British Somaliland, Jarra horotta (the era of plenty), Igara (building), Taise (sitting), Arab siyo (the name of a plant), Jalido (the precipice where monkeys live), Waji (a name of an Oromo clan), Batar Lafto (the name of a tree) are all of Oromo origin and they are all located west of Hargessa.²

By 1600 or shortly afterwards, the Harar Oromo had already spread over a huge land delineated in the north by the Awash basin and the Afar desert following the Franco-Ethiopian railway line; in the south by the Wabi Shabelle basin; in the East by the Jijiga plain and the Somali lowlands in northern Somalia, and in the west bordered by the region which now forms part of the provinces of Bale and Arsi. Except for the pockets of Borana clans who came with the flood, the large section of Harar Oromo belonged to the Barentu confederacy. They comprised four major groups of Akichu, which spearheaded the eastern migration, eventually ending up in the former British Somaliland and Ogaden. The majority of the residual Oromo groups

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1. I am indebted to Muhammed Abdulkarim, an Oromo who had lived in northern Somalia for many years, for providing me with most of these place names. Muhammed speaks the Somali language, and has travelled all over this region. I interviewed him on 17 June 1982 in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. He is a man of 50 years of age, and has a fair knowledge of the history of the Oromo of Harar and northern Somalia.
 2. I.M. Lewis, "The Galla in Northern Somaliland", RSE, pp. 21-38. I am also indebted to Muhammed Ahmad Rirash for providing me with useful information which supplements what is contained in Lewis's article.

whose descendants were observed in northern Somalia were the scattered remnants of the Akichu section.

... Among the Somali Yabarre, Bartirre, Giri and Abaskul clans (of the Darod clan family) and the Bursuk of the Dir clan family ... live small groups of Galla Waraitu Warradya, Asabo and Lehile. Further to the east in the Ogaden amongst the Somali Darod clan ... live groups of Obo Galla, and with the Somali Habar Awal clan of the British protectorate who extend into the same region live Galla Waramiyo, Warapito (or Warabito), Warakiyo, Igo and Wara Logo ... The Rer Roble Borama living amongst the Somali Gadabrusi clan of the west of the British protectorate are said to be Galla ... I have direct personal knowledge of such residual Galla communities only amongst the Habar Awal of the west and centre of the British protectorate. Here these are not Galla-speaking and are closely assimilated to the Somali of the area ... Amongst the Habar Awal Sād Muse cultivators in the Hargaisa-Gebile-Borama region in the west of British Somaliland, they are distributed in small autonomous farming communities, or resident as individuals in the cultivating villages of the local Habar Awal Somali. In this area the Akiso (Akichu), the largest Galla group are widely dispersed.¹

What has been said above about the presence of the Oromo in Northern Somalia indirectly reconciles the views of the two scholars H.S. Lewis and I.M. Lewis. As we saw in the previous chapter,² the former believes that the original home of the Oromo was in southern Ethiopia, while the latter thinks that the Oromo had lived in Northern Somalia before they were expelled from the area by the pressure of the expanding Somali. Our discussion on the original home of the Oromo in the previous chapter, and the course of the migration which we followed in this one, establishes beyond any reasonable doubt the correctness of H.S. Lewis's opinion. The opinion of I.M. Lewis is also correct when looked at from another angle. Though undoubtedly influenced by Somali oral traditions, I.M. Lewis bases his argument on two real pieces of evidence. These are the Oromo place names and pockets of Oromo-speaking groups in Northern Somalia, both of which are mentioned above. This evidence positively confirms the existence of the Oromo in the region since the closing years of the sixteenth century. Viewed from this perspective, the arguments of both scholars are based on real evidence, and are both correct in their different ways.

Secondly, the Afran Qallo (the four sons of Qallo), which was in turn divided into four major clans, namely, Alla (with more than twelve sub-divisions), Nole (with six sub-divisions), Jarso-Babile (with ten sub-

1. I.M. Lewis, "The Galla in Northern Somaliland", RSE, pp. 24-25.

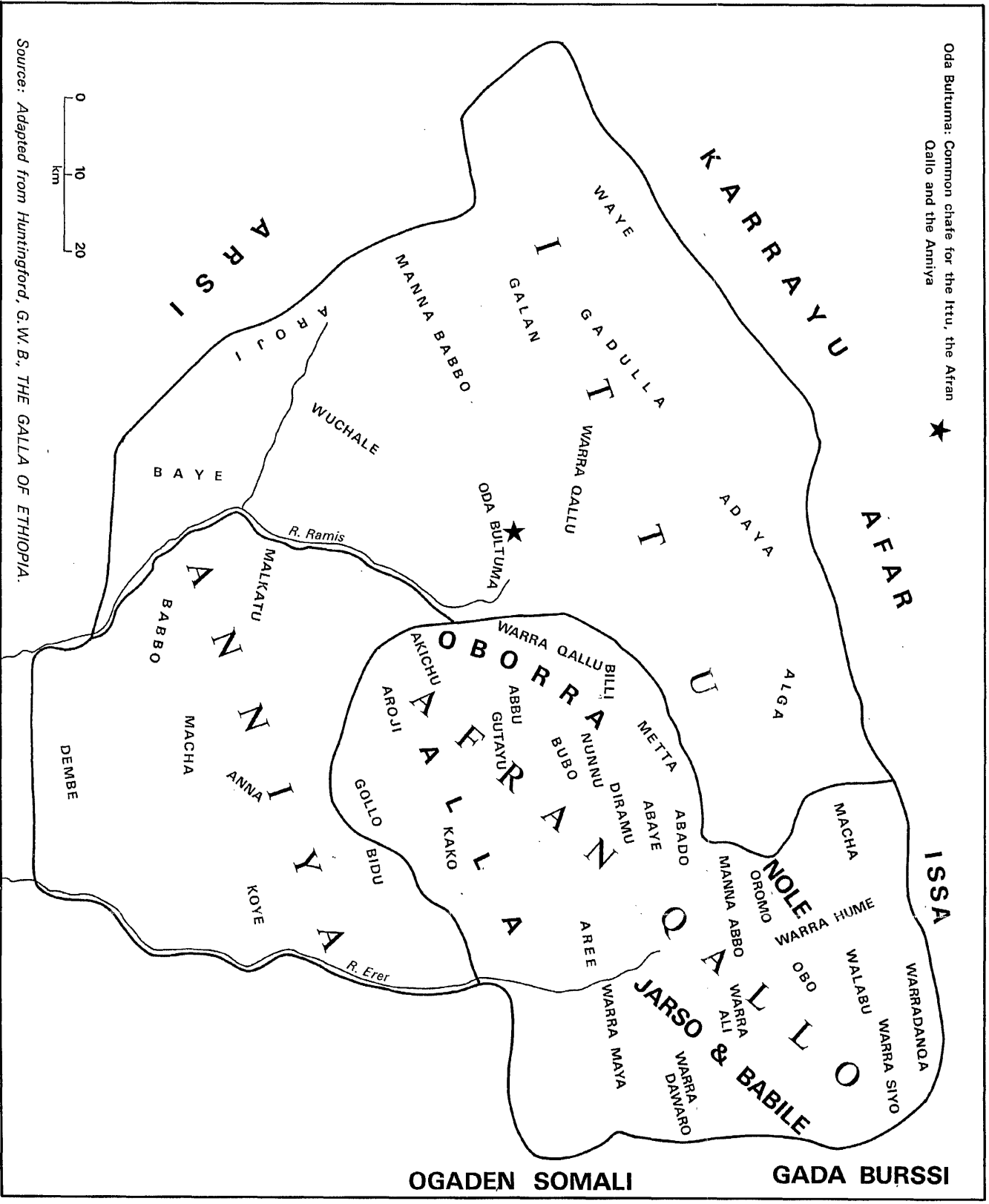
divisions) and Oborra (with four sub-divisions). These four major clans spread over the central highlands of Harar, which include the present awrajas (sub-provinces) of Harar, Gursum, Dire Dawa, Oborra and parts of Gara Multa. Thirdly, the Ittu, which was divided into ten clans, namely Alga, Adaya, Aroji, Babo, Baye, Galan, Gadula, Wuchale, Warra Qallu and Waye.¹ The Ittu spread in the vast Charchar region which now borders the provinces of Bale in the south, Arsi in the west, Shawa in the north, and the Afar desert in the north-east. The traditional boundary between Ittu and Afran Qallo was the Burqa river. Ittu, Afran Qallo and Anniya had a common chafe at Oda Bultuma. This chafe, which was used for a long time, was located in the heart of the Ittu land. It seems to have been very famous and tradition claims that it was the "well-spring from where the Afran Qallo and Anniya learned, and took laws to their respective regions every eight years."² Even after this central chafe Bultuma was broken up and replaced by no less than ten local chafes in the whole region, Oda Bultuma remained the centre for Humbana law, the land which was regarded as sacred next to Mormor, the original home of Humbana in the lowland of Bale. Up to the last century when the Harar Oromo were sending delegates to Mormor, they first had to visit Oda Bultuma on their way to Mormor.

The fourth and last group that migrated to Harar was Anniya, which was divided into seven clans, namely, Bidu, Koye, Anna, Macha, Malkatu, Babo and Dembi.³ The Anniya spread in the region bordered by Ramis, a tributary of the Wabi Shabelle in the west, Gara Mulata Mountain in the north, Mojo river in the east and Ogaden and Wabi Shabelle in the south. The traditional boundary between Anniya and Ittu was the Ramis river, while that between Anniya and Afran Qallo was the Mojo river.

Thus it is safe to conclude that by the beginning of the seventeenth century the present distribution of the Harar Oromo may have already taken shape, probably in the form we find it today. (Refer to the map on p. 219).

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1. Demisse Michael, "The kottu of Hararge : an introduction to the eastern Oromo", (1974), mimeograph, p. 32.
 2. Tasawo Merga, "Senna Umatta Oromo", pp. 72-73.
 3. Muhammed Hassan, "The relation between Harar and the surrounding Oromo between 1800-1887", p. 58.

Oda Butuma: Common chafe for the Ittu, the Afan Gallo and the Anniya



Source: Adapted from Huntingford, G.W.B., THE GALLA OF ETHIOPIA.

Map 5. THE EASTERN OROMO.

Chapter Four

The Oromo Migration into the Christian Kingdom, 1559 to about 1700

In the previous chapter the course has already been followed of the Oromo migration into Bali, Dawaro, Hadiya and to some extent Fatagar. Here their migration will be charted into the rest of the Christian kingdom. Before doing this, however, it may be useful to take a brief look at the situation in the region in 1559, a watershed in the history of the Horn. In this year Amir Nur won a decisive victory over Galawdewos. There is similarity between the Christian defeat of 1529 and that of 1559. In the first, the small but highly organized well-trained and disciplined Muslim force under Imam Ahmad completely routed the ten times greater Christian force, which was loosely organized and badly led by Libna Dingil. A large number of Christian soldiers were slain, and many more were taken prisoner. The rest ran off in disarray and confusion. This utter defeat was a complete surprise for the Christians. It may be that the Christian leadership did not expect a great victory, but no-one seems to have been prepared for a defeat of such shattering proportions. The surviving Christian leadership, including the emperor, were shocked. With the Christian society in a state of total confusion, it was left to Libna Dingil to try and salvage something out of what remained. In 1559, exactly thirty years after the victory of 1529, the Muslims under the leadership of Amir Nur routed a small hastily collected Christian force under Galawdewos. The emperor, most of his officers, and a great many of his men were slain. The rest were either captured or dispersed in panic and disarray. Galawdewos's camp was plundered, his capital looted, and its inhabitants put to the sword. In 1529 as in 1559, the morale of the Christian force was shattered.

There is general agreement among historians that in 1529 the Christian leadership was both weak and ineffective.¹ In 1559, however, the Christian leadership was in the hands of an able emperor. From 1543 to 1550, Galawdewos had gone from victory to victory. During these years, the Christian force also underwent a number of marked changes. For example, the battles

1. e.g. Tadesse Tamrat, Church and State in Ethiopia, 1270-1527, pp. 295-296. Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia and the Christian Kingdom ...", pp. 133-136.

against pastoral Oromo had also sapped the strength of the Christian army, but especially after 1548, when Galawdewos lost many provinces to the Oromo, obsession with the latter made the Christians blind to the danger from the Muslims. They wrongly assumed that they could not be challenged and that they had the power to cope with any Muslim attack. Moreover after the victory of 1550, the way in which the Christian leaders routed the Muslims, the way in which they blindly gloried in their success of having penetrated Harar and burned the Muslim capital, was calculated to impose the maximum humiliation on their defeated enemy. These successes lulled the Christian leadership into an exaggerated sense of strength.

Thus when Amir Nur attacked on 22 March 1559, the Christian force was not his match. This victory provided the Muslims with the opportunity to wipe out the stigma of defeat and humiliation under which their army had suffered for the past sixteen years. The death of Galawdewos, a man "victorious in every action he fought, except in that one only in which he died"¹ marked a turning-point in every sense of the term. Not only did his death produce terrible grief throughout the Christian land, it left the political scene uncertain and fluid. Furthermore, and from the point of our discussion, more relevant, it left the Christian defence system in utter ruin, and marked the end of the era of Christian dominance. After this battle this force was never able to regain its full strength and failed to win back an inch of land lost before 1559 to the pastoral Oromo. On the contrary, as the following discussion will show, the kingdom rapidly lost the best of its provinces one after the other. The failure of the Christian regime to protect its own frontiers had a devastating effect on the internal power structure of the kingdom, and opened a new chapter in the history of the Christian kingdom in which the landed nobility challenged the power and authority of the monarchy.

Two parallel crises faced the kingdom after March 1559. There was the immediate question of defending the frontiers of the kingdom from the aggressive migrating pastoral Oromo, while parallel with this there was a new crisis developing from within the kingdom, as a reaction to the inability of the leadership to defend the frontiers. The internal crisis was essentially military, political, economic and social and it was looking for some

1. James Bruce, Travels to discover the source of the Nile, vol. iii, p. 224.

new catalyst. Both the external and the internal crisis found what they wanted in each other. The Oromo pressure found its strength in the internal troubles, while the internal crisis found its detonator in the success of the Oromo migration; but the internal difficulties of the Christian kingdom owed more to the assault of the migrating Oromo than the Oromo migration did to the internal crisis of that kingdom. Be that as it may, the difference between the disaster of 1529 and 1559 was no less striking. In the former, the Christian force was routed, but its leadership was still in place. In the latter, the Christian force was both defeated and its leadership destroyed. The task that faced the kingdom was not just one of recruiting more men and rebuilding the army, the whole officer corps had to be recruited from the top to the bottom. Understandably, the most immediate issue was that of replacing the dead emperor.

Galawdewos, having no son, was succeeded by his younger brother Minas (1559-1563). Minas was a man with a rich store of experience but unprepared for the task of sitting on the throne. It is significant that on the day of his coronation Minas remarked that he was "not worthy of sitting on that great and honoured throne."¹ He intended these words to show his humility to the nobility who had made his king. His short reign, however, proved his remarks true. Minas began his reign at Mengesta Smayet in eastern Gojjam, and it seemed on the surface that the country had acquired genuinely a mature monarch, who would rally the people around himself. However, Minas quickly proved himself the victim of the situation. The old spirit of Christian unity, of readiness to rally to defend the Cross against the Crescent, could still be evoked for a time, as it had been done during the reign of Galawdewos. However, the new enemy which the country faced was neither against the Cross, nor desirous of imposing the Crescent. The fight against the mobile pastoral non-Muslims did not generate the same ideological passion as a fight against the traditional Muslim foe. Minas failed to infuse the Christian society with new dynamism. He had not moved far enough or fast enough towards meeting the challenge of the day. In fact, two diametrically opposed features of Minas's background combined to make him the man he was.

Minas had been captured in 1538, and he had stayed with the imam, during which time he is reported to have married the sister of Del Wambara, the

1. F.M.E. Pereira, Historia de Minas, (Lisbon : 1888), p. 27.

imam's wife.¹ It seems that the imam, who considered the presence of Minas in his camp a political asset, had treated him kindly.² In 1541 Minas was sent to the Pasha of Yeman in exchange for military assistance. Then in 1544 he was ransomed by Galawdewos in exchange³ for Muhammed, the son of Imam Ahmad and Del Wambara. Minas's short captivity among the Muslims seems to have left its indelible mark on him and created a complex personality. He responded eagerly to the call to be made king, but the spectre of previous experience dulled his initiative and inhibited him from taking any action that could possibly be construed as risky.⁴

When the Muslim force withdrew from Waj, either in March or April 1559, he missed an opportunity to go back to the capital of Galawdewos in this province. His return to Waj would have boosted the morale of his forces and gained him a strategic advantage against the Oromo, from which internal peace might have followed. Instead, he drew a wrong conclusion from the Muslim victory. Whereas he had expected them to follow up their success by moving deep into the heart of the kingdom, they withdrew from Waj and quickly returned to Harar.⁵ Thus, as the victorious Muslims abandoned Waj, so did Minas, who moved the seat of his government from here to Mangesta Samayat in eastern Gojjam. In this decision to transfer the capital across the Abay (the Blue Nile), he managed to get away almost unchallenged by his followers. He seems to have justified this as a temporary measure which would on the one hand protect the safety of his government and on the other hand allow his remaining force to recuperate while the losses were replaced before meeting a new challenge. By the rush transfer of the capital, he tacitly abandoned the provinces east of the Abay. As we shall see below, this decision irreparably altered the political landscape of the kingdom.

After a short while, the top Christian leaders, who escaped from the massacre of 22 March 1559, held a great council at the residence of Minas in

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1. Takla Sadiq Makurya, Ya Gran Ahmad Warar, pp. 650-660.
 2. Pereira, Historia de Minas, p. 18.
 3. Galawdewos paid 4,000 ounces of gold in addition to releasing Muhammed.
 4. It seems that the security of his government may have weighed more heavily with Minas than trying to save the provinces under attack.
 5. *Supra*, p. 185.

eastern Gojjam. The participants included Kiflo, Takla Haymanot, Daglahan, Rom Sagad and Hamalmal.¹ The presence of the latter general in this council had far-reaching consequences for the future. Hamalmal as the governor of Fatagar had already witnessed the fall of Bali, Dawaro and other provinces, to the pastoral Oromo. In fact he had already fought repeatedly with the highly mobile Oromo warriors.² On his way to and from Harar in 1559³ he seems to have consciously avoided the Oromo. It also appears that he left Harar at about the time that the Oromo were on the verge of attacking that city. By the time he had returned to Fatagar he must have heard about the disaster of Hazalo.⁴ This suggests that Hamalmal may have known before he went to the council that the danger from the Muslims was over. This assumption is strengthened by the fact that the outcome of the council seems to have been strongly influenced by the arguments of Hamalmal, who was best acquainted with the general situation in the provinces east of the Abay. This highest state council, in which all the top surviving Christian leaders, excepting Bahar Nagash Yeshaq, took part, discussed the problems facing the county and decided upon making Dambiya the rainy season residence of Minas. The choice of Dambiya may have been influenced by the wealth and safety it provided. This decision also proved another major landmark in the history of the kingdom. Since 1270, and especially after Amda Siyon established a strong Christian empire,⁵ the provinces east of the Abay were the centre from which Amhara colonization was directed to the south. By the transfer of the residence of the king, the Christian nobility was unconsciously transferring the centre of political and military gravity of the kingdom across the great river. The queen mother and other high dignitaries followed Minas to Dambiya,⁶ where he soon founded his capital at Gubay in Emfraz, "a mountainous area overlooking the north-eastern shore of Lake Tana."⁷

Hamalmal was created dajazmach, with authority over all the territory east of the Abay "up to the limit of his power".⁸ The last phrase expresses

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1. Pereira, Historia de Minas, p. 17.
 2. *Supra*, p. 171.
 3. *Supra*, p. 185.
 4. *Supra*, p. 186.
 5. *Supra*, p. 15.
 6. Pereira, ibid., p. 27.
 7. Richard Pankhurst, History of Ethiopian towns, (Wiesbaden : 1982), p. 94.
 8. Pereira, ibid., p. 27.

a series of accommodations that were being made to the situation on the ground. It implies that there was a reduction in the size of the kingdom. This becomes more clear from the fact that only a few decades before several dajazmachs used to be appointed over the provinces east of the Abay. For example, Dawaro alone was controlled by about fifty dajazmachs in the early sixteenth century.¹ The appointment of Hamalmal over all the provinces east of the Abay, but only with the title of dajazmach, may be a confirmation of what was taking place on the ground. Nevertheless, the decision to move the seat of the government deep into a more northern and safer area, set a pattern for the future chequered history of the kingdom. It laid the foundation for the future expansion of the kingdom in the northern direction. Thereafter the kingdom did not expand an inch in the region east of the Abay, but lost much territory held earlier. Thus between 1559, when Minas first moved to Emfraz, and 1636, when Fasiladas founded Gondar as a permanent capital, four kings (Sarsa Dengel, Ya'eqob, Za-Dengel and Susenyos) had their courts either in one or two of these places, namely Gubay, Ayba, Wandege, Qoga, Gorgora and Danqaz.² The concentration of these royal towns in this region demonstrates beyond any shadow of doubt that since 1559 the centre of political power of the kingdom had moved from the eastern provinces to the region of Lake Tana.

Within a few months the transfer of the seat of power began to produce its effects. As time went by Minas's sense of frustration increased because he was unable to provide his soldiers with adequate provisions. His short-sighted solution for alleviating the situation was to embark on slaving raids on the pagan minorities in the region.³ The first victim of Minas's slaving expeditions were the Falasha (who call themselves Beta Israel "the house of Israel"). As we shall soon see, instead of rallying to the eastern provinces which were now attacked by the Barentu and Borana simultaneously, Minas gathered Christian forces from provinces not yet invaded such as Tigray and Amhara, to attack the Falasha in their impregnable Semien Mountains. The campaign lasted only for a short while, because "the learned and respected men advised him to give up fighting Falasha since the right time had not arrived."⁴ This may have been an euphemism for the failure of the campaign

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1. H. Ludolph, A new history of Ethiopia, (London : 1682), p. 16. See also Antoine d'Abbadie, Géographie d'Ethiopie, (Paris : 1890), p. 68.
 2. R. Pankhurst, History of Ethiopian towns, pp. 94-116.
 3. Minas's slaving raids seem to have deprived the state of the services of able manpower and reduced the revenues, all of which added to the weakness of the state.
 4. Pereira, Historia de Minas, p. 28.

and a justification for its failure. Minas both alienated his peaceful subjects and at the same time failed to provide his soldiers with necessary provisions. In his frustration he even turned against the Portuguese, who then turned against him. As a result, Minas had the Portuguese Bishop Oviedo soundly beaten and his followers exiled, all of whom joined the camp of Minas's enemies.¹

When an attempt to assassinate Minas failed, the opposition that had been simmering for sometime exploded. The opposition was engineered by the same nobility who had put him on the throne.² Although Minas succeeded in defeating these enemies and killing the pretender, the opposition never gave him respite and his short reign was consumed by his efforts to maintain the throne. During this time several provinces were lost to the Oromo, but Minas never fought with them. In fact, he took the garrisons of the eastern provinces during his expedition to Tigray, at the very time when the pressure from the migrating Oromo was bringing the kingdom to its knees. There could not have been a worse time in which to have withdrawn the garrisons from the storm centres. Thus by his transfer of the capital from Waj to eastern Gojjam, and then to Emfraz, Minas neither contributed to the defence of the kingdom nor strengthened the institution of the monarchy : on the contrary, he undermined both. By his inability to provide military leadership to stem the tide of Oromo migration, he stripped the person of the king of his aura of respectability.

Before closing our discussion of the developments during the reign of Minas, it is necessary to mention some of the measures taken by Hamalmal, in order to protect the provinces over which he was appointed supreme. We have already shown in the previous chapter that by 1546, Karrayu, followed by some sections of Akichu, Warantisha and Marawa, were on the border of highland Dawaro,³ preparing for the investiture of the new gada. During the Bifole gada (1546-1554) the Oromo overran the whole of Dawaro and during the Michelle gada (1554-62) the balance of force was changed dramatically in favour of the pastoral Oromo. They not only devastated the Muslim force at Hazalo, but also destroyed the famous Christian corps Jan Amora in the important province of Fatagar.⁴ Bahrey makes it clear that the destruction of Jan Amora was followed by the Oromo attack on the small district of Dago.⁵ The

1. James Bruce, Travels to discover the source of the Nile, pp. 231, 234.

2. Pereira, Historia de Minas, p. 28.

3. *Supra*, p. 163.

4. *Supra*, p. 171.

5. Bahrey, in Some Records of Ethiopia, pp. 116-7.

Oromo attacks on the garrison at Dago seem to indicate that the Christian defence establishment in Fatagar was irreparably destroyed. Most probably Fatagar was invaded from two directions at this time. First, the spearhead of the Borana migration, Tulama-Macha, which unsuccessfully attacked Waj, but repeatedly repelled by Galawdewos had been forced to retire to the forest between the Awash river and Lake Zeway. They had been checked from crossing the river by the presence of Christian regiments in Fatagar. Once Amir Nur had destroyed the Christian force in Fatagar in March 1559, the Tulama-Macha overwhelmed the province from the south. At the same time, the numerous and more aggressive Barentu bands, namely Akichu and Warantisha, invaded Fatagar from Dawaro, east of the Awash. Simultaneously overwhelmed, Hamalmal had no alternative but to transfer his headquarters to Shawa, abandoning Fatagar to its fate. Hamalmal's removal of the garrisons from Fatagar to Shawa suggests that the Christian soldiers were unwilling to fight with the Oromo on the plains. Apparently with the intention of raising the morale of his force and reducing the effect of the Oromo cavalry, Hamalmal abandoned the plateau of Fatagar, where the Oromo cavalry would have had a significant advantage, and withdrew to the inaccessible mountains in Manz. This was for several reasons a convenient place of refuge. The mountain chains which dot the region neutralized the effectiveness of the Oromo cavalry. Neither was the region conducive for the large herds of cattle which the pastoralists were driving. Similarly the bitter cold of the region would have forced them to look for better land for themselves and their cattle. Besides, the new region was the frontier province between Fatagar, which had been abandoned and other provinces such as Gedom, Geshe, Angot and Amhara, which had not yet been attacked. What should be remembered at this point is that the Oromo became accustomed to mountain warfare only with great difficulty, and only after a long time. Hamalmal's withdrawal from Fatagar was not a cowardly act, but a pragmatic step designed to save his soldiers from the Oromo cavalry. Incidentally, this is another unmistakable confirmation for the correctness of Bahrey's assertion about the large scale Oromo use of cavalry at this time.¹

Hamalmal's withdrawal from Fatagar was followed by an exodus of Christian refugees to inaccessible and safer regions and set a pattern for the future course of the history of the region. Once a province was invaded by the

1. Bahrey, in Some Records of Ethiopia, p. 117.

Oromo, only those communities that took shelter in the deep and inaccessible valleys or mountain tops escaped the fury of the Oromo flood. Soon Hamalmal's position became critical even in his inaccessible retreat. The battle of Dago that took place either towards the end of 1560 or 1561 is a good example. "Dago was a small district to the east of Tagulat between Shawa, Gedem and Ifat."¹ It was located in an unapproachable place, but this did not prevent the Oromo from invading the region. The configuration of the land did, however, prevent them from effectively utilizing their cavalry. Here Hamalmal's strategy bore fruit, although the battle was indecisive. Bahrey makes it clear that it was the Michele gada and not Hamalmal which started hostilities. What is interesting to note here about Bahrey's information is not what he tells us about the battle, but about the presence of the Oromo in this region itself. One of the routes through which the Oromo movement spread into Geshe, Ganh and beyond passed through this region. The aggressive Karrayu, followed by Akichu and Marawa invaded this region so repeatedly that Hamalmal was once again forced to abandon his base, this time withdrawing to Angot. Hamalmal, who only two years earlier was given authority over all the provinces east of the Abay, had now withdrawn to the province of Angot. Here he again hoped to check the Oromo attack from Amhara, Tigray and Bagameder. Angot was a large and mountainous province,² and its choice shows Hamalmal's determination to protect the provinces which had not yet been attacked.

While Hamalmal was strengthening the defence of the strategically located province of Angot, Ifat was overrun by large sections of Karrayu, Akichu and Marawa. Other bands from Ittu and Warra Daya, also seem to have participated in the attack on Ifat. Within a short time Ifat was "reduced to the escarpment, with its limits in the north and south at approximately the Robi and Qabanna rivers."³ The Oromo attack on Ifat led to an exodus of Muslim refugees from the province. This exodus of both Christians and Muslims from Dawaro, Fatagar and Ifat seems to have revolutionized the relationship between the two communities. These traditional enemies who had been engaged in conflict for over two centuries now closed, albeit temporarily, the chapter

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1. Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia and the Christian kingdom ... ", pp. 204-205.
 2. Ibid., p. 32.
 3. Svein Ege, "Chiefs and peasants : the socio-political structure of the kingdom of Shawa about 1840", M.Phil. thesis, Havedoppgave i historie ved Universitetet i Bergen Høsten, 1978, p. 23.

of their former enmity, and for the first time formed a united front against a common enemy, the Oromo. Only two years earlier this could not have been dreamed of. Nothing could more dramatically illustrate how the times had changed than this Muslim Christian alliance.¹ Both peoples resolved to stop the Oromo advance for their mutual safety, peace and survival. This alliance, however, was only formed at the last moment in a desperate attempt on the part of the refugee communities to salvage something from the wreckage of their provinces. But it was already too late. The wealth, especially the animal population, had already attracted the Oromo and whetted their insatiable desire for cattle, horses, goats and sheep. What becomes clear at this stage of Oromo migration is that the conquerors were guided more by the desire for booty, and the personal glory from the killing of enemies, than by a desire to conquer new lands. Their resounding victories, which increased the prospect for rapid enrichment, attracted the highly organized and mobile pastoral warriors. The hunt for booty exceeded all expectations, and opened the era of rapid migration. The Oromo victories were partly secured by the previous mutual Christian and Muslim destruction of each other's power.² The Muslim Christian wars and subsequent Oromo migration had been followed by the decay of agriculture, commerce and consequently famine. These repeated miseries, which affected the thinly-spread inhabitants of the region, forced them to flee to safer areas. Thus the refugees were both the victims of wars and famine. Under such conditions these people were no match for the ever-growing strength of the pastoral Oromo, who were motivated with the desire for great war booty and personal glory. Shawa and a few other provinces alone remained in the hands of the Christian administration. The latter was not even in a position to stop the movement of the Oromo on other provinces which were soon also reached.

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1. The history of north-east Africa seems to have a particular tendency to repeat itself though in a different form. More recently, in the late 19th century, the relationship between the Christian empire of Ethiopia and the Mahdist state of the Sudan was revolutionized as the result of European pressure on both. The development during the last four years of the Mahdia of cordial relations with the Christian empire of Ethiopia and the traditional foe of Islam in north-east Africa, was a more spectacular and more important revolution in policy. ... In a letter of December 1897, Menelik addressed Abdallahi as "our superior venerable dear friend"; and in the spring of 1898, Abdallahi greeted an Ethiopian delegation with an official firework display, arranged for their meat to be slaughtered by Christians and even provided date wine for their refreshment. Under the pressure of Kitchener's advance, indiscriminate hostility to the 'enemies of God' was yielding to more mundane calculations of political prudence. G.N. Sanderson, "Contributions from African sources to the history of European competition in the upper valley of the Nile", Journal of African History, III (1962), pp. 69-85.
 2. Among other things, the slowness of the Oromo migration before the Michell gada (1554-1562) could be explained partly by the fact that both Christian and Muslim forces were strong enough to stop the Oromo.

The inability of the administration to do anything coincided with Minas's reign. The leaders proved unequal to the task entrusted to them. For example, when Hamalmal was unable to reverse the tide of the Oromo onslaught, he was forced to turn his attention towards the rebelliousness of his own soldiers, and he lavishly attempted to provide them with whatever was available. As a result he endeavoured to extract as much as possible from the peasants under his administration. Thus the peasant suffered chiefly from the undisciplined nature of the soldiers and the lack of responsibility of their governors. Sometimes the interests of the soldiers and the defence of provinces came into conflict. When this happened it was the interests of the latter which were ignored, though everything was done in its name. The peasants, of course, did not remain indifferent to their suffering, and this became the cause of perpetual tension in the Christian society. A good example of the inability of the Christian leadership to supply their soldiers by a fair means other than by looting and pillaging is given in the chronicle of Minas. When Minas decided to fight Yeshaq and the Turkish pasha in 1562 :

... all the dignitaries of Shawa, Hamalmal, Taklo, Rom Sagad and others gathered and discussed with the king the provisions for the army. Minas sent Hamalmal and Zara Yohannes with many soldiers to go to Doba and capture animals so that these could serve as provisions for the descent to Tigray.

The Doba were peaceful nomads and fine fighters. By plundering them the administration was weakening them. It was at this juncture, when Christian leadership had resorted to the unwarranted policy of looting its own peaceful subjects, that the period of the Michelle gada (1554-1562) came to an end. This gada was succeeded by an equally victorious and highly mobile Harmufa gada (1562-1570), which took the war into several provinces. In the words of Bahrey, "Harmufa killed the soldiers of the regiment called Giyorgis Hayle at Qachend",² located in the valley of Wayet.³ The soldiers of Giyorgis Hayle, stationed at Qachend, were probably the best crack force in the kingdom. However, it seems they were not prepared for the assault of the new gada. The commander of this regiment was a certain Awassa, a friend of Hamalmal, who believed like the latter, in avoiding the Oromo

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1. Pereira, Historia de Minas, p. 34.
 2. Bahrey, in Some Records of Ethiopia, p. 118.
 3. Asma Giorgis, "Ya Galla Tarik", p. 30.

warriors whenever possible. Unfortunately, the Harmufa gada suddenly surprised and destroyed a large section of Giyorgis Hayle. The sudden attack provided the survivors with an unlooked-for spectacle and panic struck to their hearts. With no time to organize resistance, Awassa turned his horse and fled and the rest followed. The leader and a number of his men escaped because of the swiftness of their horses. The credit for this Harmufa success, which probably exceeded their own expectations, must without doubt go to their scouts and war leaders. It was probably because of this success and others to follow, that the Harmufa gada was so boastful.¹ From the manner in which Bahrey compares the defeat of Awassa with that of Amir Nur at Hazlo, it would suggest that it was a major disaster. What is more, from the manner in which the surviving soldiers of Giyorgis Hayle avoided meeting the Oromo thereafter, and from the way they marched through Ifat, Fatagar and Shawa to Waj, looting and plundering without mercy, it appears they were very unsettled. With the defeat and dispersal of Giyorgis Hayle, the Oromo advance on Angot, Amhara, southern Tigray and Bagameder was a foregone conclusion. Giyorgis Hayle was a protective shield stationed at the cross roads from where the passes to the northern provinces were controlled. Very soon the Harmufa "devastated the countries of Gan (Ganh), Anguat (Angot) and Amhara."² The attack on Angot and Amhara clearly implies that the Christian military establishments in the provinces of Gedom, Ganh and Geshe were already neutralized. These three small provinces "... were strategically important for the defence of the highlands against encroachments from the nomads and pastoralists of the eastern lowlands."³ As Awassa, the commander of Giyorgis Hayle, abandoned the strategic post at Qacheno so Hamalmal, his boss and friend, abandoned Angot to its fate. As already indicated, in a matter of a few years Hamalmal had abandoned Fatagar, the Manz area, and now Angot.

At this stage of Oromo migration, which was still spearheaded by five Barentu confederacies, three directions of migration were observable. First, the spearhead of the powerful Karrayu and Marawa groups, which overran Fatagar

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1. Bahrey, in Some Records of Ethiopia, pp. 118-119.
 2. Ibid., pp. 118-119.
 3. Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia ... ", p. 39.

and fought Hamalmal at Dago. From here they managed to turn north between the inaccessible massif of Gedem on the east and the equally inaccessible and formidable massif of Manz on the west, passing through Geshe on the way to Angot. In all likelihood it was this group which attacked Giyorgis Hayle at Qacheno and later forced Hamalmal to abandon Angot. Secondly another section of Karrayu and Marawa, together with Warantisha and Akichu groups, followed the route of the first group up to a point between the Chacha and Mofar rivers, at which point they found it impossible to follow the route of the first group. From this it would seem that the second group was larger and accompanied by children, women and numerous cattle, while the first group was probably composed of warriors. The second group turned to the east along the western Ifat, crossing the Robi river, leaving to the west the Gedem massif and then crossing the Borkanna river towards southern Amhara and beyond. (See the map on p. 238). Thirdly, the Warra Daya group that had been trailing behind the four groups followed the course of the Awash river along its course in the lowlands of Dawaro. To a large extent the migration route of Warra Daya was defined by the course of the Awash.

Minas died in September 1563 after a short reign, during which the provinces of Fatagar, Ifat, Ganh, Gedem, Geshe and Angot, together with some parts of Shawa,¹ were lost to the Oromo. He died a frustrated man, unable to defend his provinces nor to raise tribute with which to maintain his soldiers.

Minas was succeeded by his son Sarsa Dengel (1563-1597). Sarsa Dengel came to the throne at the age of fourteen and was a man of restless and bloodthirsty disposition. According to the monk Pawlos, the Oromo first attacked the province of Angot in the year in which Minas died.² As we have already indicated Hamalmal withdrew from the province before the Oromo occupied it. According to Merid, "Hamalmal even encouraged some of the garrisons that had remained in the frontier districts to abandon their mountain strongholds. ... He lacked the ability and boldness of his predecessor Fanuel".³ This may or may not have been the case. What is not

1. On Shawa, see below pp. 243-4.

2. Conti-Rossini, "L'autobiografia de Pawlos monaco Abissino ...", RRAL, p. 287

3. Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia ...", pp. 197, 212-223.

4.. It must be remembered that Fanuel and Hamalmal faced the same problem but under entirely different circumstances. During the reign of Galawdewos when Fanuel was the governor of Dawaro, the Christian kingdom was strong. However, after 1559 when Hamalmal was appointed governor of the eastern provinces, the fortunes of the kingdom dramatically changed, and it was no longer strong.

in dispute is that the defeated and demoralized garrisons in the eastern provinces did not need any encouragement to abandon their post from Hamalmal. On the contrary a number of garrisons had already voted with their feet, abandoning their mountain strongholds at the storm centre, in favour of areas not yet attacked by the Oromo, even before Hamalmal had abandoned Angot in 1563. The already-mentioned Giyorgis Hayle is the best example.

From our sources it appears that Hamalmal was an intelligent man, who knew the reality, the limits and extents of his power, though he was a brave and good military leader. Undoubtedly he was haunted by the spectre of repeated Christian defeat. This may have inhibited him from taking anything that could possibly be construed as a risk. The security and the survival of the army may have weighed more with him than the bold adventure of meeting the fast-moving, numerically superior enemy, whose war strategy was still a mystery to the Christians.¹ Some of the provinces might have been saved if the Christian politicians and military leaders had been united on a radical and new pragmatic policy, such as building strong fortifications at strategic points, and maintaining them with thousands of soldiers. The annual upkeep of these fortifications would have required a great deal of resources that would have laid a heavy burden on the people. For this the country lacked the means as well as the will. In the event, unity of purpose was lacking, nor were the politicians and military strategists able to generate a new defence policy. It took the Christian leadership several decades even to adopt to the highly effective Oromo chiffra fighting method.² Instead of coming up with new ideas, new strategies, the old and crude policy of slaving, which had been widely used during the heyday of colonization, was resuscitated with a new vigour born of desperation. This policy, as we shall see below,³ devastated the "pagan" minorities, and depopulated vast areas, which in turn contributed to the rapid spread of the pastoral Oromo. Hamalmal alone cannot be blamed for this state of affairs. It was the economic disaster that drove the Christian leadership into this course of action. What Hamalmal could be blamed for is his revolt against the young king in 1563.

1. Infra, p p. 236-7.

2. Infra, p. 250.

3. Infra, p. 308.

When Minas died suddenly, the nobility at the court put Sarsa Dengel on the throne. According to the chronicle of Sarsa Dengel, Hamalmal's party within the court wanted his presence at the succession. There was a stormy scene in the council but the opposing faction stuck to its guns and successfully put Sarsa Dengel on the throne without the presence of Hamalmal.¹ Hamalmal, who probably aspired to be sole regent, or co-regent with Sabla Wangle (the queen mother), was deeply offended at the decision, which did not take his interests into consideration. He felt insulted and humiliated when the final decision was reached without his consent. His scheme for stopping the Oromo spread failed. The problem of maintaining his numerous camp followers added to his difficulties. The restlessness of his soldiers increased his sense of frustration, and in every sense his position became untenable. He believed he had to be in the decision-making council to steer the whole course of events in the proper direction. The news of his revolt and march towards the court sent a wave of terror through Mangesta Samyat in eastern Gojjam. Hamalmal's revolt was a nightmare, the Christians dreaded it. He was a mature man and a calculating politician who was regarded as a father-figure. His revolt was the first conspicuous crack in the government of Sarsa Dengel. From the sources, it seems that Sarsa Dengel and his supporters were alarmed by Hamalmal's revolt, but not surprised. They were deeply frightened, but had prepared themselves in advance for something of the sort. Their reaction was very restrained. In the eyes of the Christian peasants this was a humiliating moment in their history, when their leaders failed to unite in the face of the devastating Oromo migration.

Fortunately however, by the time Hamalmal arrived in eastern Gojjam, he was beginning to have cold feet about running after the fleeing Sarsa Dengel, and in consequence the original idea of an all-out war with Sarsa Dengel was watered down to a few skirmishes here and there. By this change of tactics, Hamalmal once again demonstrated that he was a calculating man who did have the overall wisdom of avoiding total war at a risky moment. Hence, for his lack of military brilliance he compensated by his willingness to come terms with reality. Very soon Hamalmal left eastern Gojjam, crossed the Abay and settled down at Endagabatan in western Shawa, where he built good fortifications.² Even though Merid believes that Hamalmal's return to western Shawa was not motivated by a sense of duty,³ his fortifications at Endagabatan were

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1. Conti-Rossini, trans. Historia Regis Sarsa Dengel 'Malak Saga', (Paris : 1907), p. 5.
 2. Ibid., p. 9.
 3. Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia ... ", p. 212.

a timely measure that saved this region from the Oromo occupation for almost two decades. Hamalmal seems to have believed, as did Galawdewos, that there was neither a way of driving out the pastoralists from the areas they had occupied, nor a means of returning refugees to their provinces. The best course of action was therefore to settle the refugees in the provinces not yet attacked and strengthen the defences there. From what Hamalmal did at Endagabatan, it seems that he believed the best way of salvaging what was left of the eastern provinces was by pooling the isolated and scattered garrisons from the provinces already wasted, and stationing them behind fortifications at strategic points in defensible provinces.

While Hamalmal was strengthening the fortifications at Endagabatan, and at the same time preparing for some sort of final show-down with Sarsa Dengel, Taklo, the latter's general, outmanoeuvred him. Although Taklo was not one of the superior officers, he applied his strategy carefully to achieve his military ends. Beneath his adventurous exterior, Taklo was a man of good experience who had grasped the essential implications of the Muslim Christian alliance against the Oromo. He exploited the spirit of the alliance and by so doing he contrived to get the Muslim leader of Waj, a certain Asma-ad-Din, to side with Sarsa Dengel against Hamalmal. Accordingly Asma-ad-Din's force of 800 cavalry sided with Sarsa Dengel, thus out-numbering Hamalmal's 500 cavalry.¹ The ensuing clashes were indecisive. Hamalmal asked for pardon, and the queen mother and her son were magnanimous towards him and pardoned him and appointed him governor of Gojjam. Hamalmal died shortly after in October 1564 in Gojjam.

However, the correctness of his new defence policy was evident immediately after he made peace with the young king. The garrisons of the threatened eastern provinces abandoned their posts and wanted to go across the Abay for safety. The regiment known as Giyorgis Hayle,² which had earlier demonstrated its lawlessness whilst fleeing through Shawa and Fatagar to Waj, once again abandoned their new haven for yet another one across the Abay. Other regiments such as Batra Amora in Waj followed suit. There was a general flight from all the eastern provinces. Sarsa Dengel, who was now on good terms with Hamalmal, seems to have carefully listened to the advice

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1. Conti-Rossini, Historia Regis Sarsa Dengel, pp. 19-20. From the size of Muslim cavalry it would seem that the Muslim refugee population in Waj was probably large.
 2. *Supra*, p. 231.

of the old man. He soon intercepted the fleeing soldiers before they crossed the Abay. He followed the course already mapped by Hamalmal and settled them at Mugar in Western Shawa. By his encounter with the demoralized and fleeing soldiers, Sarsa Dengel seems to have drawn two conclusions. Firstly, it appears that he realized that there was no way of turning the tide against the Oromo. Probably it was due to this realization, reached early in his reign, that Sarsa Dengel never undertook seriously either to return the refugees to their provinces, or to drive out the Oromo from the provinces they had occupied. Secondly, and more importantly, Sarsa Dengel seems to have realized from the mutinies of the disaffected soldiers and the rebellion of Hamalmal, that the loss of the eastern provinces would have serious internal repercussions for his administration. He soon saw that his rights to the throne were based neither on legal sophistry nor ideological rhetoric, but on the sword alone. He was obliged, therefore, to aim at the creation of an army devoted to him alone, and at the acquisition of the financial means indispensable for maintaining himself on the throne. This he started at Mugar, where he had settled the deserting soldiers. He even raised a tantalizing hope among the demoralized soldiers by recruiting into his own army the young and virile elements from among them.¹ Sarsa Dengel's need for creating a personal crack force with which to discipline the disaffected soldiers became even greater when Giyongis Hayle once again revolted, and abandoning Mugar crossed the Abay and looted Mangesta Samayat, the court of the queen mother. The restlessness of these regiments was the direct response to the deteriorating insecurity in the provinces, as yet unoccupied by the Oromo.

The Oromo movement was unpredictable. They did not have any permanent settlement and it was very difficult for the garrisons to retaliate by going into Oromo territory. The effective spying-ring which the Oromo scouts employed at this stage helped them to disappear with their cattle deep into the bush before the Christians could retaliate. In their pursuit the Christian soldiers would be harassed suddenly and unexpectedly in a forested land they did not know, and from an enemy they could not see. Thus many a time the Christian forces had to abandon their pursuit in despair and hurry back to their post to escape starvation, since they could not find provisions in the land which had been devastated by the Oromo.

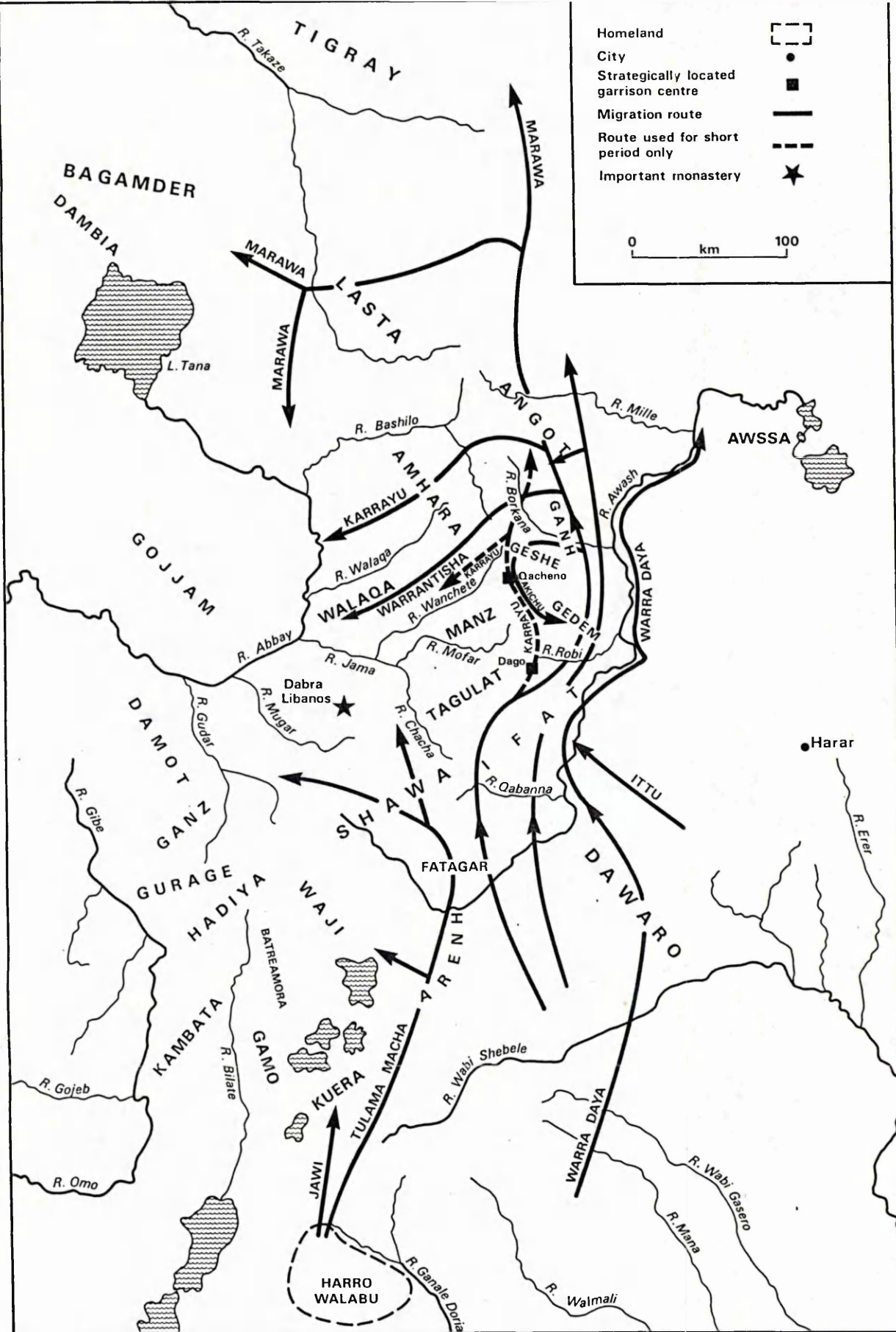
1. Conti-Rossini, Historia Regis Sarsa Dengel, pp. 29-30.

... As soon as the Galla perceive an enemy comes on with a powerful army they retire to the farther parts of the country, with all their cattle, the Abyssinians must of necessity either turn back or perish. This is an odd way of making war wherein by flying they overcome the conquerors; and without drawing sword oblige them to encounter with hunger, which is an invincible enemy.¹

Demoralized by hunger and frustrated by their inability to inflict any damage on the Oromo, the Christian soldiers were filled with a desperation that manifested itself in the form of rebellion against the state as well as in looting or massacring defenceless subjects of the Christian state itself.

Before we close our discussion on the period of the Harmufa gada (1562-1570), we must again take up the progress of the Barentu migration to the north, from where we left them in late 1563, while they were spreading themselves rapidly. The Karrayu and Marawa reached together the valley of the Wanchite river, at which point the Karrayu turned west, while the Marawa continued through Makana Sellase, crossing the Borkana river into a region bounded by rivers on three fronts, and Angot in the north. Undoubtedly this group passed through densely populated areas in a very short time. This could have happened either because the Oromo avoided attacking strong points, as they did in many places, or because the group was large and powerful, as one historian claims.² We have already shown that the Marawa were divided into three sub-groups, namely, Ana, Uru and Abati, while the Karrayu were in turn divided into six sub-groups, namely, Liban, Wallo, Jele, Obo, Suba and Bala.³ Each of these groups was sub-divided into many smaller groups. For example the Wallo were divided into seven groups. Bahrey gives the following six as the "sons" of Wallo. These are Wara Buko, Wara Guera, Wara Nole Wara Illu, these three calling themselves Wallo, while Wara Karrayu, Wara Illu and Nole Wara Ali are known as Sadacha ("the three").⁴ In popular tradition the Wallo are reported to have had seven "sons", however the name of the seventh group is not given. What is interesting to note here is that of all the Oromo group who settled in the north, the Wallo group

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1. B. Tellez, The Travels of the Jesuits in Ethiopia, p. 66.
 2. Asma Giyorgis, "Ya Galla Tarik", p. 30.
 3. Supra, p. 148.
 4. Bahrey, in Some Records of Ethiopia, p. 114.



Map 6. THE PASTORAL OROMO MIGRATION TO THE CENTRAL AND THE NORTHERN PART OF THE CHRISTIAN KINGDOM.

had a very strong Muslim tradition. This may be partly because they were the first Oromo group to accept Islam. There is also another reason why this may be so. According to one tradition, Wallo was the head of an Oromo clan, who went to Harar, embraced Islam, and came to the Christian kingdom as one of the fighters of Imam Ahmad.¹ Legends such as this one reflect more about the changed value system than anything else. Even before their arrival in the northern region, some Wallo clans may have already embraced Islam. For example, Nole Wara Ali seem to have been Muslim. Ali is an unmistakable Muslim name and usually only Muslim Oromo adopted Muslim names.

From the sources it is clear that a section of Karrayu and Marawa occupied southern Amhara while the rest invaded Angot. From the manner in which Pawlos describes the first Oromo attack on Angot, it appears that the province was attacked suddenly, and the peasants did not put up a strong resistance.² Sarsa Dengel's court, which was embroiled both in the mutiny of the soldiers and Hamalmal's rebellion, had neither the will nor the means to alleviate the plight of the peasants of Angot. Left to themselves, the peasants were unable to drive out the strong bands from the province. In one sense, the Oromo attack of southern Amhara and Angot was radically different from that of the southern provinces. In the latter, they repeatedly attacked and withdrew to their safe base areas, while in the former they attacked only during the Harmufa period, and then proceeded to settle. In other words, in southern Amhara and Angot the Oromo settled before commencing to break the backbone of peasant resistance by means of a long period of continuous attack and retreat. Considering the extremely difficult nature of the terrain for attack and retreat, and taking into account the large size of peasantry in the region, the bands' attack must have been a bold gamble generated by the degree of self-confidence gained from having won several victories. In the eyes of the unarmed peasants, the Oromo were an "invisible" enemy. The exaggerated reputation for the Oromo ability to do the "utmost mischief possible in the shortest time"³, their cruelty during the initial stage of their attack, the lightning speed with which they could attack and retreat, all these seem to have contributed to create an impression of being invisible in the eyes of the untried peasantry.

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1. Conti-Rossini, "Domenico Brielli-Ricordi storiei de wallo", in Studi etiopici, p. 87.
 2. Conti-Rossini, "L'autobigrafia de Pawlos monaco ... " RRAL, p. 287.
 3. James Bruce, Travels to discover the source of the Nile, iii, p. 240.

The report of their cruelty made such an impression upon the Abyssinians that on their first engagements they rarely stood firmly the Galla's first onset. Besides this, the shrill and very barbarous noise they are always used to make at the moment they charge, used to terrify the horses.¹

We may add that they seem to have made the same impression on all their enemies in East Africa. This explains the reason why even the name Galla was a terror among all the peoples of the Horn, even in the seventeenth century.¹ What is more, their spy network seems to have been a very active and effective one. Without essential information concerning the provinces of Bagameder and southern Tigray, we cannot see how the vanguard Oromo force was able to attack the two provinces within the Hammufa gada period. At this stage in their migration our information on their assault in southern Tigray is too scanty to enable us to make any definite statement. However, we do have sufficient information of their attack on Bagameder. Bahrey makes it quite clear that "Hammufa of the Bartuma made war on Bagameder, and killed Waka the brother of Harbo."³ Pawlos has also confirmed that the Oromo had defeated Harbo the governor of Bagameder.⁴ The first Oromo attack on Bagameder must have been a very serious one. According to Merid, this attack "was made shortly before the rainy season of 1569"⁵. The attack was made by the Karraryu and Marawa groups, which seem to have left southern Amhara and crossed the Borkana towards its source, then passing through the heart of Amhara and descending the valley of Bashilo, from where they crossed the river of the same name. From the manner in which they defeated and dispersed the Christian force, from the way in which they struck panic among the peasantry of Dambiya, and from the sheer devastation they caused, it would seem that the attack was undertaken suddenly and unexpectedly. We suspect that the long-distance attack in Dambiya was motivated purely by the hope of rich booty, because the region was famous for its animal population, and also the court of the late king Minas was located here. From this it would seem that they had the necessary information both on where to attack, and when to attack. The big band that attacked Dambiya withdrew quickly after taking sufficient booty and administering a quick sharp shock to the peasants in the area.

1. James Bruce, Travels to discover the source ... ", iii, pp. 240-241.

2. Jerome Lobo, Voyage to Abyssinia, pp. 59-60.

3. Bahrey, in Some Record of Ethiopia, p. 118.

4. Conti-Rossini, "L'autobigrafia de Pawlos monaco Abissino...", RRAL, p. 288.

5. Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia ... ", p. 324.

Finally, during the period of the Harmufa gada, the Christian kingdom lost many provinces. More was to be lost within the next period. Harmufa was succeeded by the Robale gada (1570-1578). The latter came to office at the time when Sarsa Dengel had established his authority and more importantly had won a resounding victory over the governor of Hadiya. According to Bahrey, it was Robale "who devastated Shoa and began to make war on Gojjam".¹ This means Sarsa Dengel did not turn the tide against the Oromo, even after he had fully established his authority.

The Borana migration

So far in our discussion of the migration we have mainly concentrated on the Barentu section, for the simple reason that the Barentu formed the vanguard of the whole movement for almost four decades, both in the eastern and the northern directions. This does not mean that the Borana did not make a name for themselves. They were part of the flood that engulfed the Horn in the second half of the sixteenth century. The major difference between the two sections was that at the start of the migration the Barentu section had already many fully-fledged confederacies which were fighting in their names, and looking for new homes for their members. Even though the Borana had three confederacies on the eve of the migration, only the Tulama-Macha migrated to the north, while the other two confederacies² remained in the southern region, from where some section directed its course of migration towards what is today northern Kenya and south-western Somalia.³ Our interest, however, is with the Borana movement to the north. We have already mentioned two points about the Borana migration to the north, which are worth remembering at this point. First, from the clan genealogies of the various Barentu groups found either in Harar or in the north, we find numerous Borana clan names. For instance, we find in Harar, clan names such as Macha, Tulama, Borana, Wayu and many others. In Wallo province there is even an awraji (sub-rpvovince) named after the Borana who settled there. These are all important clan names of the Borana (Tulama-Macha) that settled either in what is today the provinces of Shawa, Wallaga, Kaffa and Illu Abba Bora. What these clan names in Harar and Wallo (where mainly the Barentu section settled) indicate is that numerous bands of the Borana joined the

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1. Bahrey, in Some Records of Ethiopia, p. 119.
 2. Supra, p. 138.
 3. On the Oromo migration towards Kenya, among others see. E.R. Turton, "Bantu, Galla and Somali Migrations in the Horn of Africa : A reassessment of the Juba/Tana Area", Journal of African History, xvi, 4, (1975), pp. 519-537.

Barentu on their march early in the movement.¹ Secondly, we have also indicated that while bands of the Borana groups were joining the Barentu march, the Tulama-Macha were simultaneously migrating to the north, fighting in their own name and winning new lands for themselves.² Initially, the Borana were less successful in winning new lands for themselves. The most likely reason for this was their small size when compared to that of the Barentu. From their base at Walabu, they progressed, therefore, rather slowly through the Rift Valley. The other reason for their slow progress was the presence of strong Christian regiments at various strategic positions. Following the jihadic wars, and repeated Barentu attacks, the Christian defence system in the eastern provinces collapsed. This facilitated the rapid spread of Borana during the period of the gada under discussion. However, before embarking on a discussion of the massive Borana incursion during the Robale gada (1570-1578), we should clarify certain points which are relevant to our discussion.

In the 1920s, while visiting Ambo, Dr. Cerulli gathered the tradition about a beast called Liqimssa,³ the central theme of which revolves around Walabu, the Borana' point of dispersal. Cerulli correlates this tradition of the Borana dispersal from Walabu with Bahrey's History of the Galla, and then charts the route which the Oromo followed in their northward migration. Cerulli bases the thrust of his argument on the following conclusion of Bahrey. "Those of the Boran who stayed came out of their country by way of Kuera; that was at the time when Fasil attacked them and was killed by them."⁴ By "their country", Bahrey means the Walabu region, and his statement does not have any other meaning. Cerulli has identified the above-mentioned Kuera with the present Koira, the district inhabited by the Cushitic-speaking group known as Baditu. He also identifies Bahrey's home of Gamo (which was attacked

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1. The bands of the Borana group kept their clan names even after they had joined with and settled among the Barentu. This was also true of the Barentu bands who settled among the Borana section. Perhaps this was necessitated by the question of blood-wealth which varied according to the degree of clan relationship. According to Tasawo Marga, "Senna Umatta Oromo...", pp. 12-13; the bands of the Borana group kept their clan names even after they had joined with the Barentu, so that they could appeal to their Borana brethren whenever they were badly treated by the Barentu among whom they had settled. This was also true of the Barentu bands who settled among the Borana.
 2. *Supra*, p. 227.
 3. For the interpretation of the legend of liqimssa, *supra*, pp. 144-6.
 4. Bahrey, in Some Records of Ethiopia, p. 114.

by the Jawe, a section of the Borana during the next gada period),¹ with the Gamu of the royal chronicles. On the basis of these two identifications Cerulli makes the route from Walabu through Kuera and Gamo the major path of the Oromo migration.² Essentially, one part of this conclusion is correct, while the other part is not. It is correct in that this route was the major route for the Borana migration to the north during the period of the Robale gada and during subsequent gadas. It is incorrect, because Cerulli projects the situation of the 1570s back to that of the 1520s. It is also incorrect, because Cerulli assumes that the major sixteenth century Oromo migration to the north, to the east and to the west was conducted only along this route. We do not think Cerulli was aware of the weakness of Bahrey's History of the Galla regarding the Barentu migration. This is probably why he makes Borana rather than Barentu the spearhead of Oromo migration. Merid claims that Cerulli draws a conclusion that contradicts Bahrey's own history of the Galla. According to Merid, "Cerulli places the Dawe in front of the other Boran tribes, and makes the Boran rather than the Baraytum the spearhead of the migration."³ However, Cerulli does not place the Jawe (Dawe) in front of the Borana in the course of the migration. He does not even mention Jawe in the pages cited by Merid.

What both Cerulli and Merid forgot to consider concerns the relevance of the above-mentioned tradition of the Borana migration to Shawa itself. In this tradition, it is stated that Shawa had a powerful king named Sarako, who prevented the people from bearing arms. A certain giant arose against Sarako, and his children, and destroyed them. When the two groups of the Borana, Gombichu and Ada, entered Shawa, they found no-one to stop them, since the children of Sarako had been killed. So the Borana entered Shawa without much difficulty.⁴ Cerulli believes that some aspect of this tradition is related to the Amhara tradition of the arrogant king, which is attributed to Emperor Libna Dingil.⁵ He says Sarako is the Gurage name for Emperor Zara Ya'eqob, whose name is known among several peoples of southern Ethiopia. From this he concludes that the Oromo acquired the Sarako tradition through their contact with the Gurage. This may or may not be the case;

1. *Infra*, p. 322.

2. E. Cerulli, Etiopia Occidentale, vol. ii, pp. 169-173.

3. Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia ... ", pp. 307-308.

4. Cerulli, ibid.,

5. e.g. Takla Sadiq Makuniya, Ya Gran Ahmad Warana, pp. 161-163.

and it is beside the issue. What is important about this tradition is the part that refers to the fact that the Borana entered Shawa without experiencing much resistance.

Underneath its legendary shell, there is a ring of authenticity to this tradition. In the first place, we know that after the fall of Fatagar the defences of Shawa were under attack. Hamalmal's retreat¹ from Shawa to Angot in 1560-61 implies that Shawa itself was no longer safe.² What is more, since the time of the Michelle gada (1554-1562), four Barentu groups were channelling their migration to the north.³ We have seen that some of the groups actually passed through Manz, on their way to Geshe, Ganh, southern Amhara, Angot and beyond. Manz was an important part of historical Shawa. What all this amounts to is that even before the Robale gada, the defence of Shawa on the eastern front was in a shambles. This may be the reason why Hamalmal settled in western Shawa in 1563 rather than in any other place. It may also be why the notorious regiment of Giyorgis Hayle was settled in western Shawa after much persuasion by Sarsa Dengel in 1564-5. When the Borana Robale gada overran Shawa in the 1570s, it seems they did not find much resistance. The above tradition suggests this. Bahrey's History also implies the same thing.⁴ In the chapter on the Robale gada the historian makes two points very clearly. First, he mentions the Robale of Barentu that invaded Amhara, Angot and Bagameder. Secondly he also mentions the Robale of Borana that carried the war from Shawa to Gojjam.⁵ "Their ability to attack simultaneously in different areas made resistance to their raids almost impossible".⁶ To check the progress of such an enemy would have required a large cavalry and many foot soldiers in every province. The king lacked both the material resources and the necessary organization to undertake such a massive operation. Sarsa Dengel lacked material resources because the amount of tribute he received was negligible, and thus inadequate to finance the massive operation he had to undertake.

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1. Supra, p. 228.
 2. Shawa being the heart of the southern region where the Oromo had weakened and destroyed the Christian authority or administration with their repeated attacks, we cannot see how Shawa alone could have been immune from any attack before the period of the Robale gada.
 3. Supra. pp. 226-7.
 4. Bahrey, in Some Records of Ethiopia, p, 119.
 5. We cannot see how it was that if the resistance in Shawa was strong, the Borana were able to cross the Abay and attack Gojjam.
 6. M. Abir, "Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa" in The Cambridge History of Africa, vol. IV (1600-1790), ed. Richard Gray, (London : 1975), p. 543.

... Nor does the revenue and tribute which I shall describe directly promise anything better. The kingdom of all others in this empire from which most gold comes is Narea. From there none of the former emperors, so the present one states, ever received as much as Malaac Cegued, who reigned during the years 1563 to 1596. What Malaac Cegued received each year only once amounted to five thousand oquaeas, according to some people, for many do not think this is certain. For the rest of the time, he did not receive in any one year more than one thousand five hundred, which is fifteen thousand patacas.¹

According to the same authority, after the Oromo attacked Gojjam, Sarsa Dengel thought it best to excuse the tribute of three thousand horses,² so that the inhabitants could defend themselves better with these horses." From what has been said, it appears that Sarsa Dengel possessed very little both in gold and horses - the two vital resources in strengthening the defence of the kingdom. The Oromo cavalry must have outnumbered the imperial force.

Generally speaking, Sarsa Dengel had three sources of major income. The first included the revenue from the land and other taxes, which were utilized for the upkeep of the army.³ This had never been enough, and it had to be supplemented from the third source of income. The second revenues came from the crown lands, which went towards the upkeep of the court. The third and therefore the major sources of revenue came from the frequent plundering raids and slaving expeditions, and the confiscation of the property of the enemies of the throne. The revenue from commerce was very insignificant due to the insecurity of travelling, which had dramatically reduced trade. From these three sources rewards were made to the faithful servants, nobles and soldiers. The court was neither the centre of plenty as it had been in the early sixteenth century, nor threatened by starvation. It still attracted a large number of people. The soldiers in the frontier provinces became very restless due to the pressure of the migrating Oromo. The restless soldiers had to be bribed with all sorts of favours. Thus the army was the object of his special care. It received its pay whenever resources were available, and when resources were lacking the soldiers received his licence to plunder peaceful subjects. What all this amounts to is that Sarsa Dengel, through his obsessions with the care and demands of the army, weakened and debilitated his own subjects, while at the same time, his limited

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1. Almeida, in Some Records of Ethiopia, p. 85.
 2. Ibid., p. 86.
 3. According to the same source, the king received a great tribute in cows. However, most of these were either consumed by the tax collectors or ruined by the violent means with which they were gathered.

resources handicapped him from mounting any sustained offensive against the Oromo. Almost all his wars against the Oromo were either defensive or a nervous reaction to their bold attacks on the regions which were vital for his throne. For instance, when the Borana Robale devastated Shawa, Sarsa Dengel did not come to the rescue of this province. However, when the same Robale took the war to Gojjam and Waj, Sarsa Dengel responded by a firm decision to punish the Borana. He mobilized fully and thoroughly prepared to humiliate them.

Alors il envoya des messages à tous les pays de son royaume, pour réunir d'ici et de là ces cawa. Il envoya des messages à Zara Yohannes dans le Gojam, à Takla Giyorgis qui était le sahafa l'âm du Damot et à Dahragot qui était le gas du Waj, ordonnant à tous de venir avec leurs troupes.

The governor of Shawa is conspicuously omitted from this mobilization order. From all the eastern provinces it was only the governors of Waj and Damot who were included. This implies that either it was only these two provinces which were under his effective control or that he wanted just to defend them. His mobilization was particularly successful. "... The king of Ethiopia gave battle to him at Zeway, killed many of his men and captured many of his cattle, thanks to this booty many people became rich".² For two reasons Sarsa Dengel was unable to derive much political and military advantage out of this resounding victory. First, to the Oromo this loss was only a temporary setback that affected only one of the several groups. The loss of men, women and cattle by one group could be replaced by the gain of another group. What is interesting to note here is that during the whole course of the Oromo migration, women, children and cattle continued to pass over to new masters. Since women were in short supply among the moving Oromo, they were one of the prizes for which they were fighting. Accordingly women changed hands frequently. In the process languages got intermingled, tribes hopelessly mixed up, and customs interchanged. The captive youths became warriors under their new masters, the old were turned out to tend the flocks and herds, and the flocks and herds simply changed masters for a few years until they were taken by yet another master.³

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1. Conti-Rossini, Historia Regis Sarsa Dengel, p. 51.
 2. Bahrey, in Some Records of Ethiopia, p. 119.
 3. The Oromo moved from place to place with their flocks and herds, always in search of pasture and avoiding its loss. Cows, horses, mules and donkeys, sheep and goats were their possessions. They had neither agricultural occupation nor towns to be destroyed. In every sense they had advantages over their settled enemies.

Secondly, while Sarsa Dengel was attacking the Borana Robale in Waj, the Barentu Robale from their base in Amhara crossed over into Gojjam and terrorized the peasants. Zara Yohannes, who was probably on his way to help Sarsa Dengel, changed his course and followed the Barentu Robale across the Abay into Amhara, where he was surprised, and killed by the Oromo. Zara Yohannes, besides being the governor of Gojjam, was the "chief of the dignitaries."¹ His death must have been a considerable loss to Sarsa Dengel, who immediately abandoned his project of driving the Oromo from the eastern provinces and went back to Gojjam to reorganize the dispersed force of Zara Yohannes. During his campaigns against the Borana Robale in Waj, Sarsa Dengel captured several Oromo warriors, whom he recruited into his army. In this it was Bahr Nagash Yeshaq who first saw the advantage of involving the Oromo in his war against Sarsa Dengel. Thus in the battle of 1579, in which Sarsa Dengel defeated and killed Yeshaq, several Oromo warriors fought on both sides.² This may reflect the degree of Oromo involvement in highland Christian politics. Through this war with Yeshaq, Sarsa Dengel irreparably damaged the defence of all the eastern provinces. This was because he mobilized and took all the regiments from them. Some of these regiments were very small and one wonders why (if not to prevent their liquidation in his absence) it was that Sarsa Dengel took them all the way to Tigray. It seems he must have already formed the opinion that the fall of the eastern provinces was inevitable.

With the regiments from the eastern provinces the king went to Gojjam, from where he wished to go to Tigray via Dambiya. However, while he was in Gojjam he received news that the Barentu Robale were ravaging Dambiya, the seat of his court. He marched with full speed and fell on the Abati of the Marawa group that had invaded the province from across the Bashilo river. In the words of a contemporary historian "... Sarsa Dengel attacked the Robale of the Abati at Wayna Daga and killed them, not sparing one : it is of them that they say not more than ten remained; they alone returned home to carry news of the defeat."¹ This was the first major massacre of the Abati. Several more were to follow before the aggressive Abati became a spent force, totally swamped by the Christian society among whom they had settled.

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1. Bahrey, in Some Records of Ethiopia, p. 119.
 2. Conti-Rossini, Historia Regis Sarsa Dengel, pp. 77, 80 et passim.
 3. Bahrey, ibid., p. 119.

The Birmaje gada (1578-1586) came to office at the time when Sarsa Dengel was marching to the north with the regiments of all the eastern provinces. The Borana Birmaje simultaneously attacked Shawa, Waj and Damot.¹ Sarsa Dengel received the news of this attack after his victory over Bahr Nagash Yeshaq in Tigray in 1579. Militarily Sarsa Dengel was at the pinnacle of his power. His army had never been so formidable or so well-equipped as it was at this time, but by his subsequent action he showed that he was more insecure than at any time since his accession to the throne. The news of the Borana caused a considerable anger among his officials. To them it seemed as if the nightmare of the previous decades, that is to say the total loss of all the eastern provinces, was coming to pass. Sarsa Dengel called a state council at Gubay to decide what to do :

La pensée du hasegé était d'aller après les pluies, combattre les Galla, depuis l'Angot jusqu'au Gedem, à l'Ifat, du Fatagar, et au Dawaro. Il avait pris et ratifié cette décision avec tous les chefs de tous les côtes, lorsqu'il les avait renvoyés chacun à son pays.²

This was the first grand plan to attack the Oromo in the eastern provinces with the exception of Bali and a few of the others. The future of these provinces and the hopes of their governors, as well as that of the displaced refugees, depended on the implementation of that decision. However, before the rainy season was over he was already having second thoughts about the implications of the plan to attack the Oromo over such vast areas; and in consequence the original decision relating to a massive expedition was watered down and replaced by a feeble attack on the Falasha, who time and again proved a timely scapegoat for the Christian rulers.³ The reason for abandoning the campaign against the Oromo is given by the chronicler as the refusal of Radi, the leader of the Falasha, to pay tribute in cereals, honey, cattle and sheep. This infuriated the king so much that he immediately sent messages to all the regiments and governors of Tigray to come to his assistance. The ideological justification for his attack on the Falasha is given by Sarsa Dengel himself : "... It is better to me that I fight with the enemies of the blood of Jesus Christ rather than go to fight against the Galla"⁴. This implies either that his soldiers refused to go on the campaign against the Oromo, or he did not have provisions for them, or both.

1. For the timely innovation which enabled the Borana Birmaje to revolutionize the course of their warfare, see p. 214.

2. Conti-Rossini, Historia Regis Sarsa Dengel, p. 96.

3. e.g. James Arthur Quirin, "The Beta Israel (Falasha) in Ethiopian History caste formation and culture change, 1270-1868". For many centuries the Christian rulers turned their attention against the Falasha as an easy scapegoat in times of internal crises.

4. Conti-Rossini, ibid., pp. 96-97.

Before Sarsa Dengel undertook any campaign against the Oromo, the Borana Birmaje gada crossed the Abay and invaded Gojjam. This Borana attack on Gojjam was devastating enough, but the rout and subsequent dispersal of the victims became still more so on account of two circumstances which attended it : the first of these was the death of Fasiladas, the cousin of Sarsa Dengel, who fell in defence of his rich estate among the fleeing peasants, without having performed in his own name anything worthy of his long experience and the universal respect in which he was held. The second factor was the capture of his son Susenyos. At this time (around 1585), Susenyos was about sixteen years of age. He was born in 1569. Susenyos lived in captivity for almost two years, during which time he must have been adopted and become ilma gossa ("the son of the clan") that captured him. According to his chronicle, "the Galla who captured him liked him and treated him as his child."¹ His stay with the Oromo at this formative age must have had a lasting impact upon him. He learned their language, their manners and acquired their fighting skill. According to one authority :

He knew their language, and the history of their great men. He knew their customs and their laws. He learned fighting among them and became a brave horseman. While among them he killed a lion and shaved his head leaving a patch of hair on the top, like the Galla custom of a brave warrior.² He returned from his captivity when he was about 18 years of age.

While Susenyos was still in captivity, the Borana group among whom he lived went and attacked the province of Damot. Dajazmach Asbo, the governor of the province, patiently waited until the Borana looted his province and encumbered themselves with heavy booty. He then attacked them at the moment they were not suspecting at the place where they were busy sharing the booty.³ He easily dispersed the startled Borana, capturing many from among them.

Dajazmach Asbo detained them under severe conditions, saying 'If you bring back the son of Fasilidas, I will release you from imprisonment and send you to your people, otherwise I will kill you. They (the Borana men) for their part replied to him saying, "We will bring him for you, and if we do not bring him, kill us". When Susenyos was set free and returned from captivity Dajazmach Asbo ... released those Galla and sent them to their own people in accordance with his words.⁴

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1. F.M. Esteves Pereira, Chronica de Susenyos Rei de Ethiopia, p. 4.
 2. Asma Giyorgis, "Ya Galla Tarik"; p. 55. Asma believes that Susenyos lived among the Oromo for three years at this time.
 3. Bahrey, in Some records of Ethiopia, p. 121.
 4. Pereira, ibid., pp. 4-5. I am deeply indebted to Haile Larebo, who took the trouble of translating for me the relevant part of Susenyos's chronicle from Geez into English.

Asbo, having now obtained his desire of setting free Susenyos from his captivity, did not follow up his success with more boldness and imagination. His strategy against the Borana Birmaje brings to light the new defence measure which the Christian leaders were adopting slowly but surely. Since neither the peasants nor the soldiers could possibly withstand the first Oromo onslaught, with all its attendant consequences, the raiders were tacitly permitted to loot. Whilst they were doing this, the Christian soldiers went and hid along the route by which the heavily-loaded Oromo would make their retreat, waiting for an opportunity to take revenge on the plunderers. They usually waited at a difficult crossing, which was advantageous for their foot soldiers, but perilous for the Oromo cavalry, where either fight or flight would be equally dangerous. This new strategy was perfected by Susenyos, who also introduced the Oromo chiffra fighting system, which improved the efficiency of the Christian force.¹

While the Borana Birmaje was attacking Shawa, Damot, Waj and Gojjam, the Barentu Birmaje was busy attacking the northern provinces. The Marawa which had spread over lower Angot branched off mainly to the west where the vanguard group descended down to the valley of the Takaza, and from this point they kept up the pressure on Bagameder and Dambiya. The latter was a fertile and rich province that had attracted the eyes of several kings. After his return from the Tigray expedition in 1579, Sarsa Dengel made Gubay the seat of his court. His presence in Dambiya did not lessen the Marawa's burning desire to loot the rich province. The province was rich in cattle,² which were considered a prize worth fighting for by the pastoral Oromo. Accordingly between 1585 and 1586 the Marawa took the war into Dambiya and "killed Aboli of the royal family, Samra Ab the Bahr Nagash, and other personages."³ Of the other Barentu groups, the Warantisha had already started spreading "out along the valley of the Wancit, lower Jama and Walaga rivers; the Akachu to their west, in southern Amhara and in Gedem and the Karrayu throughout Amhara, Angot and Ganh."⁴ Of the numerous Karrayu groups, the "seven houses" of Wallo had started to establish themselves in

1. *Infra*, p. 273.

2. e.g. Almeida, in Some Records of Ethiopia, pp. 87-88.

3. Bahrey, ibid., p. 120.

4. Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia ... ", p. 330.

the southern section of Amhara, the region known until then as Lakomalza. The Wallo settled here and gave their name to the region and the province.

The area thus occupied by the Wallo consisted of the major localities known today as Jama, Laga-Mida, Laga Gora, Laga Ambo, Ali bet, Abay bet and Gimba. These seem to have been the original localities which constituted the so-called 'sabat bet Wallo' (the seven houses of Wallo).¹

The Mulata gada (1586-1594) came to office at the time when the economic difficulties had forced Sarsa Dengel to become almost like a professional slave-hunter among "pagan" minorities west of the Abay. "... While in 1585 his mother was homeless and a refugee at the Gojam village of Dajan, and while the Borana were completing their conquest of Damot, he was raiding for slaves across the river in Balya and Wambarma."² The Mulata continued to wage war in all directions, and during this gada period the Oromo in general, and the Borana in particular, won spectacular victories.³ However, it is with the activities of the Barentu groups that we are concerned here.

Around 1590, while one section of the Warra Daya and Wallo caused great trepidation among the Muslims in Awasa,⁴ the other section of Warra Daya invaded the district of which Walda Christos was the governor. The latter withstood the heavy storm of their first attack and forced them to retreat in disarray abandoning their booty.

... Walda Krestos ... conquered Multa, recovered the booty which he had taken and killed a great number of the Galla. He pursued a party of them and drove them over a precipice. ... On his return [Sarsa Dengel] found that the country had been preserved by the readiness of Walda Krestos and the battles which he had fought; and for that reason he made him Ras,⁵ or head of his house, and set him at the head of the whole kingdom.

Although Walda Christos was lucky in conflict against the Warra Daya Mulata, both he and Sarsa Dengel were unlucky in the case of the elusive Mulata of Marawa in Dambiya. The Marawa bands, which acquired an intimate knowledge of the topography of the land through which they staged their attacks and retreats, kept up pressure on this province. The king

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1. Zengawa Asfera, "Some aspects of historical development in 'Amhara Wallo', (ca. 1700-1815)", B.A. thesis Addis Ababa University, 1973, p. 4.
 2. Merid, "Southern Ethiopia ...", pp. 335-336.
 3. The activities of the Borana during the periods of the Birmaje and Mulata gada (1578-1594) will be discussed at length in the next chapter.
 4. Supra, p. 212.
 5. Bahrey, in Some Records of Ethiopia, p. 124.

strengthened the defence of the province. The Christian force soundly beat the Marawa time and again, but the defeat of one band never deterred the attack of the next. Perhaps the wealth of this province, especially its cattle, captured the attention of the Marawa. The elusive character of the Marawa presented the soldiers as well as the peasants with serious technical problems. The Marawa launched a series of raids which had little or no purpose in terms of actually making the province their own territory, such as characterized other Oromo attacks in other provinces, but they continued raiding by means of surprise attacks and sudden withdrawals, always taking back much booty and doing considerable damage to the peasants. By the time the soldiers had arrived on the scene of the raided area the victorious Marawa were already negotiating the Takaza river, for generally they crossed back into their own country with the spoils. It was essentially this elusive character of the Marawa attacks on Dambiya that forced Sarsa Dengel to change the seat of his court from Gubay to Ayba in 1590.

... The court was moved further north to Ayba in order to escape their raids which commenced once the rivers became fordable. The slaving activities in which the emperor became engaged, after moving to Ayba, show that he had not gone to Wagara to be nearer Wanya Daga and other nearby areas of Bagameder threatened by Marawa bands coming from the Takaza river ... Ayba was sufficiently distant from the Shena valley and protected by the mountains flanking it on the north and east from any bands which might come across Wayna Daga. At the same time it was not far removed from Alafa, Achafar Gojam and the provinces beyond,¹ among the pagan peoples on which the emperor and his soldiers preyed.

In the Oromo tradition of the time, the killing of an enemy or a big and dangerous animal was considered to be an act of great courage, which qualified the killer to shave his head like a hero. However, the killing of women or children or animals which were not considered as strong and dangerous, was a cowardly act that disqualified the killer from "making his head". Motivated by their repeated victories during and before the Mulata gada, a group of Barentu even went to the extent of considering the inhabitants of Shawa and Amhara as ignominious animals not worthy of killing. "... One party said an outrageous thing when they declared, 'let us not shave our heads when we kill the inhabitants of Shoa and Amhara, for they are but oxen which speak and cannot fight.'²

During the period of the Mulata gada, the Christian kingdom suffered repeated defeats and lost all of its provinces east of the Abay. In the

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1. Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia ... ", pp. 329-330.
 2. Bahrey, in Some Records of Ethiopia, p. 127.

words of a contemporary historian :

Mulata of the Borana afflicted the Christians of Damot, scattered them, and devastated their country; from his time Shoa and Damot were deserted ... The country submits to him, Mulata, and none remains without submission to him. When this book was written it was the seventh year [i.e. 1593] of the government of Mulata. (1)

The loss of Damot, Waj and several smaller provinces will be discussed in the next chapter;² here it should suffice to mention briefly the loss of Shawa, which in more than one sense was the centre of the Christian empire since the time of Amda Siyon.³ Shawa, weakened by the continuous Borana assaults, and drained of its population by wars and famine, was in no state to resist any longer. Sarsa Dengel was unable to help. The Amhara population of Shawa, who did not flee across the Abay :

... took refuge in the deep and inaccessible valleys of the Jamma-Addabay system, on inaccessible mountain plateaux in Manz and Geshe, and on the narrow plateaux of the eastern escarpment in Anisokiya, Ifreta and Gedem. Small groups also lived in the upper parts of the Qahama and the Kassam valleys in the south. The terrain made it impossible for the Oromo to use their cavalry effectively, while their nomadic way of life led them to prefer the high plains.

By about 1600 the Oromo controlled all the plains south of the Mofar, the central highlands up to Gedem, where the main route of their invasions seems to have turned down the escarpment to the eastern side of the Borkanna river, and the wide tract north-west of Shawa, in the west even settling south of the Wanchet river in Marhabete. They also occasionally crossed through Manz, although they do not seem to have settled there. (4)

When southern Amhara was lost to the Amhara authority during the Robale gada (1570-1578), it was a tremendous moral shock to the Christians, as well as a blow to the prestige of the Amhara dynasty. This was because this province, besides being the very home of the Amhara people, was the area to which Amhara kings retreated in time of trouble. The graves of several prominent Amhara kings, the famous royal prison of Amba Geshe, the royal treasure of several centuries, rich and famous churches, were all located in the same area.⁵ But the loss of Shawa further shocked the Christian morale

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1. Bahrey, in Some Records of Ethiopia, p. 127.
 2. *Infra*, pp. 313-6, 320-3.
 3. *Supra*, pp. 13-15.
 4. Svein Ege, "Chiefs and peasants : the socio-political structure of the kingdom of Shawa ... ", p. 21.
 5. *Supra*, pp. 2-3.

and shattered the prestige of the Amhara dynasty. After all, the loss of Shawa meant not only the loss of the centre of the Amhara empire, and the springboard for the southward expansion, but also the end of Amhara authority east of the Abay. The Amhara kingdom retreated beyond the Abay, and afterwards crossing the Abay to fight against the Oromo became an impossible task for many of the Amhara kings. Indeed, only few able and gifted Amhara kings managed to mount short campaigns in Shawa during our period. However, where the Gondar kings failed even to face the Oromo in Shawa, pockets of Amhara communities who survived in the inaccessible parts of Shawa succeeded. These Amhara communities, cut off from the rest of the kingdom, survived in their mountain stronghold until the second half of the eighteenth century, when they started reversing the tide of events against the Oromo.¹

Before we close the period of the Mulata gada (1586-1594), it is essential to make some remarks about the historian Bahrey, whose History of the Galla forms the basic source for the events presented so far.²

We neither know anything about the parents of Bahrey, nor when he was born; but one thing is certain : he was born in Gamo, and lived there most of his life until the 1580s, when he was chased away from his home by the Borana, who looted all his possessions. It would appear that although a priest, and perhaps a monk, he was not a poor man. Once he arrived in the northern part of the kingdom he seems to have attracted the attention of Sarsa Dengel, who soon took him into his service. Besides his education and wisdom, Bahrey seems to have had some kind of political experience in Gamo. As for his service under Sarsa Dengel, we have a very strong hint in his own history that he was an important official in the court. He closes his book by writing his own name, and "below the last line of the MS, on the dexter side, is written faintly, in longer characters, the word yaman 'right hand'".³ This invaluable piece of information has hitherto been totally ignored. "Right hand" in this sense means an important official, and this is indirectly supported by the chronicle of Susenyos, where in chapter twenty-two it is stated that "azaj (commander or steward) Bahrey was present among the nobles, administrators and advisors of the king, at the accession to the throne of Susenyos in 1604."⁴ We have also other information that makes Bahrey the

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1. Among others see R.H. Kofi Darkwah, Shewa, Menilek and the Ethiopian Empire 1813-1889, (London : 1978), pp. 1-54.
 2. Bahrey's History of the Galla deserves serious consideration, especially because events described in it had implications for the history of the beginning of the seventh century, reaching further than hitherto acknowledged or even understood.
 3. Bahrey, in Some Records of Ethiopia, p. 129, see note 1.
 4. Pereira, Chronica de Susenyos Rei de Ethiopia, pp. 57-59.

confessor of Sarsa Dengel. Conti-Rossini and Perruchon¹ have published an extract from the abridged chronicle, where Bahrey is unmistakably referred to as the confessor of Sarsa Dengel. One modern Ethiopian historian has convincingly established that Bahrey was both the confessor of Sarsa Dengel and an important man in his court.² From the content of his book Bahrey makes it quite clear that he was very close to the court and knew about the burning issues of the day. It seems safe to claim that Azaj Bahrey, confessor Bahrey, and Bahrey the author of the History of the Galla, were one and the same person.

By 1593 when he wrote his book, Bahrey was an old man, who had lived most of his life during the tumultuous second part of the sixteenth century. Except with regard to the earlier history of the Oromo, which he had gathered from knowledgeable persons, most of his history is based on his own experience. He was a keen observer gifted with a deep sense of history, and highly articulate in expressing his ideas. His book is an important work from the pen of a leading scholar and far-sighted politician of the time.³ Historical literature of a kind had of course developed within the Christian kingdom long before the time of Bahrey; but what makes his work quite distinct and unique from other historical literature of the time was his serious concern with the major issues of the day. He was the prime mover of the whole debate about the major issues at the court. As an official having inside access to what was happening in the court one would have expected him to dwell on all the trivialities which took place there, as his contemporaries did. Bahrey, however, chose to concentrate on the Oromo question, which to him was the source of all the problems of the kingdom. He was deeply saddened by the inability of the Christians to stop the Oromo advance. He was disappointed and shocked by the power struggle between the forces of centralization and those of decentralization, which in his eyes made the Christians impotent to defend themselves.

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1. Conti-Rossini, "Due squarci inediti di cronica etiopica" Rendicanti della Reale Accademia dei Lincei (Roma : 1893), p. 18. Jules Perruchon, "Notes pour l'histoire d'Ethiopie Regne de Sarsa Dengel ou Malk Sagad I (1563-97)" Revue Semitique, vol. 4 (1896), p. 277. See also, S.B. Chernetsov, "The History of the Gallas and the death of Za-Dengel king of Ethiopia (1603-4) in IV Congresso Internazionale di studi etiopici (Roma : 1974), pp. 803-808.
 2. Takla Sadiq Makurya, Ya Gran Ahmad Warara, pp. 801-802.
 3. Considering the enormous prejudice that existed between the Oromo and the Christians at the time, it was an extraordinary achievement by the standards of those days.

... Bahrey's attempt ... at explaining the military prowess of the Oromo and the weakness of the state in a socio-political analytic framework, ... is an expression of concern. Indeed, for Bahrey, it is an expression of protest against the existing form of the socio-political structure of the state, which in his eyes had become disastrously dysfunctional. (1)

At the court Bahrey observed that there were many persons who had their own axes to grind and complaints to make, none of which were contributing to the crucial issue of Christian defence. He saw that Christian salvation was possible only if their energy was channelled into a common purpose against a common enemy. It appears that he believed that a call for unity against the common enemy would have stimulated Christian nationalism, and would have kept the Christians in a state of psychological mobilization, closing all ranks and enabling them to accept sacrifices. Behind Bahrey's presentation of the main issue in Chapter 19, one can see the serious thinking of an intelligent politician, who had a precise grasp of the difficulties of the Christian kingdom, and was suggesting the imaginable course of action. Notwithstanding all his love and reverence for Sarsa Dengel, Bahrey does not attempt to conceal the defeat of the Christians. He endeavours to represent events without prejudice, so that his fellow Christians could understand what was at stake and come to grips with the reality by adopting measures commensurate with the danger they faced. He justifies his radical departure from the norm of the day on biblical grounds.

... As to what I have written, that sometimes the Galla were victorious and sometimes the Christians, it is what comes to pass according to the words of the Holy Scripture, which say : Today to thee and tomorrow to another, and the victory is one time to this one, and another time to that one. (3)

The Oromo migration was of course also described by Muslim as well as Christian historians; the latter including the Portuguese. But where their strong prejudice, or perhaps ignorance, prevented them from observing those

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1. Hailu Fulass, review : Tradition and change in Ethiopia : social and cultural life as reflected in Amharic fictional literature ca. 1930-1974, by R.K. Molvaer, Northeast African Studies, vol. 4, No. 1. (1982), p. 41.
 2. Where the views of the chronicler of Sarsa Dengel was coloured by the myth of the strength of the king, Bahrey has shown the other side of the picture.
 3. Bahrey, in Some Records of Ethiopia, p. 124.

organizational factors that enabled the pastoralists to become a formidable enemy, we find a great concern in Bahrey to know what was the strength of Oromo society. And this he rightly attributes to their social organization. Notwithstanding his distaste¹ for some Oromo practices, he still describes them. He touches on every aspect of their social organization. Although the thrust of his description in Chapter 19 concentrates on the military aspect, in the following chapter he touches upon their judicial system, methods of settling disputes, mechanisms of equal distribution of booty, and methods of preventing crimes in their society. His information on the Gada system and on other aspects of Oromo life provides the most important data to students of Oromo history.² The chronicle of Sarsa Dengel seldom mentions Oromo victory, and in it there is a continuous thread of triumphalism which, if it had really continued throughout his thirty-four year reign, ought to have checked the Oromo progress. With Bahrey, the distinction between illusion and reality is clearly drawn. He knew why he was writing and what he was writing. He opens his book with the following pre-emptive message, which was aimed at the pacifist elements at Sarsa Dengel's court.

I have begun to write the history of the Galla in order to make known the number of their tribes, their readiness to kill people, and the brutality of their manners. If anyone should say of my subject, 'Why has he written a history of bad people, as one would write a history of good people', I would answer by saying "Search in the books and you will find that the history of Mohammed and the Moslem kings has been written, and they are our enemies in religion."³

One group of the intelligentsia at the court of Sarsa Dengel ascribed it to the will of God, as a punishment for the sins of the Christians; while the other group attributed it to the large number of Oromo warriors. The arguments of both camps can be detected in the Christian literature of the time; but both currents found fullest expression in Bahrey, who developed the arguments logically, and presented them succinctly.

The wise men often discuss these matters and say, 'How is it that the Galla defeat us, though we are numerous and well supplied with arms?' Some have said that God has allowed it because of our sins;

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1. Bahrey's scathing criticism of some aspects of Oromo practices depreciates the value of his great work in the eyes of Oromo nationalists.
 2. The importance of his work lies in the fact that it contains the first detailed account of Oromo history, and social organization, not to mention the history of their migration.
 3. Bahrey, in Some Records of Ethiopia, p. 111.

others, that it is because our nation is divided into ten classes, nine of which take no part whatever in war and make no shame of displaying their fear; only the tenth class make war and fight to the best of its ability. Now, although we are numerous, those who can fight in war are few in number, and there are many who go not to war.¹

In the above description, Bahrey not only shows his knowledge of the Christian society, but goes to the heart of what he considers to be the weakness of their defence system. Even though the Christians were many, and better armed, their actual fighting force was very small compared to that of their enemy. The solution to this serious problem lay in the policy of increasing the number of fighting men. He made it clear that this could be done if the majority of the people were called upon to fight. Besides, he implies that if the private soldiers of the landlords and governors were made to provide their services to the state directly, the king would be able to meet all the Oromo challenges whenever and wherever they occurred.² In order to demonstrate the numerical disparity between the Christian fighting men and those of the Oromo, he gives the following graphic description,

... Among the Galla on the contrary these nine classes which we have mentioned do not exist; all men, from small to great, are instructed in warfare, and for this reason they win and kill us. Those who say that it is by God's command that they kill us, find their reasons in the fact that the Israelites were conquered and their ruin accomplished at the hands of the kings of Persia and Babylon. If brave warriors gain the victory, they say, who should ask help from God the exalted and most high? And if those who are numerous always conquer those who are few, the words of Holy Scripture, which say 'One man shall put a thousand to flight, and two shall pursue ten thousand', would be found to be vain. However, you wise men, you can judge if the claim of the first of these arguers is right, or that of the second.³

At the court of Sarsa Dengel, opinion had been divided along the two lines laid down in the above arguments. Bahrey has not gone to the extent of denying the validity of the first argument, but he has demonstrated without doubt the need to increase the Christian fighting force. Among the young elements at the court, Bahrey's thesis became a powerful food for

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1. Bahrey, in Some Records of Ethiopia, pp. 125-127.
 2. S.B. Cemenetsov, "The History of the Galla and the death of Za-Dengel..", IV Congresso Internazionale di studi etiopici, pp. 804-805.
 3. Bahrey, ibid.

thought, providing them with a new course of action.¹ There is every reason to believe that Bahrey wrote his book with this element in mind. As will become clear from the following paragraphs, this element argued that on the home front the first thing to do was to bolster up the stand of the monarch, and restore the eroded Christian morale.² This element at the court found its ardent and revolutionary leader in Za-Dengel, who gave his time and energy to implementing Bahrey's idea. That will be discussed below, but here it should suffice to say that Bahrey inspired Za-Dengel's revolution.³

The Dulo gada (1594-1602) continued with raids in all directions. Its thrust into the huge area between Gojjam and Ennarya threatened the disruption of communications, trade, revenue and travel between Ennarya, the gold mine of Sarsa Dengel, and Gojjam. During his long reign Sarsa Dengel had never set foot either in Amhara or in Angot in order to help the Christians against the Oromo, hastened to reopen the communications between Ennarya and Gojjam. This demonstrates how much he depended on the gold tribute from Ennarya. This last attempt was a grand project, by which he wanted to punish the Borana in Damot, and the whole land between Abay and Ennarya. With the apparent intention of administering a quick, sharp shock that would enable him to guarantee the safety of the route to Ennarya, he left his court, in spite of a warning message from a priest, who told him that it would be bad for him to fight against the Borana at that time. The warning seems to have been the veiled ideological expression of those elements that attributed every Christian defeat to their sins. The supporters of this fatalistic view argued against pushing the war into Oromo-held territory. He was told :

... by a priest famous for holiness, and a talent for divination, who warned him not to undertake that war. But the king, expressing his contempt of both the message and messenger declared his fixed resolution to invade Damot without delay.⁴

He courageously led a large force into Damot, but the flight of the various Borana bands prevented him from securing any decisive victory. The

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1. *Infra*, pp. 260-1.
 2. Bahrey's central thesis, that stressed the need to strengthen the kingdom appealed to Za-Dengel and his supporters. They believed that the moment the unity of purpose was achieved the morale would rise, confidence would be regained and the trust and credibility of the leadership would be restored, and with that the initiative in the Christian offensive would pass into Christian hands.
 3. *Infra*, pp. 263-66.
 4. James Bruce, *Travels to discover ...* ", vol. iii, pp. 254-255; see also Jules Perruchon, "Notes pour l'histoire d'Ethiopie ... " *RS*, pp. 277-278.

much hoped-for, gallant attempt to punish the Borana and guarantee the safety of the route to Ennarya, did not come, but instead boomeranged causing serious erosion in the morale of the Christian army, which was exposed to hunger and refused to fight in the land of Borana. Sarsa Dengel, after thirty-four years of long campaigns against the Oromo, during which he won several victories,¹ but ironically lost almost all the eastern provinces, was exhausted by campaigns, frustrated by his failure to stop the Oromo, demoralized by the cowardly attitude of his force towards fighting in the Oromo held territory, died on 4th October, 1597.

Za-Dengel and the Oromo 1603-1604

At this time at the court of Sarsa Dengel there lived Za-Dengel, a young man of nineteen years of age, the nephew of the king. Za-Dengel had already distinguished himself both in his ability to wield the sword in battle, as well as in the debate raging at the court over the question of why the Oromo were able to defeat the Christians. His father, Lessana Krestos, was a highly educated priest, who carefully looked after the education of his son. Perhaps both the father and the son were great admirers of Bahrey. The latter had exerted strong influence on Za-Dengel, who had lived the whole of his life in those tumultuous decades and had shared with Bahrey all the currents of experience of the time and the common trials of living in a rapidly changing kingdom. Sarsa Dengel, who had seen in Za-Dengel all the qualities of an able general and an upright administrator, seems to have realized that it was Za-Dengel, and he alone, who could save the kingdom. As a result he wanted him to succeed him. However, the court officials who saw the danger to their position in Za-Dengel's revolutionary ideas, persuaded the king to change his mind in favour of his seven-year-old son Ya'eqob. But subsequently Sarsa Dengel again changed his mind in favour of Za-Dengel.

... As I am sensible I am at the point of death, next to the cause of my soul, I am anxious for the welfare of my kingdom. My first intention was to appoint Jacob, my son, to be successor : and I had done so unless for his youth, and it is probable neither you nor I could have cause to repent it. Considering, however, the state of my kingdom, I prefer its interest to the private affection I bear my son; and do, therefore, hereby appoint Za-Dengel, my nephew to succeed me, and be your king; and recommend him to you as fit for war, ripe in years, exemplary in the practice of every virtue, and as deserving of the crown by his good qualities, as he is by his near relation to the royal family.²

1. *Infra*, pp. 316-7.

2. James Bruce, *ibid.*, pp. 255-256. Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia. p. 358, claims that this speech was invented by James Bruce. However, considering the situation in the kingdom and the debate at the court, and Za-Dengel's popularity among the literati, we think Bruce may not be far off the mark, even if he did invent it.

However, the queen and her two sons-in-law, in whose presence the king died, usurped the order of succession and enthroned the young Ya'eqob (1597-1603) and exiled Za-Dengel to one of the islands in Lake Tana. Although the triumvirate excluded Za-Dengel from the throne, for they wanted power for themselves during the regency of Ya'eqob, it seems there was a deeper reason behind their move. They had seen in Za-Dengel the burning desire to intensify the war against the Oromo. They had lived with the war and had seen the consequences of it to their country, and were tired of it and wanted peace. In fact it seems they represented the dogmatist element at the court, which attributed the Christian defeat to God's punishment. Bahrey was very careful in his presentation of the arguments. He did not dare to offend this entrenched power block. It was not without valid reason that all the campaigns against the Oromo were suspended during the whole period of the triumvirate. During the seven years of the regency, Gojjam, Amhara, Bagameder and Walaqa were repeatedly attacked. The campaigns from the court were suspended and the fate of each province was left to the inhabitants and their governors. A few years later the attempt of Ya'eqob to help the provinces was to be one of the causes of his overthrow.

Meanwhile, Za-Dengel escaped from his exile and went to the inaccessible mountains of Gojjam, where he lived for seven years. These were the years of trial and preparation for Za-Dengel. He saw the effects of the Oromo war on the peasants in Gojjam. He fought with the peasants against the raiding Oromo bands. During these years Gojjam became the scene of bitter fighting, with heavy casualties on both sides. To the Christians, the province was prized as the rich region that had become the very home of Christian refugees who came to it from across the Abay. To the Oromo, its value consisted in its pivotal position in their defence plan for the final conquest of the rest of the kingdom. Za-Dengel wanted to save Gojjam and push the war back across the Abay.

When Za-Dengel was exiled by the triumvirate, Susenyos, the other young man of the royal blood, escaped from Gojjam to Walaqa. Susenyos had already distinguished himself in his war against the Oromo in Gojjam. He assisted the governor of Gojjam "... in defeating the Galla who had overrun that province, and by his courage and conduct that day had left strong impression on the minds of the troops."¹ When Susenyos escaped to Walaqa, he helped

1. James Bruce, Travels to discover the source of the Nile, vol. iii, p. 259.

Beela Krestos, the governor, against the Oromo, who were invading the province at the time. However, Susenyos soon abandoned the governor and joined the Oromo in their attack on the province. Considering his capricious behaviour and sudden change of sides, it is quite evident that Susenyos was a very different man from Za-Dengel. The latter was a man of principle, while the former had no principles at all. His opinion on everything varied and changed rapidly with the state of his mind. He had espoused the idea of the defence of the kingdom against the Oromo, advocating that virtually everything had to be channelled towards that end, at the time when he helped the governors of Gojjam and Walaqa. But Susenyos soon changed not only his ideas, but also his loyalties, and started with the Oromo to attack the provinces, for which he had been fighting only shortly before. The constant factor in Susenyos's character was his lust for power. His problem was, that unlike Za-Dengel, who was an intellectual with a formidable knowledge of the history of his society, Susenyos lacked much on the intellectual side. He was ruthless with every one : with his Christian subjects and with Oromo enemies. He subjected both allies and enemies to his own ends. His two backgrounds combined to make him the man he was. These two backgrounds were his father's court in Gojjam, and the time he had spent in captivity with the Oromo. The estate of his father in Gojjam was under heavy Oromo attack even before the death of his father, and it was here that he was trained in the art of the sword, but it was during his years of captivity that he learned the art of self-preservation in difficult situations. Susenyos responded eagerly to the nomadic way of life with its tendency to respect no authority or boundary, and its desire to loot. But his instinct remained those of a sedentary. His difficulty was that he lacked the intellectual resources with which to reconcile the experiences of his two conflicting backgrounds. The result of the conflict was a personality of fascinating and sadistic complexity, which is observable through the pages of his chronicle. However, he compensated for his lack of intellectual brilliance and principle by courage and military genius, which became proverbial.¹

In 1602, Melbah gada came to power. After eighty years, during which ten successive gadas had carried out with varying degrees of success the migration into the east, north and western parts of Ethiopia, a new cycle

1. James Bruce, Travels to discover ... , iii, p. 404

of gada names now began repeating the same series in the same order. As will be remembered, we opened our discussion on the migration with the Melbah gada in 1522.¹ In 1602 we again start with a Melbah gada. However, the distance between the place from where we started the first gada, and the place where the cycle begins again, is probably more than 800 kilometres. The Melbah of the Borana and Barentu continued with raids in all directions. The major assault of this gada, and of several subsequent ones, was concentrated on the areas west of the Abay. In the region east of the Abay Oromo cavalry remained invincible.² In the region west of the Abay, although the Christian kingdom was at its weakest at this time, the Oromo did not derive much benefit from their enemy's weakness.

Meanwhile, by 1603, Ya'eqob, who was then fourteen years of age, wanted to take the reins of power into his own hands. For this premature move Ya'eqob was repaid in kind. The triumvirate deposed him and brought to power Za-Dengel, the very man they had exiled in chains seven years earlier.

When he was placed on the throne in September 1603, at the age of twenty-six, [Za-Dengel] had a good understanding of the political situation. He may have admired the integrity and dedication of Galawdewos, whose throne name he adopted.³

He did not only admire Galawdewos, but like him he appealed to the sense of Christian unity against the common enemy. Through his knowledge of the history of Galawdewos, he realized that victory would be achieved only with Portuguese cannon and soldiers. To repeat the glorious victories of Galawdewos, he knew he needed three elements, arms, training and the morale to fight on the part of the Christian soldiers. He knew the arms the Christians possessed were not enough for his revolutionary scheme and he knew that the training the Christian forces had had did not enable them to check the Oromo advance. Above all, he knew that the Christian forces lacked the morale to fight the Oromo east of the Abay. To infuse this morale into his force, and to provide them with better arms and sufficient training, he needed help. He quickly came to the conclusion that he could get all he needed through the cultivation of friendly relations with Portugal,

1. Supra, p. 157.

2. Getahun Dilebo, "Emperor Menelik's Ethiopia, 1865-1916 : National unification or Amhara communal domination", Ph.D. thesis, Howard University, Washington, D.C., 1974, pp. 20-21.

3. Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia ... ", p. 371.

a major European power of the day. As the Portuguese had saved his country six decades earlier, he believed they would save it again. Accordingly, he invited Peter Paez to his court in the same year he came to the throne. He wanted Paez to be a link between his government and that of Portugal. Both men needed each other; the one for political goals, and the other for religious purposes. Za-Dengel wrote to Pope Clement VIII and to Philip III, king of Spain and Portugal, requesting them for aid. What is particularly important to note here is that Za-Dengel specifically stated that the threat from the Oromo raids was the reason why he so urgently sought Portuguese assistance.¹ Za-Dengel's eagerness to embrace Catholicism had been interpreted by James Bruce as a unique accomplishment of Peter Paez, the highly educated and industrious missionary.² More recently Merid has suggested a new theory. For him, Za-Dengel's desire to embrace Catholicism was a tactical move to get support against his internal enemies.³ This is correct, but it is not the whole truth. The real motive must be seen in Za-Dengel's obsession with the Oromo and defence of the kingdom. By embracing Catholicism, he believed himself sure of getting quick assistance against both his internal and external enemies. Beneath his acceptance of Catholicism, and the edicts he issued, Za-Dengel was a visionary politician who saw the absolute necessity of getting foreign aid to stop the Oromo pressure. Paez's attitude towards him assured him of the forthcoming aid, while his acceptance of the Catholic religion provided the ideological justification for Paez to appeal on his behalf. Hence we do not think that Za-Dengel had a genuine desire to embrace Catholicism. He accepted it, because it was the only way to get the Portuguese support. In reality, Za-Dengel was concerned with the defence of his country. His tragedy was that he launched his crusade against the Oromo, and wanted to accomplish everything too soon, and too quickly.

"The reign of Za-Dengel is very interesting because he was the very king who made an attempt to realize the ideas of the 'History of the Galla' and its principles of resistance to Galla invasion".¹ Soon after coming to power he issued an edict which was intended to mobilize the private soldiers

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1. Girma and Merid, The question of the union of the Churches, pp. 75-76.
 2. James Bruce, "Travels to discover ...", iii, pp. 263-265.
 3. Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia ...", pp. 382-385.
 4. S.B. Chernetsov, "The History of the Gallas ...", IV Congresso Internazionale di studi etiopici, p. 806.

of the nobility under one central command. By this he wanted to deprive his enemies of their retinue, while at the same time increasing his own force. With whatever force he was able to gather around himself, Za-Dengel hastened to Gojjam to stop the simultaneous Borana and Barentu attack. He attacked the 'Liban and killed all of them and left no-one'.¹ His partial mobilization was spectacularly successful. Bahrey's ideas were being tested and being shown to work with remarkable results. The quick success inspired him to try his fortune against the Oromo and Susenyos in Walaqa. At this time (1603-4) Susenyos was in the service of various Oromo bands helping them to reduce mountain strongholds, where Christian communities took refuge.² After his victory in Gojjam, Za-Dengel proclaimed the most revolutionary decree of the seventeenth century, which was directly based on the content and spirit of Bahrey's History of the Galla.

If every man who is of age who lives in any land of my kingdom does not come, not only the chawa, whose task has always been warfare, but also the farmers as well as the retainers of the ladies, and the servants of the monks, if any one stays behind and does not heed this call-up, his house shall be pillaged and his property confiscated ... All men who were of age for fighting and who carried instruments of war came and joined him. None stayed behind in the villages except the lame, the paralyzed, the blind and the sick. The retainers of the lords, he took all from them, and he made them chawa and called them Malak Hara.³

This was a call to full mobilization. It was radically different from all other mobilizations of the time, in that the call was made to every able-bodied citizen. All other call-ups, before and after this, were directed mainly to the professional soldiers. Za-Dengel had seen in his own life time the ineffectiveness of the professional soldiers by themselves. He may have read and pondered over Bahrey's history, in which was stressed the need for a new course of action. In his theoretical discussion, Bahrey had demonstrated how the existence of nine non-fighting classes hampered every Christian effort against the Oromo. Among the nine classes he mentions the clergy, the administrators of justice, those who escorted the wives of dignitaries, elders, landlords, farmers, traders, artisans such as smiths, scribes, carpenters and wandering singers.⁴ Among the nine classes, Bahrey

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1. S.B. Chernetsov, "The History of the Gallas ... ", p. 806.
 2. *Infra*, p. 272.
 3. Pereira, Chronica de Susenyos, pp. 50-51. Translation by Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia ... ", p. 370. See also Asma Giyorgis, "Ya Galla Tarik", p. 99.
 4. Bahrey, in Some Records of Ethiopia, pp. 125-126.

stressed the absolute necessity of making good use first of the escorts of the wives of dignitaries and princesses, since "they are vigorous, brave and strong men, who nevertheless do not go to war."¹ He had also stressed the need of pulling the vast majority of the peasants ^{into} the war, "who have no thought of taking part in war."² In Za-Dengel's proclamation all the nine classes are included, and even the servants of the clergy were not left out. Herein lies the tremendous impact of Bahrey's history on Za-Dengel, whose revolutionary measures "testify that he not only knew, but shared the ideas of Bahrey."³

The implementation of Bahrey's ideas enabled him to raise an enormous number of fighters, which in the words of Susenyos's chronicler, were "as numerous as a swarm of locusts."⁴ Unfortunately for Za-Dengel, he had now more fighting men than he needed; but he did not have strong organization, or the necessary logistics with which to maintain the flow of supply to the huge army. It is one thing to raise an army, but quite another thing to supply it and maintain its discipline. Za-Dengel wanted to use this huge untrained mass of men against Susenyos and his Oromo supporters, and accordingly he led his followers to Walaqa against them. Susenyos fled with his Oromo supporters and Za-Dengel had to be content with the large booty he took from them.⁵

While Susenyos was rallying the various Oromo bands against Za-Dengel, the latter made the struggle against the Oromo his battle cry. In this he became over-ambitious and committed three classical errors. First, the news of his letter to the king of Spain and the Pope leaked out, and it became a very powerful weapon in the hands of his enemy. It provided ideological justification for his ex-communication. At the same time his rash inclination to embrace Catholicism either neutralized or diffused his potential supporters, who became indifferent to his cause. Za-Dengel wanted to use Christian nationalism for his grand campaign against the Oromo, but he undercut himself by accepting Catholicism. Secondly, by taking the retainers

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1. Bahrey, in Some Records of Ethiopia, pp. 125-126.
 2. Ibid.
 3. Chernetsov, "The History of the Gallas ... ", p. 806.
 4. Pereira, Chronica de Susenyos, p. 52.
 5. Ibid.

of the lords and constituting them new chawa named Malka Hara, he offended both the lords and the retainers. The lords, because by taking their men away he was cutting down their power; the retainers, because he gathered them under his own command, but was unable to provide them with sufficient provisions, since his treasury was empty and he did not receive tribute even from the provinces under his control. His nationalistic propaganda captured their imagination and rallied them to his call; but hunger, that powerful factor which time and again had wasted the efforts of Christian rulers, cut deep into their morale, and subsequently sapped their support for him. The very men who shortly before had given full support to his revolutionary ideas began to suspect them. Thirdly, and most importantly, by his over-zealous action against the Oromo, Za-Dengel incurred the deep hatred of his crack force, the Qureban soldiers. The reason for their disaffection had a lot to do with his campaigns. He had led a number of expeditions against the Borana and Barentu into Gojjam.¹ He led them across the Abay into Walaqa. Although the latter province was under the nominal Christian administration until the beginning of the seventeenth century, by the closing decade of the sixteenth century "the effective frontiers of the empire were limited to the Abay river, with the Galla groups established on the western spurs of the plateau."² Even during the reign of Sarsa Dengel the professional soldiers had already become very nervous about crossing the Abay to fight against the Oromo. Whenever possible they resisted crossing the river. They had already started avoiding the Oromo even west of the Abay. Za-Dengel's expedition into Walaqa must have been seen as a reckless act by the Qureban soldiers. What is more, Za-Dengel did not license his soldiers to loot and plunder his Christian subjects. The soldiers were already used to looting even their fellow Christians, and by restricting their licence it seemed to the Qureban soldiers that he was encroaching on their "sacred" rights. The disaffected soldiers found their champion in Za-Sellassie, the famous adventurer who had his own axe to grind against Za-Dengel. The latter marched against Za-Sellassie, but on his way he was deserted by Ras Athanasius, a top officer of the kingdom, and many of his soldiers.

1. *Infra*, p. 337-8.

2. R.H. Kofi Darkwah "Shewa, Menilek and the Ethiopian Empire," p. 4, citing J.S. Trimingham, Islam in Ethiopia, p. 94.

On the 13th October 1604, the king, after drawing up his army in battle order, placing 200 Portuguese with a number of Abyssinian troops on the right, took to himself the charge of the left.

The engagement began with the appearance of great success. On the right, the Portuguese led by old and veteran officers destroyed and overturned everything before them with their fire-arms; but on the left ... things went otherwise ... He and his attendants being surrounded by the whole army of Selasse ... were unable to support any longer such disadvantage.¹

The battle ended with the death of Za-Dengel, and his death closed a year of revolutionary campaigning against the Oromo. It also ended the first dramatic attempt to implement the far-reaching implication of Bahrey's theory of raising a large army.

Both have outrun their historical time by far, and this was their tragedy. We know nothing of Bahrey's fate,² but king Za-Dengel fell down on the battlefield for the unity of his motherland like a patriot and soldier.³

Susenyos 1607-1632 and the Oromo

The victorious Za-Sellassie wanted to bring back Ya'eqob from his exile in Ennarya and put him on the throne. But before he could do that Ras Athanatius sided with the Qureban soldiers in order to put Susenyos on the throne. This took place on 14 December 1604. When Ya'eqob suddenly showed up, Susenyos was deserted by all, and Ya'eqob was put on the throne for the second time. This means that, in effect, there were two kings, one with power and the other without power.

At this point in our discussion it is relevant to mention the activities of Susenyos, the man who had lived among the Oromo for a number of years, fought for them several times, and fought against them more than any Christian king known to history before the beginning of the nineteenth century. Our main source for his history is his own chronicle of ninety-nine chapters, which is the largest of its kind. It contains very important geographical literature. Its information on the names of the rivers Susenyos crossed, the hills he ascended and the slopes he descended, all of which were undertaken either in flight from his enemies or in pursuit of them, or in his effort to raise taxes (which was how he rewarded his loyal servants and

1., James Bruce, Travels to discover ... , pp. 267-268.

2. It seems after Susenyos was deserted by all, and he himself fled towards the Oromo, Bahrey also fled and lived in an inaccessible area somewhere between southern Amhara and Manz. Ironically it was Susenyos and his followers who drove away Bahrey from his mountain stronghold. See for instance, O.G.S. Crawford, Ethiopian itineraries, pp. 54, 71-72, where it is stated that Susenyos and his captains "... ejected Bahrey and subsequently established themselves on the amba of Badabaj."

3. Chernetsov, "The history of the Galla ... ", p. 808.

punished disloyal elements). It also relates how he administered the country through his close relatives, how he abandoned the idea of fighting the Oromo east of the Abay, and how he even settled a large number of Oromo clans on the western side of the Abay, as the safest bulwark against the attack of their own brethren. All of this is ~~an~~ important data for the study of government in the seventeenth century Christian kingdom. For our purpose, its chief importance lies in the fact that it contains the most detailed account of campaigns against the Oromo. The writers of this voluminous chronicle were two : Abba Mehereka Dengel, the confessor of the empress, wrote the first part of the chronicle.¹ The second and larger part was written by Azaj Tino ("chief steward" Takla Sellassie). Interestingly, Tino was among the dignitaries at the court of Susenyos who embraced Catholicism in 1622 together with the king.² The Oromo word tino, which means "little" or "short", was his nickname, attributed to him on account of his short size. Tino appears to have known the Oromo society, its language and culture. Sometimes his unconscious admiration for some aspect of the Oromo culture, which would have been abhorred even by the enlightened Bahrey, makes one suspect that he probably belonged to the first generation of converted Oromo. We have already said that Tino's presentation of Oromo history is radically different from that of Bahrey.³ The latter dated the ingress of the Oromo into the Christian kingdom as 1522. Tino does not set Oromo origin outside of the Christian kingdom. He makes Lalo their father and Dawaro "his original home". However, one thing remains certain. Tino's central thesis which establishes the presence of some Oromo elements within the Christian kingdom, even as early as the fourteenth century, is not disputed, and in fact there is ample evidence to support it. In this sense Tino's contribution towards refuting the fallacious claim about the sudden arrival of the Oromo in the sixteenth century is quite invaluable.

Throughout the chronicle of Susenyos the same phenomenon is observed. Warfare was at the centre of his life. His was an exuberant nature, endlessly appreciative of, and delighting in, every war situation. According to his chronicler, he was a warrior in the highest degree, brigand by necessity, and

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1. Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia ... ", p. 357.
 2. A. Bartnicki & J. Niecko, "The role and significance of the religious conflicts and people's movements in the political life of Ethiopia in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries", in Rassegna di studi Etiopici, vol. XXIV, (1970), p. 29.
 3. *Supra*, p. 45.

self-made emperor. The marvellous thing about his chronicle is that it does not omit even some of his profoundly shocking barbarity.¹ The chronicler expresses without apparent intention of so doing how he executed his wars with a thoroughness and cold-bloodedness which would at times make him appear a monster. And it is probably never far from the truth. Such a tale is of course horrifying, but above everything else, it is the endless pillaging, looting and massacring of the weak "pagan" minorities which is most shocking. And perhaps of all the successes and victories attributed to Susenyos, and celebrated in this chronicle, it is his repeated victories over the Oromo which is the consistent thread, the ideal most manifestly embraced. We are made to feel that the looting, pillaging and massacre of his own subjects, and the campaigns against the Oromo, are part of the same phenomenon. In the end, of course, defeat by the Oromo, or victory by Susenyos, turned out to be equally ruinous to the peasantry.²

As we have already indicated,³ Susenyos's political history begins with the death of Sarsa Dengel in 1597. Having got wind of the triumvirate's scheme to imprison him, Susenyos escaped from Gojjam and settled in Walaga. While he was there, the Borana attacked the province, and it so happened that the group that attacked was Kono under the leader named Buko,⁴ (who was to become important in his future government). It was the same group among whom he had lived during the years of his captivity. It was the group that earlier adopted him as its "son". Accordingly, he was treated with kindness. He spoke their language and knew their customs. Besides, he was an excellent horseman, trained to a degree of excellence in the use of arms, strong and agile in body, in the prime of his manhood, and the bravest of the brave. He had all the qualities of a great warrior, the essential qualities much admired by warlike Oromo bands themselves. The various Oromo bands who wanted to loot the Christian strongholds on the mountain tops found in him an able and ruthless leader who knew well how to lead attacks against Christian strongholds. The Oromo soon flooded to him and within a short

1. Pereira, Chronica de Susenyos, pp. 106, 235-236, et passim.

2. *Infra*, pp. 278, 287.

3. *Supra*, p. 261.

4. Pereira, ibid., pp. 11-12.

time they outnumbered his Amhara followers. His standard became their standard, the noise of his drum their incitement for action. His oratory in their language made him their natural leader.¹ Once the Oromo accepted him Susenyos started taxing the indigenous peasants in Walaqa. From the latter province he went to Debra Selalo, where famine forced his followers to abandon him. What attracted the bands around him was the prospect of rich booty. When that hope dwindled, time and again he was deserted by all except a few intimate friends. From Debra Selalo, he went to Mugar, where he impressed some Oromo bands who soon flocked to his standard. With his new followers, he pillaged Christian peasants on mountain tops in Shawa and returned to Walaqa, where he mercilessly looted a large commercial caravan. When the Amhara peasants on mountain tops in Shawa revolted against him he surprised them with his large Tulama followers and the very sight of his Oromo followers forced the peasants into submission.² This brings to the fore a key element in his policy. Whenever and wherever the Christian peasants revolted against him he attacked them with his Oromo bands and he settled the bands in the territory of the peasants. The strong suspicion, enmity and deep prejudices that divided the Oromo and the Christians created situations so tense and explosive, that on the slightest pretext the Oromo bands would loot and massacre the peasants. This gradually evolved into a government policy for settling Oromo warriors on the land of his Christian enemies. In the words of the chronicle, the Christians would submit to him "... after they had seen the massacre of their children, the death of their friends, the enslavement of their women, destruction of their property and rustling of their animals."³ It seems that Susenyos, by repeatedly holding before their eyes the spectre of settling among them the ruthless Oromo bands, forced the Christian peasants into submission. This was his celebrated policy of "divide and destroy" all opposition. It had another side to it. Once Susenyos established himself on the throne, a large part of his followers were Amhara soldiers. He played on their fear and enmity of the Oromo, and with them he had successfully managed to contain the Oromo assault on Gojjam and Bagameder.⁴

1. Asma Giyorgis, "Ya Galla Tarik", pp. 57-60.

2. Ibid., pp. 83-84. See also Pereira, Chronica de Susenyos, pp. 44-49.

3. Pereira, ibid., p. 60.

4. Asma Giyorgis, ibid., pp. 84-98.

What has been said so far took place between 1597 and 1603, at which time Susenyos went to Amhara with a large army of Barentu followers. The Christian governor of the province fled from Susenyos into Walaqa, where Susenyos followed, destroying many mountain top strongholds with his Barentu followers. From here he went to Ennarya¹, where he was defeated, and then went to Gurage, from where he went on to Enamore, where he was deserted by all except two of his followers. It was during these years that the adventurer prince learned to live without bitterness with the changing fortunes of war. "Susenyos ... never felt ashamed of his defeat nor proud of his victory since he understood that he has his day, as others, in turn, have their days."² Susenyos soon went to Walaqa, where he and his Oromo followers saved themselves by flight from the huge army of Za-Dengel in 1604. Once the latter had returned to Gojjam, Susenyos followed him. While crossing the Abay Susenyos met Liban Oromo from among whom about 400 gero (the best cavalry) joined him on his march on Gojjam. With Za-Dengel's death :

... There was no person then within the bounds of the empire that solicited the crown but Suscinios and he was now at hand, and very much favoured by the army. [Ras Athanatius] ... met Socinios as required and joined his army ... and saluted him king in the midst of repeated cheerful congratulations of both armies, now united.³

After seven years' life of banditry, of which his large portion of followers were the Oromo bands, during which time after every defeat he had fled into Oromo territory and come back with their help, Susenyos now sat on the Christian throne, with the backing of the Oromo, whom he made chawa in Gojjam.⁴ With his large Oromo and Amhara army, Susenyos marched on Bagameder, where he secured the submission of Za-Sellassie's Querban without drawing sword. However, with the arrival of Ya'eqob, he was deserted by all his erstwhile Amhara allies, including his own brothers,⁵ and he had to flee to Amhara where a large force of Karrayu Oromo from the clan of Bila and Jele joined him. Susenyos, who was rejected by his own people, now became a hero among the Oromo, who by now considered him as one of their leaders, who led them from booty to booty. Susenyos was soon joined by the Wallo, who rallied to his cause. While these happy events gradually accumulated for Susenyos

1. *Infra*, p. 335.

2. Pereira, Chronica de Susenyos, pp. 27-30.

3. James Bruce, Travels to discover ... , p. 271.

4. Asma Giyorgis, "Ya Galla Tarik", p. 102.

5. Pereira, ibid, pp. 75-77. Susenyos requested his brother Yamana Krestos not to leave him when Ya'eqob threatened to march on Susenyos. The latter according to the chronicle is reported to have said "... 'Please, do not abandon me, my brother and the son of my mother'. But Yamana Krestos said to him '... It is impossible for me to be with you ...'. After this exchange of talk, they separated, and each went his own way."

Ya'eqob tried to make peace with him. He employed Susenyos's mother in "... an application to her with an offer of peace and friendship; promising besides that he would give him ... Amhara, Walaqa and Shoa, and all lands which his father had ever possessed in any other part of Abyssinia."¹ In this peace offering (with the exception of Susenyos's father's estate in eastern Gojjam), Ya'eqob was not actually giving anything to Susenyos. Nobody knew better than Susenyos, who had travelled and lived in the three provinces, that none of them were under the control of Christian administration anyway. In essence Ya'eqob was making Susenyos king over the lost provinces. Susenyos knew this very well. He wanted to be the king of the Christian kingdom in its proper place across the Abay. Accordingly, Susenyos answered Ya'eqob "that what God had given him no man could take away from him; that the whole kingdom belonged to him, nor would he ever relinquish any part of it but with his life."²

Ya'eqob's general Za-Sellassie, with his Amhara followers, met Susenyos, with his mainly Oromo followers, at the field of the latter's choice. In the words of the chronicler, "Susenyos organized his army similarly to that of the Galla chiffra fighting system. But neither the army of Za-Sellassie, nor any of the Amhara at that time knew anything about the chiffra fighting. They used to mix up like people in a market place."³ The chiffra fighting method was organized in such a way that all warriors advanced in a great line of six to a dozen ranks deep, so that the first who fell were immediately replaced by other fighters, without confusion or panic, who continued to advance with greatest boldness and terrible attack, which unnerved the enemy. Choice of place and time, speed in attack and retreat, blood curdling battle cries when charging, and coordination in attack were all integral parts of the chiffra system. Susenyos's long experience with the Oromo now bore military fruit. By adopting the chiffra system he improved the speed, the coordination and the capacity to attack rapidly, or retreat in time. It enhanced his capacity to surprise his enemies. The effect was rapid and quite dramatic. Susenyos attacked Za-Sellassie :

... While in the pass so rudely that his army, entangled in broken ground, was surrounded and almost cut to pieces. Za-Sellassie, with a few followers, saved themselves by the goodness of their horses and joined the king, being the first messengers of their own defeat.⁴

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1. James Bruce, Travels to discover ... , p. 274.
 2. Ibid., see also, Asma Giyorgis, "Ya Galla Tarik", pp. 105-106.
 3. Pereira, Chronica de Susenyos, p. 79.
 4. James Bruce, ibid., p. 275.

On 10 March 1607, Susenyos, (1607-1632) at a mature age of thirty-five, met Ya'eqob's huge army and decisively routed them. With the death of Ya'eqob, and his principal political and religious officers, the short period of dual kings came to an end. Once alone by himself on the throne, Susenyos reversed his policy of appeasing the Oromo by indiscriminately leading them to loot both Christians and pagans alike. This was not a change of heart on his part. It was a political expediency, dictated by the circumstances. There were three factors that forced him to alter the course of his old policy. First, it was common knowledge to all the Christians in the kingdom that Susenyos came to the throne with massive Oromo support. There was a sense of deep anger among the Christians for the way Susenyos had let loose his Oromo bands on them during his years of banditry. The presence of various Oromo groups in his army, after grasping for power, intensified the Christian suspicion and fear. In order to allay their fears and dilute opposition, Susenyos had to demonstrate his concern for defending the country by a relentless attack on the Oromo. Few Amhara kings of the century had been more driven by the desire to drive out the Oromo at best, or to make them loyal subjects at worst, than Susenyos. He was an irritable, impatient and at times a sadistic man, whose mind was literally obsessed with the need to provide sufficient provisions for his troops. He knew he was a self-made man, who during the years of banditry had been wretchedly poor at times,¹ yet still managed to keep followers around him precisely because he was always able to provide for them in some way. After he came to the throne, he was obsessed with the same thing. Now there was a new surge of interest and the hope that the shattered empire might reconstruct itself, that order and stability might be restored and that revenue would flow again. As the following discussion will show, his wars with the Oromo and embroilment with all sorts of internal opposition shattered all that hope.

Secondly, and even more importantly, when Susenyos fought against Ya'eqob, the latter "fell unknown among a herd of common soldiers ... the consequence of which was, that he was believed to be alive many years afterwards."² Within a year a pretender calling himself Ya'eqob arose in Tigray and caused a considerable problem. It is said that by the middle of 1608 both

1. Pereira, Chronica de Susenyos, pp. 21-22.

2. James Bruce, Travels to discover ... , p. 277.

parts of Tigray were more or less under his control.¹ How did the pretender win so much support and sympathy within such a short time? The answer is quite simple. He played on the fundamental fear of the Christian peasants with regard to Susenyos. The pretender's platform could be summed up in the following words, which are attributed to him:

The son of a Galla, called Susenyos, with the support of Galla soldiers, has taken the Christian throne. You Christian people of Tigray, you love the dynastic line of Emperor Zara Ya'eqob ... how come a pagan Galla sits on the Christian throne of Yikunno Amlak? So far no foreigner had ever sat on the Ethiopian throne. With this powerful propaganda they rallied to his cause.²

If the whole content of this propaganda attributed to the pretender is true, it must have been a very powerful message that appealed to the Christian tradition and played on their underlying fears. There is internal evidence, albeit indirect, which seems to suggest that some aspects of the above claim may have been correct. To dispel the doubt about his being "pagan Galla", Susenyos had to show that he was not. He had to reveal his passions and make his most intimate desire the will to fight against the "pagan Gallas". He had to show that he was a man of high morals with a burning desire to put his country back where it once had been. He had to play on a blend of nostalgia and fear: on the one hand the possibility of restoring the old frontiers, and on the other hand the Christian fear of, and anger against, the Oromo. This he clearly expressed in his letters of 14 October and 10 December 1607, to the Pope and the king of Spain and Portugal respectively.

These letters say not a word of his intended conversion nor of submission to the See of Rome; but complain only of the disorderly state of his kingdom, and the constant inroads of the Galla, earnestly requesting a number of Portuguese soldiers to free them from their yoke, as formerly, under the conduct of Christopher de Gama they had delivered Abyssinia from that of the Moors.³

Thirdly, and most importantly, the precarious alliance between the various Oromo bands and Susenyos came to an end as soon as he came to the throne. The bands allied with him and accepted his leadership precisely because he led them from booty to booty. Once he became the king, he restrained them.

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1. Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia ...", p. 397.
 2. Asma Giyorgis, "Ya Galla Tarik", p. 117.
 3. James Bruce, Travels to discover ... , p. 285.

This must have been interpreted by the bands as the betrayal of a pledge. Be that as it may, one thing remains certain : Susenyos treated the Oromo among his soldiers just as he treated his Amhara or Tigray soldiers. But he tried to stop other Oromo bands (who were not his soldiers) from pillaging Christian peasants. This brought about a clash of interests. The first major blow came when the Warantisha bands from Walaqa invaded Gojjam. The governor of the province appealed urgently for help. Susenyos rushed to the area, and defeated the Warantisha after a hard-fought battle. From the chronicle, it appears that the place Susenyos had chosen for the battle was the bank of a river which was rugged and precipitous, and the Oromo cavalry suffered more by falling than by the muskets and spears of Susenyos's men. While escaping many Warantisha fell over a very high precipice, dashing themselves to pieces on the plain below or in the river, until the river became full of blood.¹ This was his first major victory against the Oromo. He wanted to exploit the benefit of this victory by pushing the war across the Abay into Walaqa. The history of the previous kings repeated itself. His soldiers refused to go with him. So Susenyos had to content himself with shelving the plan for future action. When he was a bandit, and with a small band of followers, he crossed the Abay whenever he wanted. Now as an emperor with a large army, it was difficult to cross. The reason is not difficult to find. The Amhara soldiers were very nervous about going to war east of the Abay because of the threat of hunger in an enemy territory. It was at this juncture that he even sought foreign military assistance against the Oromo. In his letter of December 1607, he appealed to the king of Spain and Portugal, requesting about a thousand soldiers "... to help him save the Christian empire".²

While Susenyos was camping at Suha, he heard that the Liban bands had spread across Wasan Amba along the banks of the Abay. Liban, according to the chronicler, were "as numerous as locusts, masters of warfare and military strategists, the strongest of all the strong Galla".³ The Liban bands that poured over eastern Gojjam were so numerous that Susenyos was forced to let them loot and ruin Gafates, Chome, Agaw, Damot up to Sakala and Gabarma. He met them only after they had destroyed these lands and captured their cattle, women and children.⁴ The reason for his action is not hard to find.

1. Pereira, Chronica de Susenyos, p. 105.

2. Ibid.

3. M. Abir, Ethiopia and the Red Sea, p. 200; see also Bruce, Travels to discover ... ,pp. 284-285.

4. Pereira, ibid., p. 105 et passim.

In fact it was part of his new strategic policy, by which he wanted to save Bagameder and Gojjam. This was part of the policy of fighting with the Oromo after they had looted, for then they would be exhausted and burdened with their loot. Susenyos himself told Almeida why he adopted this policy.

What makes the Galla much feared is that they go to war and into battle determined and firmly resolved to conquer or die. The Emperor (Susenyos) recognized this quality in them and in most of the Abyssinians the exact opposite. To this he used to ascribe the victories of the Gallas and defeats and routs of the Abyssinians, though the latter are usually much more numerous, and have better horses, muskets, helmets, and coats of mail in plenty. The Gallas do not usually come in bands of more than six or seven or eight thousand, but these are mostly picked young men. The same emperor used therefore to say that the Abyssinians could not possibly withstand their first onslaught. So he used to let them invade the country and steal the cattle and whatever else they found. He used then to wait for them on their return. Their first fury was broken and they were thinking of reaching their country and securing and preserving the booty¹ with which they were loaded. In this way he often defeated them.

The above long quotation needs some elaboration. In most of his engagements with the Oromo, Susenyos was victorious. He employed their own chiffra fighting system against them. By choice of place, time and good use of the fire-arms, he neutralized the effectiveness of their cavalry. Hence, it was only on rare occasions, as we shall see below, that the Oromo bands were able to defeat him. However, the bands had repeatedly devastated several Christian regiments and routed provincial governors. The difference between the imperial army and those of the provincial governors was that the former was larger in number, better equipped, better trained and mounted. The provincial regiments or the retainers of the landlords were usually small, with little or no muskets and poorly armed. These regiments and retainers were never a match for the numerous Oromo cavalry, but the Oromo were never a match for the army commanded by Susenyos. For instance, by the middle of 1608, Susenyos had an army of 25,000 fighting men, while by 1622 this had grown to around 40,000 strong.² Of this force, four to five thousand were cavalry, and the rest foot soldiers. Of the cavalry as many as 700 or 800 wore coats of mail and helmets. They had no less than 1500 muskets, of which probably only 400 to 500 were in good working order.³ In every respect Susenyos was superior to his Oromo enemies. Probably, in

1. Almeida, in Some Records of Ethiopia, pp. 137-138.

2. Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia ...", pp. 475-476.

3. Almeida, ibid., pp. 77-78.

terms of the cavalry, the various Oromo bands may have matched that of Susenyos, since most of the Oromo warriors were mounted. The size of his army, its weapons, training and his military leadership, all contributed towards the succession of victories he won against the Oromo. But ironically his Oromo campaigns were equally ruinous to his subjects. Herein lies the major weakness of his administration.

The people take no provisions and as far as those who do take some, when they are finished, they all live on what they are given, and they usually leave places through which they are marching almost as much ruined and plundered as the Galla might have done if they had invaded them. This is specially so if the army remains in a district for some days, for there is no solution but for the emperor or captain major to assign certain places to it, which they rob of all the kinds of provisions found there ... This is also the reason why the Gallas easily invade the territories of the empire, and why, on the other hand, the imperial armies cannot invade those of the Galla far; they do not cultivate at all, and have no stock of provisions on which to feed, but live entirely on the milk of their cows. When necessary they easily take them wherever they like, retreat with them and leave the deserted meadows to the imperials, so that in time they are forced to retreat and, if they do not, die of sheer hunger.¹

Susenyos, whom we left on the bank of a river waiting for the retreating Liban on very rugged and precipitous ground, met the heavily loaded bands and dealt with them very severely. What is very interesting to note here is that Susenyos left all his cavalry on safe ground in hiding. His numerous foot soldiers suddenly poured themselves on the unsuspecting Liban from all sides, in a situation where fighting or flight posed equal danger. On this day, his muskets, arrows, spears and stone missiles and wooden clubs all contributed in their own way to the slaughter of the day. According to his chronicle, there was no soldier who did not cut off one or more enemy heads and present them to Susenyos, who heaped them up and made a hill out of them.² A few days later he also met the Digalu band in the lowlands of Kundel, at a place called Zaragam. This band, which may have already heard of the fate of the Liban, fled at the first sight of Susenyos, abandoning all its booty. With these victories to his credit and the retrieved booty for his soldiers, Susenyos once again decided to push the war across the Abay into Walaga. When his soldiers knew about his intention they rejected it openly. In the words of the chroniclers, they said "... 'In one year only we have

1. Almeida, in Some Records of Ethiopia, pp. 79-80.

2. Pereira, Chronica de Susenyos, p. 106.

defeated the Galla four times. Why then now is he taking us for another military expedition against the Galla ?' When he realized that they were not interested in the project he dropped it."¹

During the third year of his reign, after the rainy season, Susenyos went to Ayba, where he received a letter containing an urgent appeal from his brother the governor of Bagameder. According to this letter large Marawa bands from Ana, Uru and Abati, were wasting Bagameder. Susenyos hastened with full speed to help his brother. Upon arrival his vanguard force was able on the spot to chop off the heads of a few Oromo scouts. Taking advantage of this early success, Susenyos wanted to catch the Marawa unprepared. Unluckily, however, this was not a field of his own, but of his enemy's choosing. And usually every Oromo band in enemy territory would choose a plain convenient for cavalry. Susenyos wishing to prevent the Marawa from escaping, and eager to take advantage of the element of surprise hastily ordered a cavalry attack. What followed was succinctly expressed by James Bruce, who carefully consulted Susenyos's chronicle.

... They received the king's cavalry so rudely ... they were beat back, and obliged to fly with considerable loss, being entangled in the bushes. No sooner did the king observe that his horse were engaged than he ordered his troops to pass the ravine to support them ... but a panic had seized his troops. They would not stir, but seemed benumbed and overcome by the cold of the morning, spectators of the ruin of the cavalry ... And those of the cavalry that had escaped the massacre repassed the ravine, and dispersed themselves in the front of the foot; while the victorious Marawa, ... pushed their victory to the very front of the king's line.²

Even though Susenyos ordered all the drums to be beaten and the trumpets to sound to excite his soldiers into action, nothing stopped the desertion of his soldiers. It was a total rout, the first major Oromo victory over Susenyos. The casualty list included several of the nobility, numerous elite of his cavalry and "countless foot soldiers". As a result of the disaster, "there was no house (family?) in the camp of the king that did not mourn the death of someone."³ This took place in December 1609.

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1. Pereira, Chronica de Susenyos, p. 108.
 2. James Bruce, Travels to discover ..., p. 291. See also Pereira, ibid., pp. 117-118.
 3. Pereira, ibid., p. 118.

The Mudana gada (1610-1618), came to power after Susenyos had inflicted four defeats on the Melbah gada (1602-1610), while the latter administered one telling blow on the former. The new gada, who wanted to take advantage of the recent humiliation of Susenyos, and were eager to loot and burn his capital at Qoga, sent a wave of terror throughout the land. Susenyos accepted this challenge seriously, and appealed to all his governors to rush to his assistance. His soldiers who had been nursing their wounds since the last disaster went to Dangaz, where they were joined by a new force that came to their assistance. A large Oromo band, returning from Wuqiro in Tigray, poured on Emfraz, and destroyed from Goreba up to Chachisa, even burning the capital at Qoga. The Oromo victory, their unchecked burning and looting is interpreted by the chronicler as "God's warning for Susenyos to repent."¹ But Susenyos had his own plan. He wanted to meet them on the field of his choice. When his soldiers realized that he was determined to take revenge for his humiliation, they were very nervous and did not hide their fear. "We cannot fight against the Galla after the last disaster. We are shocked and shattered by the number of men who died last time. Would you like the destruction of your remaining soldiers?"² Susenyos was not discouraged by the cowardice of his soldiers. He pursued at a distance the bands that were burning, destroying and looting. His numbers increased, and the morale was boosted, when he arrived in Ebenaat, by the arrival of fresh soldiers from two provincial governors. He met the bands near Tiqin, where he chose the best ground and made good use of his superiority in weapons.

... The Galla presented themselves to Socinos in battle, in a plain below Ebenaat, surrounded with small hills covered with wood. The Galla filled the plain, as if voluntarily devoting themselves to destruction, and from the hills and bushes were destroyed by fire-arms from enemies they did not see, who with strong body took possession of the place through which they entered, and by which they were to return no more ... no general, or other officer, thought himself entitled to spare his person more than the king: all fought like common soldiers; and being the men best armed and mounted, and most experienced in the field, they contributed in proportion to the slaughter of the day. About 12,000 men on the part of the Galla were killed upon the spot ... whilst 400 men only fell on the part of the king; so it was a massacre rather than a battle.³

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1. Pereira, Chronica de Susenyos, pp. 119-120.
 2. Ibid., p. 121.
 3. James Bruce, Travels to discover ... , pp. 294-295. See also, Pereira, ibid., pp. 120-122.

In this resounding victory, Susenyos not only massacred the band itself, but also retrieved much of their booty and set free their captives. The chronicler says that "the king returned the booty to their owners and divided the Galla cattle among his soldiers."¹ The presence of Oromo cattle, separate from their booty in the province, seems to suggest that the exterminated bands probably did not come only to loot and then return. They probably wanted to stay in the province, which was why they brought their huge herds of cattle with them.

By insisting upon punishing the overbearing pastoralists, Susenyos had shown a touch of realism in coping with the situation. By their cowardice his soldiers had shown that they had none. They did not lift their fighting spirit either during the heat of the fighting or the beating of the drums and sounding of the trumpets. Among his soldiers there was an absence of any true desire to continue the war with the Oromo. The following incident may show the pervasiveness of this feeling. After the Easter of 1611, Susenyos wanted to push the war into Walaqa and Shawa. This was the first time that he had shown any desire to go as far as Shawa and his advisors, whose opinion was based on the feelings of their soldiers, suggested to Susenyos that it would be better to go to Bizamo than to Walaqa and Shawa. Accordingly Susenyos was forced to change his course, and the journey towards Bizamo was commenced, seemingly with high spirits. However, within a few days, by the time he arrived at the river Abay, the fire had already gone out of his soldiers. They were looking for any pretext to disrupt the journey and avoid crossing the Abay, and they found it in the shortage of provisions. The soldiers mutinied and looted Susenyos's stores, thus exposing the nobility, including the king himself, to the bitter taste of hunger. Susenyos had no alternative but to abandon the campaign to cross the river, and return to Dambiya, where he soon sanctioned the pillaging, looting and destruction of the unfortunate Shankillas, on the pretext of their having attacked a caravan, though in reality it was a desire to please his soldiers.²

Around 1612, the pressure of the Borana on Gojjam was mounting. At the same time, the Warantisha, from their bases in Jamma and Ammonat land in Walaqa, reduced the few Christian strongholds in the province. At the same

1. Pereira, Chronica de Susenyos, p. 122.

2. Ibid., pp. 139-141.

time, Susenyos received alarming news that the Warantisha had invited the Ittu from Adal¹ (from Charchar) to join them on their attack on Gojjam. The prospect of the Borana, Warantisha and Ittu attacking Gojjam simultaneously made the defence of the province a nightmare for Susenyos and his brother Sela Christos, the governor who had accepted Catholicism during the time of crises. Susenyos was bent on attacking the Warantisha before the arrival of their allies, the Ittu from Charchar. He ordered full mobilization so as to attack them separately. Thus after Christmas of 1612, he crossed the river Bashilo from Bagameder into Amhara, from where he crossed over into Walaga. The detour was intended to deceive the Warantisha and take them by surprise. The strategy worked perfectly and Susenyos attacked the Warantisha before the Ittu arrived from Charchar to help them. The unsuspecting Warantisha men were massacred, their women and children and cattle were taken captive by the victorious army and the survivors fled in total disarray. What is interesting to note here is that Susenyos opened negotiation for peace with the vanquished Warantisha. His knowledge of Oromo customs and way of life becomes crystal clear from the way he sent an old captive woman^a with her child to ask the Warantisha to make peace. In Oromo society of the time, women and children were not killed in a war situation, on the contrary, they were considered as the torch of peace. The name of this lady is not given in the chronicle. She is only referred to as the mother of Karrayu Fatto, and from the manner in which the chronicler mentions his name, it seems her son was probably a leader of the Warantisha. Susenyos sent her with the following message. "It was you who rebelled and fought the land of Walaga and broke amba. Therefore, I came to fight you. However, I have pardoned all your evil doings. Please, come and make peace with me."² Accordingly, about forty Warantisha elders came and made peace with Susenyos. The terms of the agreement are not spelled out clearly in the chronicle, but it seems three important conditions were probably included. First, Susenyos seems to have returned their children and women to the Warantisha. Secondly, the Warantisha agreed to live in peace, and thirdly and most important, Susenyos seems to have promised them his support in their future conflict with their enemies. With this commendable victory against the Warantisha, and a huge booty of cattle that enriched his soldiers, Susenyos returned to his court. The dispossessed and weakened Warantisha had to replace their lost stock for their survival. They were too weak to

1. Pereira, Chronica de Susenyos, pp. 139-141.

2. Ibid., pp. 146-147.

attack their brethren the numerous Borana, and too enfeebled to cross the Abay to loot Gojjam. They had no alternative but to turn against the Ittu, who came all the way from Charchar to help them. The Ittu were suddenly caught off balance and looted. It took some time before they had gathered strength to repay the Warantisha in kind. ^{The Warantisha appealed for help.} Accordingly, Sela Christos went to Walaqa with a large force. The Ittu refused to meet him in the field. The Warantisha were too frightened to remain in the province without his presence. Hence, Sela Christos took all of them with their cattle across the Abay and settled them in eastern Gojjam some time in 1614.¹ In a way this was part of Susenyos's grand plan to create a secure bulwark against other Oromo bands. He was particularly successful in this field. He even took the trouble to gather together the scattered Maya, the experts in poisoned arrows, and settled them together with the Warantisha and other Oromo groups in Achafar and Kurbaha. He also settled a large number of Yahabta² and ilma guzit,³ in Wasan Amba Machakal and several other areas.³ A few years later they were made to accept the Catholic religion, thus permanently separating them from the body of their nation and its heritage. Azaj Tino was present on the day of their conversion. According to him Susenyos :

... told them to 'believe in Christ and be baptized in His name so that you can become equals with us in glory at the resurrection. Give up the customs of your fathers (the Galla) which are irreconcilable with belief in Christ.' The Warantisha said 'All right, let it be as you ordered'. (4)

Tino, who seems to have been impressed by the Oromo belief in one Waga (sky god), describes the Oromo Abba Muda⁵ in glowing terms. According to Tino, all Oromo go to Abba Muda, from far and near, to receive his blessings for victory. This blessing is contained in the form of myrrh, on which he spat his saliva, and distributed it to the delegates. The delegates brought back this treasure to their respective clans, who used the blessings of the spiritual father in their war against their enemies. His blessings were associated with success in warfare.⁶ And therein lies the ideological role

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1. Pereira, Chronica de Susenyos, pp. 146-147.
 2. On Yahabta and ilma guzit, *infra* pp. 350-1.
 3. Pereira, ibid., pp. 146-7, 196-7; see also Asma Giyorgis, "Ya Galla Tarik", pp. 124-5.
 4. Pereira, ibid., p. 214.
 5. On Abba Muda, *supra*, pp. 110-2.
 6. Pereira, ibid.

of the Abba Muda in the great war. In this sense the Abba Muda represented the ideological fountain head that generated the spur for conquest, and he interpreted success or failure in terms of their willingness to stick to his advice in their daily life. The kernel of his advice consisted in the dictum, "do not fight among yourselves."¹ This advice was more honoured in its breach than in its observance by the beginning of the seventeenth century.

In 1614 Susenyos ordered Rases Yaman Christos, the governor of Bagameder, Sela Christos, the governor of Gojjam, Afa Christos, a governor of a province, and Dajazmach Walda Hawariat, the emperor's son-in-law, to go to Grarya in western Shawa and fight against the Tulama. The four senior officers of the kingdom (the first three were his brothers) led a huge coordinated force into western Shawa. They surprised and defeated a section of the Tulama; the rest saved themselves by flight. This was the first major expedition into western Shawa, after Susenyos had succeeded to the throne in 1607. But it was a short-lived success, since the expeditionary forces were compelled to withdraw quickly.²

After Easter of the same year, Susenyos ordered Ras Sela Christos to attack the Borana in Bizamo. The main reason for this attack was to open the route to Ennarya, the main province from where Susenyos received tribute of gold. Sela Christos crossed the Abay and accomplished the main mission but did very little damage to the Borana, since they fled with their cattle. Nevertheless, the expeditions to western Shawa and Bizamo clearly indicate that Susenyos's long expected offensive against the Oromo, both to the east and south of the Abay had commenced.

By early 1616, the Borana and the Barentu formed a league to attack Tigray, Bagameder and Gojjam simultaneously. The news of the league sent a wave of terror throughout the three provinces. What inspired the formation of the league at this time is difficult to tell. Perhaps it was the Oromo response to Susenyos's offensive across the Abay. However, two things can

1. Asma Giyorgis, "Ya Galla Tarik", pp. 124-125.

2. Pereira, Chronica de Susenyos, p. 149.

be said with certainty. First, the league included Karrayu that poured on Tigray, the Marawa, that gathered on the frontier of Bagameder, Ittu and the Borana themselves who invaded Gojjam. Secondly, it appears that the leadership of all the groups had met and discussed the details of the operation, including even the timing of the attack. The news of the formation of the league was received very seriously by Susenyos, who was bent either on frustrating it at best, or minimizing its effect at worst. According to his chronicler, after receiving the news, Susenyos went to Bagameder, which was strategically located between Tigray and Gojjam. The presence of Susenyos in Bagameder deterred the Marawa from once again exposing themselves to destruction. With the safety of Bagameder assured, Susenyos left Tigray to its fate and rushed to Gojjam. In Tigray the series of fortifications that had been built at strategic positions, by the energetic and able Takla Giyorgis, the governor of Endarta, and the son-in-law of the emperor,¹ acted as an effective means of checking the flow of the Karrayu into the land. The walls built around the fortifications made the Oromo spears, arrows and stone missiles useless. The few muskets which were used in the fortifications kept off the Oromo cavalry and the surrounding trenches made their horses easy victims. The sheer determination of the Tigray peasants to keep the Oromo out of their land forced the latter to look for softer targets. These they found in the sparsely populated lowland Tigray, where the Oromo easily dislodged the Doba nomads.

Upon Susenyos's arrival in Gojjam, he received the good news that Ras Sela Christos had already defeated many Oromo bands while they were crossing the Abay. With this happy train of events, Susenyos ordered all his senior officials to push the war across the Abay to Walaqa and Shawa against the Ittu. Ras Yaman Christos, his elder brother, and the governor of Bagameder, refused to go to Shawa on the ground that his soldiers were unwilling to follow him. The ras may have had his own axe to grind, since he did not like Susenyos's attitude towards the Orthodox church. However, his refusal must have been prompted by practical difficulties which he had faced two years earlier. For his insubordination, Ras Yaman Christos was removed from the office of first minister, which was filled by his younger brother Ras Sela Christos. The latter led a huge imperial army to Walaqa, from where he went on to Mugar in western Shawa. Everywhere the Ittu fled before him.

1. Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia ...", pp. 506-507.

Whatever cattle, women and children he gathered during his long expedition, Sela Christos returned to Gojjam without achieving the smashing victory he had wanted.¹

The period of the Mudana gada (1610-1618) came to an end at the time when the Borana were embroiled with the rebellion of their own subjects.² Mudana was succeeded by the Kilole gada (1618-1626). Due to the internal crises which afflicted the Oromo at this time (to be discussed later on), the Borana were unable to mount any attack against Gojjam. It was only in 1620 that they eventually planned to attack the province. The governor of the province received wind of their plan through his elaborate security system. He soon appealed to Susenyos for assistance.

... Macha, after having won their battle against Hadiya, Gurage, Barentuma and Tulama, had turned towards Bizamo, where (they) stayed and wanted to fight Gojjam and Ennarya. Please, come and reach me soon with all your army. We have the duty and obligation to fight together and save Gojjam and Ennarya.³

By means of a hasty mobilization Susenyos raised a large force and marched to Gojjam. But the Macha failed to show up. The level of the river and the prospect of the Borana flight forced them to abandon the plan of crossing over to Bizamo at that time of the year. Sela Christos returned to his headquarters at Debra Abraham and Susenyos went in another direction. The failure of the Borana to attack Gojjam became deceptive, and Susenyos's quick return proved to be a mistake. Eight days after their separation, Sela Christos bombarded Susenyos with an urgent plea for help.

... Half of the Macha have crossed via Guman to attack Gongga and Jigat, Agaw as far as Zigan, Min, Matakal ... and Dagar. The other half had crossed via Machakal and had camped in the highland ... Now I have decided to fight either for life or death. This is the time and hour to come and reach us soon.⁴

With his determination to prevent the disaster and punish the Macha Susenyos rapidly marched in full battle order towards Debra Abraham, and arrived at a critical point, when Sela Christos and his men were under the rain of numerous Macha arrows, spears and stone missiles. The arrival of a fresh, large and better-armed imperial force turned the tide against the Macha

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1. Pereira, Chronica de Susenyos, pp. 156-159. See also Asma Giyorgis, "Ya Galla Tarik" pp. 128-9; Bruce, Travels to discover ... , pp. 309-310.
 2. Infra, pp. 347-52.
 3. Pereira, ibid., p. 217.
 4. Ibid., pp. 220-221.

who were compelled to flee in total disorder. In the ensuing confusion and darkness the soldiers of Sela Christos, startled by the speed and sound of the flying Macha, abandoned their leader in a wild escape from their fleeing enemy and ended up chopping off each other's heads. It was only the presence of Susenyos on the other side of the town which stopped the panic-stricken residents of Debra Abraham from joining the flying soldiers.¹ This victory represented a well-known, yet sad story of the whole campaign. Well-known, because Susenyos's victories over the Oromo were very frequent and there was nothing new about this one. A sad story, because Susenyos's subsequent action differed very little, if at all, from the Oromo looting. The people of Gojjam thanked Susenyos for saving them from the Macha looting and massacre. However, in less than a week his soldiers finished their provisions, and Susenyos called together the people of the area and asked them :

..to give him a country by lot where his army could go and plunder. It is only if my soldiers eat that I can protect you. The people of Gojjam felt sad and did not give him any country to plunder. Susenyos ordered his soldiers to plunder. (2)

This must have outraged the people, as it did the chronicler, who does not hide his disapproval of the plunder of fellow Christians. From what followed this sad spectacle, it appears as if the Oromo were monitoring the movement of Susenyos at a distance. A day after Susenyos left Debra Abraham, the Tulama poured into Gojjam and destroyed half of the province, from Baranta as far as Debra Warq :

They also destroyed and devastated the country of Nagashat and Manqorqorya, Enqora, Enset, Yashur, Zangema and Yakubbat. All the countries inhabited by Shinne, Chome, Gafat and Dabana Ansa were devastated. Since the Galla first attacked Gojjam, they had never killed so many men and captured so many women, children and cattle. There were people from Gojjam who knew of the coming of the Galla, but they hid it from the emperor, since they feared his plunder.³

The above quotation reflects three interconnected sad stories. First, it appears that the peasants in Gojjam (and probably in other provinces as well) feared Susenyos's plunder as they feared Oromo looting. Secondly, that the people who were devastated by the Tulama were almost all refugees who fled to Gojjam, either from Damot, Bizamo, or from other provinces. They had

1. Pereira, Chronica de Susenyos, p. 222.

2. Ibid., p. 223.

3. Ibid., pp. 223-224.

fled to Gojjam, because Sela Christos and Susenyos had encouraged them to do so and they had instigated their rebellion against the Borana.¹ However, both Susenyos and Sela Christos failed these refugees twice, and exposed them to Borana revenge. First, Sela Christos and Susenyos were unable to give sustained assistance to the victims in their respective provinces. Instead of supporting them with whatever resources they had in their respective regions, they encouraged them to flee either to Gojjam or to Ennarya. By so doing they exposed Gojjam to attack and endangered the defence of Ennarya, which was by now greatly reduced in size.² Secondly, Gojjam, the haven for all refugees, seems to have lulled these victims into an unguarded state, giving them a false sense of security. Thirdly, the Tulama attacked only a day after Susenyos had left. He did not come back to assist the unfortunate victims. Although the reason for this callous behaviour is not given in the chronicle, it may have been caused by three inter-related factors. First, the people of Gojjam displeased Susenyos by their refusal to give him a country to plunder voluntarily. Secondly, the Tulama that poured into Gojjam at this time were so numerous that their very size may have frightened Susenyos's soldiers. Thirdly, the Tulama probably attacked with lightning speed and withdrew with the same speed, in order to reach their home with their booty. And finally, the death of Susenyos's brother at this time may have affected his attitude.

In the same year (1620), while Susenyos was in Bure, he heard the eruption of the numerous bands in Tigray, Bagameder and Gojjam simultaneously. The Marawa poured like a flood into Tigray, where the defence strategy of the able Takla Giyorgis once again checked the flood from engulfing this province. According to the chronicler, Takla Giyorgis made errors that contributed to his defeat. First, instead of remaining in his strategic stronghold fortifications, he met them in the plain, where the numerous Oromo cavalry caused havoc. Secondly, Takla Giyorgis met the bands before they encumbered themselves with booty, and consequently their first assault was tougher and more difficult to withstand. However, with a heavy defeat Takla Giyorgis was able to retreat to his strategic strongholds, where his men fought bravely and prevented the Marawa from taking the booty they so much desired. Alarmed by the bad news from Tigray, Susenyos dispatched two urgent letters, one to Sela Christos in Gojjam, and the other to Dajazmach

1. *Infra*, pp. 351-4.

2. *Infra*, pp. 362-5.

Walda Hawariat, his favourite son-in-law and trusted lieutenant. He had been appointed to defend and protect Dambiya from his headquarters in Danqaz. In his first letter, Susenyos told Sela Christos that the Wallo and Jele had invaded from Amhara up to the frontier of Lake Tana and that he needed his urgent assistance. In the second and more interesting letter, he included the following warning: "Do not fight with the Galla face to face. If possible attack them when they descend a slope: otherwise attack them in a narrow pass, which is suitable to you and inconvenient to them."¹ These few lines sum up the foundation of Susenyos's strategy against the Oromo. In most of his wars, he either attacked them at a point when they were crossing a big river, or after they were loaded with booty, or when it was scarcely dawn of day, when they were unsuspecting of any attack, or when they were in a narrow pass or on rugged and precipitous ground, etc. What the choice of these types of situations have in common is that they are inconvenient for cavalry warfare. And Susenyos always tried to immobilize the Oromo cavalry, which the Christian troops dreaded.

Walda Hawariat did not heed Susenyos's wise instructions. When the former knew about the arrival of the Wallo and the Jele to attack Bagameder, he hurriedly mobilized and rushed to stop them. The very sight of the large Oromo force put his men to flight. The casualty list included Walda Hawariat, many of his brothers and other members of the royal family. Susenyos was deeply angered by the disastrous defeat of his son-in-law.² Resolved on revenge, he marched against the Wallo and Jele. The latter were caught suddenly, before they had time to finish the celebration of their victory and the sharing of the booty. Susenyos closed all the passes with his strong cavalry and organized his force into three flanks, the right and left flanks commanded by his brothers, and the centre by himself. This was rudely received by the Oromo cavalry, which put up short but most obstinate resistance during which the Turkish and Portuguese musketeers caused havoc and put them to flight. This flight of the cavalry had the effect it regularly had on Oromo foot soldiers. Nobody considered which way to go but only that he had to get away. In the general panic and flight that followed, a number of Oromo were crushed to death by the stampede of their own cavalry. Those who escaped from the massacre by the speed of their

1. Pereira, Chronica de Susenyos, pp. 225-234.

2. Ibid., pp. 233-234.

horses under the cover of darkness found themselves in a deadly trap since all the passes were guarded by strong cavalry units. They were easily cut to pieces. That day Susenyos, his two brothers and his son Fasiladas had distinguished themselves by contributing to the slaughter of the day.

Susenyos is reported to have made a mountain out of the skulls of Wallo and Jele,¹ which was evidence sufficient of the greatness of the slaughter.

There is an interesting episode which shows how Susenyos treated his captives in a partial way. The groups that attacked Bagameder at this time included Oromo and Amhara nationals. The latter were the subjects of the former. Susenyos captured both groups, but he ordered the emasculation of the Oromo and the adornment of the Amhara with beautiful ornaments.

As a result all the Galla were saddened deeply and all the children of Amhara, those who were born here or those who were captured overjoyed, because of his love for and kindness to them. At that time all the people of the realm praised and loved him for saving the country and rescuing it from the Galla. (2)

From the above it would seem that fourteen years after he came to the throne Susenyos was still haunted by the campaign of his enemies who accused him of being "a pagan Galla".

With his resounding victory over the Wallo and other groups, Susenyos resolved to try his fortune against the Oromo in Amhara, Angot, Damot and Walaqa. These campaigns, which took place from 1620 to 1622, had two interconnected purposes. First, he was seeking out Yona'el, the rebellious governor of Bagameder, who sought refuge among the Karrayu in Amhara. Secondly, he wanted to punish those Oromo who had given refuge to Yona'el and other rebellious Christian elements, while at the same time striking at the Wallo, Karrayu, and the Marawa in their base areas, so as to decrease the pressure they were exerting both on Tigray and Bagameder. He succeeded in doing both. He also succeeded in discouraging the Oromo from giving refuge to his enemies. "... The king laid waste the country of the Galla, who had protected (Yona'el). This occasioned a division among the Galla themselves."³ Susenyos went into Angot from where he passed into Amhara where he devastated "the three houses" of Wallo, namely Warra Kiyu, Warra Nole and Warra Illu. The devastated Wallo groups tried their luck on him by resorting to night attack. They were beaten back. This continuous train

1. Pereira, Chronica de Susenyos, pp. 235-236.

2. Ibid.

3. James Bruce, Travels to discover ..., pp. 350-351.

of successes against the Oromo produced its desired goal. Susenyos soon received the head of Yona'el, his arch-enemy, in search of whom he was devastating province after province. Yona'el was killed by a member of the Wayu clan, who wanted to make peace with Susenyos, and obtain the release of their twelve leaders whom Susenyos had taken hostage.¹ Susenyos returned to Bagameder with numerous victories to his name and Yona'el's head in his hands.

Between 1620 and 1622, his brother Sela Christos had also conducted a number of campaigns against the Borana in Damot, and at one point even pushed the war into Shawa.² It now appeared in 1622 that Susenyos was at the height of his power. However, this power was more apparent than real. It is true that Susenyos had 40,000 soldiers under his command at the time, but notwithstanding his military advantage, he was at his weakest politically, because by his acceptance of Catholicism in this year he had turned the Christian society against himself, and economically because he faced the formidable task of maintaining his large force. Between 1607 and 1622, in spite of his repeated victories, he was neither able to win back any of the lost provinces east of the Abay, nor be guaranteed the safety of the route to Ennarya, his economic base. There was no progress in commerce or improvement in his revenue either. Due to the chaotic conditions which preceded and followed his accession, the treasury was almost empty. What is more, he was not able to use wisely the little gold tribute he received from Ennarya. Accordingly his war machinery became a deadly parasite on his own subjects. There was one treasure untouched by Susenyos in his attempt to maintain his army. This was the wealth of the Orthodox church. As early as 1608 he had already turned his eyes towards the wealth of the Church. By 1622 there was no alternative left, but to appropriate the property of the church. His embracing of Catholicism in the same year provided him with ideological justification to dispossess the church. By his action he turned the Christian society against himself. By so doing he sold the ground which he had bought so dearly. The strength of the Christian society was rooted in its unity, and that unity was nurtured by the Orthodox church. The monks and priest^s provided the ideological rationale for revolution. They ignited the revolutionary fire among the peasants.³ They also fled to the

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1. Pereira, Chronica de Susenyos, pp. 255-268. See also J. Perruchon, "Notes pour l'histoire d'Ethiopie ...", Revue Sémitique, V, (1897), p. 185.
 2. Pereira, ibid.
 3. e.g. Donald N. Levine, Wax and Gold : Tradition and innovation in Ethiopian culture, p. 18.

Oromo areas. Susenyos followed them with devastating raids against the Oromo. This in turn alarmed the Oromo and the need for self-preservation forged alliances between the rebellious Christian elements and the Oromo, and it was this alliance that ended his regime ten years later.

By 1622 Susenyos must have foreseen something of his impending failure. Maddened by his inability either to restore the lost provinces, or to stabilize the remaining ones, Susenyos now turned on the weak and defenceless minorities - the easy scapegoats who became the victims of his terrible wrath.¹ He dealt with his formidable problems of revenue by endless looting, pillaging and killing. To him these were necessary and essential. Susenyos was all but unable to think of massacre as a terrible thing to which other Christian rulers had resorted only on rare occasions. He saw it as a weapon of government to be used against both internal and external enemies.² Insecurity and uneasiness became so strong in him that he had no choice but to rely upon his soldiers, treating them as his only shield in an otherwise hostile country. Their maintenance was his highest priority next only to his throne.³

Between 1623 and 1625 his campaign against the Oromo continued intermittently, with neither side winning nor losing fresh ground. The Oromo were unable to mount any alarming raids during this time. They were unable even to storm and take mountain strongholds within their own territories. The ambas (the mountain tops) are "lofty and steep on all sides, have on top a level space of sufficient size for people to live there."⁴ All the passes to the ambas were guarded with men armed with inexhaustible and irresistible stone munitions. Hence, the ambas were natural fortresses and quite impregnable to an enemy not armed with muskets. The presence of Christian elements on these ambas represented the shadow of Christian administration. The shadow because their presence neither affected the surrounding Oromo nor benefitted the kingdom in the form of raising taxes and maintaining law and order. Some elements from among the rebellious Christians who took refuge

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1. *Infra*, p. 358.
 2. Susenyos was the embodiment of the law of the jungle. He was a bandit first and emperor second. He presented a perfect blend of banditry with the excesses of an autocratic kingship.
 3. Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia ...", p. 478.
 4. Almeida, in Some Records of Ethiopia, p. 97.

among the Oromo had muskets, with which they rendered a great service to the Oromo by enabling them to weaken the Christian fortresses within Oromo territory. However, the Oromo were unable to push this advantage west of the Abay. This was due to a misfortune of another kind. It was the consequence of the 1624 famine, which was caused by long drought which had devastated the animal population. The famine and the destruction of the animal population was catastrophic to the Oromo, since they depended heavily on their animals. Instead of taking the trouble to kill them, "burying the dead Galla became the major task of Susenyos".¹ However, he was not able to derive much military or political advantage out of the calamity that struck the Oromo. His hands were tied by the effects of the famine, as well as by the mounting internal opposition. On 11th February 1626 Susenyos officially submitted to the See of Rome, thereby disestablishing the Orthodox Church. With that move he consolidated the camp of his enemies.

The period of the Kilole gada (1618-1626) ended before the Oromo recovered from the effect of the famine. It was succeeded by the Bifole gada (1626-1634). Due to the effect of the famine, the new gada was unable to mount any strong raids on the provinces west of the Abay. The feeble attempt made by the Borana was repelled by Susenyos with great slaughter and defeat. It was only in 1628, after they had recovered fully from the famine, that they were able to make a devastating raid on Gojjam. Multitudes of Borana crossed the Abay, and the governor of the province, Ras Sela Christos, was not willing to stand in the way of such an onslaught. Thus he took shelter in the land of Gambatta in order to avoid the fury of their first assault. Dajazmach Buko, one of the most trusted and able generals of Sela Christos, found his small force of 1000 foot men and 200 cavalry surrounded by a large Oromo force. To think of flight was too late, nor was there any way to escape. The greatest part of the Christian force was cut to pieces, including their leader. The victorious Borana loaded with whatever booty they found retired to their country in Bizamo across the Abay. Susenyos, who was deeply grieved by the loss of this loyal servant, left his town Dangaz in charge of his son Fasilidas, and marched towards Zantra.² Susenyos expected that the Borana would spread themselves to loot Gojjam, but the Borana feared his punishment and contented themselves with what they had got and retired. Susenyos was not willing to cross the Abay after 1626, nor were the Oromo willing to risk any major confrontation with him in Bagameder. This precarious

1. Asma Giyorgis, "Ya Galla Tarik", pp. 152-3; see also J. Perruchon, "Notes pour l'histoire ...", R.S., p. 185.

2. Pereira, Chronica de Susenyos, pp. 289-291.

balance characterized the last few years of his reign. The loss of all the eastern provinces was tacitly accepted. The offensive measures across the Abay had become part of history, at least until the time of Iyasu I.¹

In 1626, Takla Giyorgis, the son-in-law of the emperor, and the able governor of Enderta, revolted because of Susenyos's religious policy. Takla Giyorgis, who by his selfless efforts in building walls and fortifications at key passes saved highland Tigray from constant Oromo inroads, now appealed to the Oromo for help. The irony of ironies was that he helped them reduce some of the walls and fortifications that he had built and defended so bravely. His promise of rich booty attracted many to his standard. Accordingly, when his rebellion was crushed in the same year, the Oromo warriors constituted the larger section of his fighters.²

The rebellion of Takla Giyorgis was followed by that of the peasants of Lasta, in which the Oromo constituted a significant element. Although this rebellion was temporarily quelled, the involvement of the Oromo on the side of the opposition increased. In the meantime, Oromo raids on Gojjam continued.

The misfortune was followed by another in Gojam, great to the nation in general, and greater still to the Catholic cause in particular ... The Galla from Bizamo ... passed the Nile, laying the whole province waste before them. Fecur Egzie, lieutenant general under Sela Christos ... (was slain) ... He was reputed a man of the best understanding, and the most liberal sentiments of any in Ethiopia. A great orator, excelling both in the gracefulness of manner ... He was among the first that embraced the Catholic religion ... And was the principal promoter of the translations of the Portuguese books into Ethiopic assisted by the Jesuit Antonio de Angelis. (3)

Neither Sela Christos nor Susenyos even tried to follow the Borana into Bizamo to punish them for the death of the general, or to retrieve the booty they had taken. The repeated Oromo inroads into Gojjam continued. Susenyos, under fire from the rebellion of his own subjects, left the defence of Gojjam to his brother and concentrated on crushing the Lasta peasant rebellion. The latter was spearheaded by a pretender named Malka Christos, who had the full support of both the Christians and Oromo of Amhara and Angot. In June

1. *Infra*, p. 299.

2. James Bruce, Travels to discover ... , p. 374. See also Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia ... ", pp. 516-7.

3. Bruce, ibid., p. 385.

1632, Susenyos won a decisive battle in which he slew between 6,000 and 8,000 followers of the pretender.

The next morning the king went out with his son to see the field of battle, where the Prince Facillidas is said to have spoken to this effect, in the name of the army : these men whom you see slaughtered on the ground, were neither pagans nor Mohametans, at whose death we should rejoice - they were Christians, lately your subjects and your country men, some of them your relations. This is not victory which is gained over ourselves. In killing these, you drive the sword into your own entrails. (1)

Susenyos understood the true meaning of Fasiladas's words. There and then, he decided not to drive the sword into the entrails of what was left of the Christian kingdom. Accordingly, Susenyos left the whole matter to his son, who soon restored the old church, thereby guaranteeing the unity of the Christian society. It was that unity which saved what was left of the kingdom from passing into historical oblivion. Susenyos died in September 1632 at the age of 63.² He had been a captive for two years, a bandit for almost ten years among the Oromo, and a king for twenty-five years, during which time he had led numerous campaigns against the Oromo. He repeatedly inflicted crushing defeats on them, but ironically he was never able to win back any of the lost provinces. He did his best to stop the Oromo advance with whatever resources he had, and even sought foreign aid. Had even part of his request for help to fight against the Oromo arrived, the course of history in the region might have been different. However, even his official submission to the See of Rome failed to deliver the desired goods. In the event Susenyos left behind a kingdom which was even weaker, and more troubled by problems of religious controversies,³ than the one he had inherited.

Fasiladas (1632-1667) not only restored the Orthodox Church, but also took a number of defensive measures, all of which contributed to lessening the effects of Oromo raids on the provinces west of the Abay. His first

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1. James Bruce, Travels to discover ... , p. 385.
 2. In one sense he died in June 1632. His pride, his most treasured asset, had been hurt as never before. Only a short time before, the Catholics had awaited tense, expectant, for every word he uttered for the future of that religion. Now the Orthodox priests smeared him and made him a laughing stock. The events that led to the establishment of the old church finished him off. Between June and September he was only a living corpse.
 3. Donald Crumney, Priests and politics : Protestant and Catholic missions in Orthodox Ethiopia, 1830-1868, (Oxford : 1972), pp. 18-19. See also Donald Levine, Wax & Gold, pp. 20-21. The religious controversies that bedevilled the Christian society between 1632 and 1706 (is) discussed at some length in Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia ... ", pp. 531-583.

pragmatic measure was to come to terms with the reality of the situation. He accepted the loss of all the provinces east and southwest of the Abay,¹ and concentrated on saving Gojjam and Bagameder. His defensive measures consisted of building walls, fortifications and trenches at strategic positions west of the Abay. During his long reign the province of Gojjam, attacked by the Karrayu from Amhara, the Tulama and Ittu from Walaqa, and Macha bands from Damot and Bizamo, captured his attention. It was here that he developed his highly complex defensive measures. "... A long line of fortified strongholds shielded Gojjam, in the east against the Tulama and Ittu, and in the southwest against the bands of the two Macha confederations."² These measures did not stop the Oromo from raiding deep into Gojjam. However, according to an eye-witness report, the warning given by the armed men posted there helped the inhabitants of the region to flee to places of safety in time.³ Along with his policy of building walls and strong fortifications in the provinces of Gojjam and Bagameder, Fasiladas intensified his father's policy of settling a large Oromo group in the two provinces, where they were made to accept Orthodox Christianity, gradually integrating into the main stream of Christian society.

Fasiladas died in October 1667 and was succeeded by his son Yohannes I (1667-82). Yohannes was not a military man, and he does not seem to have chosen his Amhara provincial officers for their military abilities. In fact Yohannes seems to have depended militarily on his Christianized Oromo subjects. In Gojjam, Walle, the leader of the Macha groups, which Fasiladas had settled in Gojjam, was made dajazmach of the southern districts. For the first time, a Christianized Oromo, with the highest Amhara title, was made the governor of an important province. Yohannes also formed a number of squadrons from among the Marawa and Karrayu, who had settled in some parts of Bagameder, Lasta and the adjacent districts. These were the backbone of his force in the northern provinces. However, his heavy dependence on the Christianized Oromo involved them deeper into Christian politics. Yohannes died on 19th July 1682, and was succeeded by his son Iyasu I (1682-1706). Very soon Dajazmach Walle, the governor of the southern districts in Gojjam, crossed the Abay and appealed to his Macha brethren to support

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1. M. Abir, Ethiopia and the Red Sea, pp. 231-232.
 2. Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia ...", p. 545.
 3. According to R. Pankhurst, An Introduction to the Economic History of Ethiopia, (London : 1961), p. 171, ... In 1648 the Yamani ambassador, Hasan bin Ahmad el Haimi ... had seen one of the frontier posts ... guarded by ten armed men who were changed every month.

him in his scheme to put on the throne a man of his choice. In this he was not disappointed. "The Galla, who sought but a pretence for invading Abyssinia readily embraced this opportunity, and swarmed to him on all sides. His army, in a very short time was exceedingly numerous."¹ Amidst them Walle proclaimed one Yeshaq an emperor, and returned to Gojjam with the intention of marching on Gondar. Iyasu, an energetic and very brave young man,² who had already distinguished himself as an able horseman and "the best marksman with passion for war",³ marched with full speed and "... met them just after they had crossed the river. He succeeded in dispersing them before they and their allies could organize themselves for an orderly march."⁴ The unfortunate Yeshaq was captured and executed, while Walle repented and made peace with Iyasu, who pardoned him.

While Walle was trying to be a king-maker on his own, the Christianized Oromo soldiers which Yohannes had settled in Lasta and the adjacent districts were also preparing to put on the throne a man of their choice. For this purpose they appealed to their brethren in Amhara and the surrounding areas. The Karrayu and the Marawa soon flocked to them and with a king of their choice at their head, "... they began to move towards Bagameder, probably with the intention of reaching Gondar."⁵ Once again Iyasu intercepted and dispersed them. However, these two attempts by the Christianized Oromo to be the force behind the throne was the signal for what was to come. Within a few decades, the Oromo leaders of Yajju, were to become the regents of the puppet Amhara kings of Gondar.⁶ Nevertheless, in the short run, Iyasu's easy victories encouraged him to try his luck against other Oromo across the

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1. James Bruce, Travels to discover ... , pp. 458-9.
 2. Iyasu was 22 years of age when he succeeded to the throne.
 3. James Bruce, ibid., p. 453. See also Charles Jacques Poncet's Journey from Cairo into Abyssinia and back 1698-1701", in William Foster, ed., The Red Sea and the adjacent countries at the close of the seventeenth century, (London, 1949), The Hakluyt Society, second series, No. 100.
 4. Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia and ... ", p. 578.
 5. Ibid., p. 579. See also Ignazio Guidi, Annales Iohannis I, Iyasu I, Bakaffa, (Paris : 1905), pp. text, 103-4, trans. 106.
 6. e.g. Bruce, ibid., vol. IV, pp. 146-188.

Abay. There were also two other factors which seem to have influenced Iyasu's decision. First, when Iyasu rebelled against his father in 1680, he fled across the Abay and took refuge in the Oromo-held territory. During his short stay in the land of the Tulama, Iyasu realised that the Christian subjects of the Oromo were restive and expected assistance from the Christian leadership. It was at this time that Iyasu soothed the Christians in Tulama-land, with his famous promise to free them from the oppression of the Tulama.¹ Secondly, Iyasu had evidently been overflowing with an inborn exuberant energy and an ardour and imagination for which slave-raiding expeditions west of the Abay provided little outlet. He needed a cause to serve, a cause involving extensive military campaigns. This he found in the Christians' appeal for assistance against the Oromo, and his own secret ambition to force the Oromo into submission. Thus more than half a century after it was abandoned, Iyasu resuscitated the campaign across the Abay. It was perhaps because of this that he was known as "Iyasu the great."

Iyasu got the opportunity to launch his Oromo campaign when the Liban from Bizamo crossed the Abay and attacked Gojjam in 1683. He left Gondar and swiftly marched towards Gojjam and his sudden and unexpected arrival itself forced the Liban to abandon all their booty and flee across the Abay to their country.² Determined to take advantage of this easy victory, Iyasu decided to push the war across the Abay. There and then the history of the previous kings repeated itself. His soldiers refused to cross the Abay. It took him a year to convince them to change their minds. During that time he showed them unprecedented kindness, entertaining them lavishly, "... passing the day and night in continual festival."³ In 1684 Iyasu marched towards Amhara at the head of an army animated by the generosity of the young king, and motivated for battle by the rhetoric of his Christian nationalism. Iyasu surrounded and surprised the Wallo, attacking them with a speed at a moment when they least expected or suspected it. The Wallo lost about 6,000 men on this day.⁴ This was Iyasu's first major victory against the Oromo, but he failed to move fast and take advantage of this resounding

1. Annales Iohannis, p. text 127, trans. 132.

2. Ibid., p. text 66.

3. James Bruce, Travels to discover ..., vol. iii, p. 453.

4. Ibid., p. 457. See also Annales Iohannis, pp. text 76-78, trans. 75-77.

victory. It was only in 1688 that he was able to cross the Abay with a firm determination not only to free the Christian subjects of the Oromo, but also to force the latter into submission. Upon his arrival in the Tulama land, Iyasu was jubilantly received by the people who are called Kordida in the chronicle. Apparently they were descendants of former Christians who did not flee across the Abay after the Tulama occupied their land. Kordida is an Oromo term consisting of kor "to mount" and dida "who refuse", those who refuse to mount, meaning those who do not ride horses in battle. The Tulama who did not regard these people as good fighters called them Kordida. The latter, according to the chronicle, were as many as a hundred thousand. They seem to have appealed to Iyasu to rescue them from the Tulama.¹ With the support and guidance of the Kordida, Iyasu inflicted a number of defeats on the Tulama.² The Kordida, who feared Tulama revenge if they were to remain in Tulama land, begged him with one voice to take them across the Abay. Accordingly, "... thousands of families of the Kordida were brought back from the Tulama lands."³ Iyasu went to Tulama land, with the intention of forcing the Oromo into submission, but returned from it by transporting the very people who would have helped him with the task. In this sense the expedition of 1688 was a failure.

In 1690, Iyasu and his ablest general, named Yohannes, surprised and routed a number of Oromo bands with real carnage.⁴ Perhaps encouraged by repeated Oromo defeats, their subjects both in the Tulama and Macha lands rose up in arms against them.⁵ This rebellion, which reached its climax in 1692, was spearheaded by the people who are called Qala Ganda in the chronicle.⁶ Qala Ganda⁷ were the terms with which the Tulama described those Christians who, when their lands fell to the Oromo, avoided capture by fortifying themselves within mountain strongholds which dot the western parts of the Tulama lands. In all likelihood, the Tulama, who had superior

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1. Annales Iohannis, p. text, 127, trans. 132.
 2. Ibid., pp. text 127-133, trans. 132-138.
 3. Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia ...", p. 584.
 4. Annales Iohannis, ibid., pp. text 147-148, trans. 154-155.
 5. The rebellion against the Macha started much earlier than 1690s. See below pp. 350-2.
 6. Annales Iohannis, ibid., p. text 166, trans. 174.
 7. Both terms are of Oromo origin. Qala has two meanings. It means "thin" and it also means "a table land on a mountain" (plateau). Ganda has also two meanings. It means "village" and it also means "villagers". Taken together the two terms describe the people who lived on a mountain stronghold within the Tulama territory.

cavalry in the plains, were unable to dislodge them from their strongholds and force them into submission as long as the Qala Ganda stayed on the mountains. As a result of Iyasu's successful campaigns against the Oromo, the precarious balance between the two gave way to the Qala Ganda's offensive against the Tulama. What is more, in a message to Iyasu in 1692, they vaunted their role in the conquest of the Tulama and proposed to him to force them to submission.¹ However, Iyasu failed to take advantage of Qala Ganda's readiness to fight for his cause. It was only four years later that Iyasu led an expedition into Tulama land. By then the steam had already gone out of Qala Ganda's offensive.²

Iyasu's 1696 expedition into Tulama land was famous and unproductive. Famous, because this was the first time since the 1620s when a Christian king led such an expedition into Shawa and beyond. Unproductive, because as we shall soon see, Iyasu did not achieve anything by it. While in Shawa, Iyasu is reported to have vaunted that he would not return to Gondar before driving the Oromo beyond the Awash river. According to his chronicle, it was the people of Shawa and Amhara who advised him not to try it.³ The king had no alternative but to accept the wise counsel of the people who closely knew the cavalry power of the Oromo. During his long march to and from Shawa, Iyasu did not fight with any of the Oromo groups. In this sense he did not achieve anything apart from exhausting his own soldiers. The failure of his expedition had an immediate impact on the relations between the Oromo and their subjects, and also on the morale of his own soldiers. Some of the Oromo subjects who earlier sought support from Iyasu, recognized the failure of his offensive against the Oromo, repented for their past mistakes and made peace with the Oromo.⁴ The chronicler heaps insults and imprecations upon these people, who betrayed their erstwhile Christian ally and made peace with the Oromo. However the decision of these people to come to terms with reality is an unmistakable indication for the collapse of Iyasu's crusade against the Oromo across the Abay. This in turn affected the morale of his soldiers. When Iyasu wanted to lead an expedition across the Abay

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1. Annales Iohannis I ... , p. text 166, trans. 174.
 2. The Qala Ganda expected Iyasu's immediate military expedition against the Tulama. But Iyasu sent them only large quantities of gifts and promised them future military assistance.
 3. Annales Iohannis I ... , pp. text 180-1, trans. 189-190.
 4. Ibid., pp. text 190-1, trans. 200-201.

into Damot in 1697, his soldiers :

... refused to accompany him beyond the Blue Nile. The soldiers complained that the expeditions into distant lands were taking them away from their farming occupations. They justified their refusal to help Iyasu in his Galla campaigns by referring to the very decree which had brought the swift and terrible anger of the Qureban soldiers upon Za-Dengel. (1)

As we saw earlier, Za-Dengel's ambitious Oromo campaigns led to his untimely tragic death at the hands of his own soldiers.² The same fate awaited Iyasu who had neither learned any lesson from the history of Za-Dengel, nor taken heed of his soldiers' warning.³ Iyasu's second attempt to cross the Abay in 1698 ended ignominiously.⁴ In 1700, when some Macha bands invaded Gojjam, Iyasu left Gondar with speed and secrecy so as to surprise and destroy the invaders. However, ironically, the people of Gojjam themselves told the Macha bands that Iyasu was coming to attack them.⁵ The bands fled and saved themselves. The action of the people of Gojjam naturally incensed and deeply hurt Iyasu. This episode (and it is not an isolated one) seems to suggest that Iyasu's Oromo campaign was unpopular even among the people it was supposed to protect.

Thus by 1700 the following picture could be observed in the relations between the Christian kingdom and the Oromo. Though Iyasu still led two more expeditions against the Macha (in 1702 and 1704)⁶ his offensive across

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1. Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia ...", p. 588, citing Annales Iohannis I ... , p. text 190, trans. 201.
 2. Supra, p. 268.
 3. Iyasu was assassinated in 1706.
 4. In 1698 his soldiers flatly refused to obey orders of their king. See for instance, Annales Iohannis I, pp. trans. 202-203.
 5. Ibid., pp. text 202, trans. 213.
 6. In 1702, when the terrible famine devastated Gondar, Iyasu and his officials were obliged to feed from their own supplies, "an innumerable multitude of destitute for two months." R. Pankhurst, "The Great Ethiopian famine of 1889-1892 : a new assessment", in Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences, vol. xxi (1966), p. 97. See also Annales Iohannis, p. trans. 231. Iyasu's Macha campaign which followed this famine seems to have been motivated more by the prospect of rich booty to replace the depleted supplies of the king and his officials than by a desire for a military conquest. Again we suspect that Iyasu's 1704 expedition to the Gibe region was perhaps influenced by the effect of wild smallpox, which wrought havoc among some Oromo groups. According to one source : "... This disease met them in Abyssinian villages. It raged among them with such violence, that whole provinces, conquered by them, became half desert; and in many places, they were forced to become tributary to those whom before they kept in continual fear." (Bruce, Travels ... iii, pp. 246-7). It is not far-fetched to assume that in his grand design to conquer all the Macha in 1704 Iyasu may have thought that the smallpox might have weakened the Macha resistance.

the Abay was already a failure. In the areas east and south of the Abay the Christian leadership was unable to force the Oromo into submission "... without external aids or technological superiority over the latter's superior cavalry".¹ The Oromo too were unable to make Gojjam and Bagameder their own land without submitting to and serving the Christian kings, and embracing Orthodox Christianity, thus becoming part of the main stream of the Amhara society.

1. Getahun Dilebo, "Emperor Menelik's Ethiopia : 1865-1916 : National unification or Amhara communal domination", p. 37.

Chapter Five

The migration of the Macha to the south-western region and their settlement in the Gibe region from 1570-1710

In the last two chapters we followed the course of the Oromo migration into Harar and the northern and central part of the Christian kingdom. This chapter examines their further migration mainly to the south-western regions of Ethiopia. The Macha section, which spearheaded and dominated the whole course of the migration, is the subject of our discussion in this chapter. At the same time, since the history of the Macha cannot be analyzed apart from the peoples of the area through which the Macha passed, we have given considerable attention to the history of the people of Ennarya, thereby showing the dynamism of conflict, interaction and change which occurred over two centuries. Before going on to describe the course of the migration, we should briefly look at some of the factors that made Damot, Shat, Konch, Bizamo, Bosha and other districts easy prey for the migrating Macha, while Ennarya alone proved to be too hard a nut for the Macha arms to crack. It is only by looking at the underlying forces of disintegration in the area that we will be able to explain the dynamism of the Oromo migration.

After 1560 the south-western regions were in much the same predicament as Harar and the Christian kingdom. We have already seen how the battle of Hazalo in 1559 dealt a "coup de grace" to the Muslim military power of Harar. Harar, the centre of Islamic learning and civilization, the political capital of the mighty Muslim empire for fifteen years, and the long-time entrepot for the lucrative long distance trade, now suddenly found itself reduced to a town exerting little influence beyond its walls, deprived of its historic functions and thrown back on its own resources.¹ Likewise, the Christian kingdom, although it quickly recovered from the devastating jihadic wars, rapidly lost ground to the migrating pastoral Oromo.² In our discussion on the dynamism of the sixteenth century, we have referred to the jihadic period, because we believe it critically conditioned the period which followed. The jihad, which was really the beginning of a radical transformation of the political landscape of the Horn, was actually a blessing for the migrating pastoral Oromo. A brief glance backward from the time of jihad over the general course of history of two neighbouring provinces which shared many common characteristics,

1. Supra, p. 213.

2. See Chapter Four above.

would clarify the point under discussion. We mention two examples of different response to the jihadic situation, that of Damot and Ennarya, which shaped their subsequent histories.

First Damot. We have already seen that since 1270, when the new Amhara dynasty was formed in Shawa, Damot was a prize within its reach.¹ The kingdom of Damot, famous for its trade in gold, was located between the Gibe and the Abay in the thirteenth century.² This land of wealth became part of the emerging Christian kingdom under Amda-Siyon. With the power derived from the wealth and manpower of Damot, Amda-Siyon was able to vanquish seven Muslim states within the space of two years.³ The incorporation of Damot not only provided the Christian empire with material prosperity, but also opened a new chapter for the spread of Christianity.⁴ The baptism of Damot's ruling house added glamour to what was already a dramatic moment in the rapid consolidation of the Christian empire. The harmonious relationships between the ruling house of the conqueror and the conquered is an example (albeit a rare one) of an ideal relationship, in which ideology became an important factor guiding national integration. In contrast the relationships between the Christian rulers and the vanquished Muslim ruling families were subject to constant strains and stresses which in time produced fuel for the devouring flame of mutual destruction. In the ideological battles between Christianity and Islam, the leaders of both communities failed to replace old doctrine and hopes by new realities. Compared to the relationship between the rulers of the Christian kingdom and the ruling house of Damot, that of the Muslim ruling houses with their Christian overlords was singularly unsuccessful.

In contrast with Damot, Ennarya was spared both from the devouring sword of Amda-Siyon, as well as from the diffusion of the beneficial effects of Christianity which followed in its train.⁵ Amda-Siyon's conquest did not in fact reach Ennarya. It was only a century later that we hear of Ennarya paying tribute to the Christian kingdom. Even then, in matters of internal

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1. Supra, p. 14.
 2. Tadesse Tamrat, Church and state in Ethiopia 1270-1527, pp. 120-123. See also Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia ...", p. 53.
 3. Supra, pp. 14-5.
 4. Tadesse Tamrat, ibid., p. 182, et passim. It appears that the previous radiation out of the Zagwe dynasty had kindled among the people of Damot a spark of Christianity, which burst into flame during the missionary activities of Saint Takla Haymanot and subsequent conquest of Amda-Siyon.
 5. The greatest stimulus for the spread of Christianity in the 14th century seems to have come from the victories of Amda-Siyon.
 6. The tribute from Ennarya was reported for the first time in the song in honour of the victories of Yishaq (1413-1430).

administration, the hereditary ruling house of Ennarya remained responsible and the Christian kings neither tampered with the order of succession, nor asked the rulers to embrace Christianity. The Christian kings only exacted tribute from the rulers of Ennarya, while leaving them to be entirely the masters of their own affairs. The deeper reasons for this exceptional liberality of the Christian kings towards the pagan rulers of Ennarya will become clearer further in the discussion.

For two centuries following the foundation of the Amhara dynasty in 1270, it had been an accepted doctrine that the best way to protect the kingdom was to carry war into enemy territory. The successors of Zara Ya'eqob, however, had been content to remain in their own lands, ready to crush any invader rash enough to attack them. The jihadic war of ^{the} sixteenth century not only showed the weakness of this doctrine, but also altered the military landscape of the region. Under the hail of blows from the Muslim army, the Christian kingdom disintegrated. The king saved himself by flight. The disaster which had overtaken the Christian leadership had also engulfed Damot. The rulers of the province suffered a series of defeats from the invading Muslim army. Thus, the Christian forces of Damot were left in complete disarray; some fled, and others surrendered. There was nothing the Amhara Christians could do to assist Damot, and the Muslims moved in to exact their revenge for the stiff resistance put up against them.

The tragedy which had affected Damot did not, however, extend to Ennarya. At the beginning of the jihad, Ennarya tried to remain neutral. Once the direction of the tide became clearer, the ruler of Ennarya made a firm decision which delighted the Muslims and saved Ennarya from their swords.

When the Muslims went into the country of Damot, Balaw Sagad ... ran away with thirty horsemen and crossed the Gibe. He stayed ... in Ennarya, in the hope that the ruler of Ennarya might save him from the Muslims. However, the ruler of Ennarya chained all of them and brought them to Wazir Dole. The ruler of Ennarya brought 1000 ounces of gold tribute and rich presents to Adole. The latter was delighted and gave the former beautiful clothes, and sent him back to his country with honour. (1)

By these practical measures, the Ennarya ruler not only maintained himself in power but also saved his country from the rattle of Muslim sabres. As we

1. Arab Faqih, Futuh al-Hebasha Arabic text, p. 209.

shall see below, time and again the leaders of Ennarya showed a touch of realism in a dynamic circumstance. The banner around which the leaders rallied support was to keep enemies out of their land. This rigid policy was balanced by one of paying tribute to, and trading with, any powerful leader who was in control of the region of the Christian kingdom. In other words, they were jealous of their internal autonomy and they paid regular tribute and gave rich gifts, so as not to provide any pretext for interference in their internal affairs. What is remarkable about the leaders of Ennarya is the consistency with which they maintained this policy. They believed passionately in maintaining their autonomy, without failing to pay what was due to their masters. They were ready to fight to the bitter end any enemy who crossed the frontier of their land, but they were particularly reluctant to fight beyond their own frontiers. In this they were greatly helped by the topography of their land, as well as by the unity and self-confidence of their people, which made them ever-ready to punish any enemy unwise enough to cross into their territory.¹

Once the jihad ran its course and the weakened Christian authority ^{was} restored in the region, Ennarya was the first to adjust to the changed situation, and once again without resorting to war. We have already seen that in 1548, Galawdewos conducted a devastating six months campaign on the frontiers of Damot.² The expedition had at least three purposes. First, it was directed against the governor of Konch, who had refused to pay the tribute.³ Secondly it was meant to punish the inhabitants of Bosha, who were reported to have killed Christians during the jihad. Thirdly, it was meant to replace the depleted resources of the Christian treasury by a veiled act of brigandage. Once again, the sword of the conqueror fell on the defenceless inhabitants of the neighbours of Ennarya. It was with the riches, slaves, cattle and gold taken at this time that Galawdewos financed his last and ^{most} expensive expedition to Harar in 1550.⁴

Ennarya gave no opportunities for Galawdewos to invade her territory. On the contrary, as he approached the border, the ruler surprised him with

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1. In this sense what made Ennarya different from all her neighbours was neither the size of her territory, nor the number of her population. It was her pragmatic policy of self-preservation based on neutrality and caution.
 2. Supra, p. 169. See also, W.E. Conzelman, Le Chronique de Galawdewos, pp. 37-38.
 3. Bermedez, The Portuguese expedition to Abyssinia, pp. 237-8.
 4. Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia ... ", p. 161.

pleasant and conspicuous generosity, with humility and words of loyalty on his lips. The clever leader presented lavish gifts and tribute. His choice of time for paying tribute was excellent, his understanding of the financial difficulties of Galawdewos was profound, choice of place appropriate and his delivery impressive. In this he gave form and expression to Galawdewos's desire of reconstructing the devastated kingdom. In short, he won the respect and admiration of Galawdewos. In the congenial atmosphere generated by Enmarya's gold, the past was forgotten and forgiven as if nothing had happened. Enmarya was left undisturbed. She enjoyed peace and prosperity.

The fate of the pagan neighbours of Enmarya was the exact opposite. Many of the pagan communities of this area had begged Galawdewos to convert them to Christianity. Probably their sudden clamour for Christianity was not out of love for it, but because they thought this was a sure way of escaping from the devastating slave-raids conducted by the Christian leaders upon them. In the words of a Jesuit father, who was in the kingdom in 1555, the plea for baptism went unheeded.

And that you may know what sort of people these are : persons who should well know about it affirmed to me several times that many of those pagans who border upon them and who pay them tribute begged them many times that they make them Christians and that, thus, they would happily continue to pay them their taxes. And they did not want to do so that they may continuously make raids on them, which they do and they take from them their children and wives and possessions. And they send them to the sea to be sold to the Turks and Moors, to whom those of this kingdom sell every year more than ten or twelve thousand slaves, of whom there would not have been one person, who would not have willingly become Christian. (1)

It was ironic that Galawdewos, who has been reported to have been the most humane king ever to sit on the Christian throne,² and who was regarded as a torch for the spread of Christianity, did so much to reduce not only the chance of spreading the faith, but also undermined the future resistance of these pagan communities.

Minas died in 1563, a year which saw a series of development that contributed to the rapid spread of the migrating Oromo to western Shawa, Damot

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1. The Jesuit Goncalo Rodrigues in a letter of December 1556, cited in Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia ... ", p. 104.
 2. Merid Wolde Aregay, *ibid.*, p. 371.

Bizamo, Shat, Konch and several other districts. When Sarsa Dengel succeeded to the throne in 1563, Hamalmal, the old general, rebelled against the young king. During the interval between his quarrel with and reconciliation to Sarsa Dengel, Hamalmal settled in western Shawa with his large army. The pagan Gafat tribes of this area became an easy prey and the victims of plunder by his soldiers. "Hamalmal had overlooked the problems of feeding the continuously increasing regiments. Gafat villages of Endagebatan and the neighbouring district of Gendabarat were wantonly pillaged."¹

Many Gafat chiefs, who were outraged by the pillage of Hamalmal's soldiers, saw the salvation of their people in submission to Sarsa Dengel, Hamalmal thereupon reconciled himself to the young king, but the plight of the people of Gafat continued. For example, when the soldiers of Rom Sagad, the governor of Shawa, were ordered back to their eastern garrisons (which they had abandoned since 1559),² they refused to do so. Instead they plundered Gendabarat, Endagebatan and Mugar.³ To add to their misery, Sarsa Dengel pacified the notorious Giyorgis Haile regiment by settling them in Mugar, where they continued with their wanton destruction and plunder.⁴ In their short-sighted policies, the Christian political and military leaders were not only causing the slow death of the Gafat people,⁵ but were also creating a vacuum into which the pastoral Oromo would move. Thus a few years later, when a storming party of Borana cavalry passed through the region, Gafat had no strength left to resist. The Gafat pastoralists who were impoverished,⁶ and the farmers who were uprooted against their will, had either to submit to the Oromo and become part of them, or to run en masse across the Abay, to seek refuge in the province of Gojjam. They did both.⁷

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1. Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia ... ", p. 213.
 2. Supra, p. 233.
 3. Conti Rossini, Historia regis Sarsa Dengel, pp. 25-6.
 4. Ibid., p. 30.
 5. Like several other minority groups, the Gafat people were reduced to such an insignificant number by the events of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.
 6. It was at this time that the tax on cattle was introduced for the first time. This new tax seems to have proved a timely pretext for impoverishing the Gafat pastoralists as well as farmers. On this tax, see Almeida, in Some Records of Ethiopia, p. 88.
 7. Infra, p. 315.

The history of the Gafat people of western Shawa runs parallel with that of the Damot. During the rebellion of Hamalmal, Damot was governed by Taklo, a man who is described (with some justification) as "intelligent, and famous for his sagacity and wisdom".¹ He was instrumental in failing Hamalmal's rebellion, but, though he succeeded in securing the throne for Sarsa Dengal, he did so at a great cost. His large force continuously increased by the addition of the rebellious soldiers, who refused to return to the eastern districts. In order to pacify them, Taklo had to indulge in lavish generosity towards them. For this pillaging, sacking and extortion became the rule, and seeking fair tribute the exception. As we shall see below, these undisciplined and disloyal soldiers were brave among the defenceless peasants, but cowardly before the Oromo. They rebelled against Taklo for no other reason than his excessive liberality which failed to appease them. Taklo found it impossible to keep them in the province, for which reason Damot was taken from him and given to an adventurer by the name of Fasilo, who soon became the gravest menace to the man who appointed him. In 1566 Sarsa Dengal wanted to pass the rainy season in Damot, but his soldiers refused it on the pretext that it had an unhealthy climate.² Sarsa Dengal had no alternative but to abandon his plan. The real reason for the soldiers refusal, however, is hinted at in the chronicle. Damot, which only a few years earlier had been described as one of the richest provinces³ in the kingdom, was by 1566 largely denuded of its wealth by the continuous pillaging and plundering by the rebellious soldiers, who had come and gone through the strategically located province. The young king, who knew the root cause of the rebellion, moved to Endagebatan, in western Shawa, where his soldiers found fresh pasture for their rapacity. Fasilo, who was supposed to keep in their post the provincial soldiers of Damot, marched against Sarsa Dengal, at the head of mutinous soldiers, with the proclaimed intention of chopping off his head. In the battle of August 1566, Sarsa Dengal would have perished had he not received timely warning. He saved himself by flight. The victorious Fasilo looted his camp and put his soldiers to the sword. Frustrated by the escape of Sarsa Dengal, Fasilo marched through Gendabarat to Gojjam committing all kinds of outrageous plunders. Despite the failure of its main objective, Fasilo's rebellion was terrible

1. Conti Rossini, Historia regis Sarsa Dengal, pp. 19, 27.

2. Ibid., p. 35.

3. e.g. Alvares, The Prester John of the Indies, vol. II, p. 455.

and its consequences drastic. The misery it inflicted on the people of Damot and western Shawa was beyond calculation. Sarsa Dengel was shocked, and became captive to the demands of his soldiers in the time to come. Thus the flame of endless slave-raids which burnt the pagan minorities between the second half of the sixteenth and the first half of the seventeenth century was already alight at this early date, in the reign of Sarsa Dengel. As with the Gafat in western Shawa, the people of Damot received a heavy wound from which there is good reason to assume that they did not recover before the Borana assault a few years later.¹

But all was not gloomy for Sarsa Dengel. In 1566, the governor of Konch gave him shelter and treated him kindly. By the beginning of 1567, the soldiers of the adventurer Fasiilo surrendered to him. This was followed by the submission of (albeit temporary) Yishaq of Tigray. At the beginning of 1568, Sepenhi, the clever politician and famous ruler of Ennarya, delighted Sarsa Dengel with rich tribute.

... Sepenhi vint vers lui avec une armée nombreuse comme les sauterelles couvrant la terre. Alors il entra à la réception royale, selon sa loi; parmi ses hommes, les uns avaient disposé en signe de révérence leurs vêtements de soie bleue, d'autres le manduqé, d'autres encore leurs velours chacun de sa couleur. Après cela, Sepenhi remit au roi son tribut, composé d'une bonne quantité d'or, telle que ceux qui l'avaient précédé dans la charge de gouverneur de l'Enarya n'en avaient jamais donné une égale aux rois qui avaient existé auparavant. (2)

There could never have been a more difficult time than this, as Sarsa Dengel needed gold to replenish his looted camp and empty treasury. Once again the ruler of Ennarya surprised Christian leadership with his far-sightedness, his understanding of the spirit of the time and his demonstration of total loyalty, backed by a show of strength, to warn the king that it was not possible to let loose his slaving-raids on Ennarya with impunity. This mixture of humility and strength had the desired effect. Sarsa Dengel never conducted slaving-raids in Ennarya. For Ennarya there was nothing new in this policy. It was part of her established tradition, to pay in full what was due to her masters, but at the same time to keep them at bay. For Sarsa Dengel this

1. *Infra*, p. 315.

2. Conti Rossini, Historia regis Sarsa Dengel, p. 44.

was a historic compromise dictated by economic and political considerations. Thus of all the non-Christian provinces of his kingdom, Ennarya alone escaped from the devastation of his slave-raids. This in itself was a significant achievement for Ennarya. More was to come in the decades to follow.

The governor of the province of Bosha neither learned anything new from the practical and pragmatic policy of his neighbour Sepenhi, nor forgot and forgave the terrible misery Galawdewos had inflicted on his country. As a result, he refused to pay tribute to Sarsa Dengel, and so invited punishment on his people. Under the combined pressure of the forces of Sarsa Dengel and Sepenhi, the unwise governor surrendered and submitted tribute and rich gifts to calm the king's wrath. What is interesting to observe here is not Sarsa Dengel's easy victory, but Sepenhi's cooperation in the attack on Bosha. It may be that he was simply obeying an order from the king; but one suspects that Sepenhi also had other motives for involving Ennarya in her first attack on her pagan neighbour. It seems that Sepenhi was well aware of the flood-like spread of the Oromo in the eastern provinces. By 1568 Sarsa Dengel had already lost many provinces to the Oromo.¹ One suspects that Sepenhi may have realized that the clouds were gathering for the Oromo storm to pour on the Gibe region. It may have occurred to him that Ennarya by herself was in no position to stem the tide.

Like the governor of Bosha, Aze the Muslim governor of Hadiya, refused to pay tribute to Sarsa Dengel. But unlike the governor of Bosha, Aze had a formidable force of 1700 cavalry and 500 armed malasay², including a large infantry. The Muslims of Hadiya who had earlier suffered at the hands of the Oromo, had no longer any desire for war with the Christians. The attitude was expressed by the action of Aze's soldiers, who refused to fight with Sarsa Dengel. Only the malasay, the Muslim force from Harar,³ fought. Deserted by their fellow Muslims and outnumbered by Sarsa Dengel's men, they were easily crushed. Aze reconciled himself to the king who was magnanimous in return. The king left Aze in his office, but stripped him of real power. Takla Giyorgis was made the commander of the provincial soldiers.⁴ With this success in Hadiya, Sarsa Dengel proceeded to Waj, where he left the Muslim

1. *Supra*, pp. 237-40.

2. On Malasay, see Chapter One, pp. 33-4.

3. These were part of the Muslim force left behind by Amir Nur in Waj in 1559.

4. Conti Rossini, Historia regis Sarsa Dengel, pp. 48-9.

force under Asma-ad-Din undisturbed.¹

In 1571, during his stay in Waj, the king again appointed Takla Giyorgis as the "governor of Damot and dajazmach of the Gibe Awash region."² The appointment was strikingly similar to those of 1559 and 1548. In 1571 Takla Giyorgis was made the dajazmach of a vast region. In 1559, Hamalmal had been made the dajazmach of all the provinces east of the Abay, while in 1548 Fanuel was appointed³ with authority over Dawaro and its dependencies. In all three cases, the appointment was made at the eleventh hour to stop the advance of the Oromo forces. All three appointments were followed by the departure of the monarchs from the storm centres. In all three cases the withdrawal of these officials was accompanied by the massive exodus of Christian refugees. The appointment of 1548 and that of 1571 were made at the time when both Galawdewos and Sarsa Dengel were powerful. But that of 1559 was made at the time when the Christian power had reached its nadir.⁴

The beginning of the Macha migration to the Gibe region

Having appointed Takla Giyorgis, Sarsa Dengel left Waj for Dambiya in 1571 at the very time when the Borana Robale (1570-78) was about to invade Shawa and Waj. The simultaneous Borana attack on both provinces was quite devastating and swift. Alarmed at the success of the Borana, the king returned to Shawa in 1572, where he ordered quick mobilization, and administered a quick sharp shock to the Borana, which forced the latter to withdraw from Waj.⁵ After this success, he campaigned for two years at the head of his large army, first towards western Shawa, and then to Damot and Bizamo, everywhere inflicting heavy damages on the pagan communities. As we shall see below, the king had been engaged in extensive depopulation for two years. Just as he was completing the debilitating round of slave-raids among the pagan communities, the Robale gada attacked Gojjam. Shortly after, Zara Yohannes, the experienced governor of Gojjam, was killed by the Oromo.⁶ His death led to the rebellion of the garrisons in the province. The pacification of the

1. Perhaps Sarsa Dengel did this for two reasons. First in gratitude for the help of Asma-ad-Din, whose support won him the throne in 1563. Secondly, to strengthen the defence of Waj against the Borana.

2. Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia ...", pp. 234-5. See also Conti Rossini, Historia regis Sarsa Dengel, pp. 48-9.

3. From the records it is difficult to tell whether Fanuel was made dajazmach at the time of his appointment. Le Chronique de Galawdewos, p. 144 only say that Galawdewos deputed Fanuel in his place, while he himself went to Damot. As a deputy of the emperor with authority over Dawaro and a number of other provinces, Fanuel may have had a title higher than dajazmach. See for instance, Merid Wolde Aregay "Southern Ethiopia ...", pp. 268-9.

4. Supra, p. 184.

5. Bahrey, in Some Records of Ethiopia, p. 119.

6. Supra, p. 247.

garrisons in Gojjam took the king's time and energy, and it meant that the Borana were left undisturbed in the provinces east of the Abay.

When the Muslim forces from Harar invaded Bali and Waj in 1576, the Borana deliberately withdrew from the storm centres, avoiding conflict with both the Muslims and Christians. This is one of the many examples which show how the Oromo tried to be neutral in the conflict between the Muslims and Christians. We have already seen three examples. First in the 1520s, when Imam Ahmad invaded the Christian kingdom, the pastoral Oromo remained beyond the range of the Muslim sword; and again in 1559, when Amir Nur entered the Christian kingdom, the Oromo withdrew out of the storm centre, keeping themselves in reserve at the time when the Muslim army plunged its feeble sword into the disintegrating body of the Christian kingdom. Once again in 1576, the pastoralists kept themselves out of the conflict between the two enemies. The outcome of this last war proved to be the end of the political importance of Harar, and at the same time the weakening of the Christian kingdom. The invading Muslim force was liquidated. "... The whole Moorish army perished this day, except the horse, either by the sword or in the river, nor had the Moors received so severe a blow since the defeat of Gagne by Claudius (Galaw-dewos)".¹ But the Christian force was also left too feeble to stop its new enemy. Thus once again, as in 1559, the real victors were the Oromo. In other words, the Christian force succeeded in dealing the death-blow to their enemy at the cost of sustaining deep injuries themselves. Unlike the two previous times, when the Muslim conquests prepared the soil for the Oromo success, in 1576 the Oromo reaped where the Christian had sown. This is shown by the fact that before Sarsa Dengel had left Shawa in 1577, the Borana had already overrun Waj. The Borana devastation in Waj sent a wave of terror throughout western Shawa, where the Christian community rightly guessed that the next blow was to fall on them. Their fear was succinctly expressed by the mother of the king.

... Ensuite, pendant qu'il était là, sa mère apprit que son fils désirait aller au Tigré ; elle quitta tout de suite Gend Barat (car alors elle demeurait là) et s'empressa d'aller le trouver à Sabarad. Ce jour-là elle se mit à lui dire: 'O mon fils, pourquoi as-tu décidé cette chose contre moi et tes frères ? Veux-tu donc nous livrer aux Galla ? Notre perte ne te cause-t-elle pas de chagrin?' Par ces paroles et d'autres semblables, elle fléchit son coeur et le persuada, car il était obéissant à sa mère et ... Lorsqu'il renonça à aller au Tigré, il résolut d'aller au pays de Wag combattre les Galla qui s'y trouvaient. (2)

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1. James Bruce, Travels to discover ... , p. 249.
 2. Conti Rossini, Historia regis Sarsa Dengel, pp. 60-1.

His change of heart was only temporary and intended to mitigate mounting criticism against him and to allay the fears of the Christians in western Shawa. His campaign against the Borana was short-lived and it inflicted no lasting damage on them, since they dispersed before him. With an insignificant success to his name, Sarsa Dengel withdrew all the Christian regiments east of the Abay and marched to Dambiya, from where he led a more successful expedition against Yishaq in 1579.

One of the most singular documents written by an unknown compiler in the first half of the eighteenth century sums up the history of this period in a striking sentence. "When ... the country was wasted by the hands of the Galla Malak Sagad was exiled and came to Dambiya."¹ The use of the term "exile" has profound meaning. Sarsa Dengel's withdrawal to Dambiya shattered the Christian authority east of the Abay. Even though he tried time and again to restore his authority in the region, all attempts failed ignominiously and therefore his withdrawal to Dambiya remained an exile in the true sense of the word.

Sarsa Dengel's decision to take all the eastern regiments to Tigray in 1578 fortuitously coincided with the period of a new Borana gada, which was undoubtedly the most aggressive of all the Borana gada that fought so far. This was the Birmaje gada (1578-1586), which continued the war with vigour and revolutionary innovation. This was the adoption of ox-hide shields of body length, which made the poisoned arrows of the Maya warriors irrelevant in war. We have already seen that it was the Maya poisoned arrows which kept the Borana out of Waj for a long time.² The effect of the new shield was dramatic and the consequences shattering.

This Birmaje of the Borana made ox-hide shields of body length and attacked the Maya, who were skilled archers, but were beaten because there was no place for their arrows to strike, since the shields were made of stiff ox-hide. (3)

The Maya were respected and dreaded by all for their deadly weapons. There is every reason to believe that it was the poisoned arrows of the Maya that

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1. Hega Waser'ata Mangest, cited in Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia ... " pp. 269-270.
 2. *Supra*, p. 60.
 3. Bahrey, in Some Records of Ethiopia, p. 120.

kept the Borana out of Waj for a long time. The Borana adopted the body-long ox-hide shields only after they had suffered repeatedly at the hands of the Maya warriors. Once adopted, the new shield revolutionized the whole course of the Borana warfare. As the large scale use of cavalry by the Michelle gada (1554-1562) quickened the pace of Barentu spread, so did the adoption of the protective shield for the Borana Birmaje. In every sense this was a real-turning point in the course of the Borana migration.

... Birmaje pressed hard on Azmach Daharagot, commander in chief of the king's army, and killed Zena and his guards. At first Daharagot defeated the Galla many times; but by the will of God, because the sins of the Christians were not expiated, the Galla devastated Arena, the country of which Daharagot was governor and killed Gato Batro Badlo, Amdo, and other personages. (1)

As a result Daharagot withdrew, abandoning all the provinces over which he was appointed governor. The Borana Birmaje, motivated by the booty they had gained in Waj, insured for future success by the protective shields, attacked and devastated Damot. The Christians in Damot fled to Gojjam. Some of the indigenous people too fled across the Abay to Gojjam, and across the Gibe to Ennarya. But the majority of them seem to have accepted the new masters, by whom they were adopted en masse. The Christian leadership in Damot, under the shock of the Borana attack, thought of nothing but flight across the great river. "Among the countless people who had fled to Gojjam were Selus Haila (the mother of the king) and other members of the royal family."²

The Borana Birmaje quickly overran "... the whole low country between the mountains of Narea and the Nile."³ In this vast area they attacked Gojjam, Konch, Shat, Ennarya, Bizamo, the Choman swamp, Gumar and Bosha. The widespread and scattered formation thinned their numbers and mitigated the effects of their sudden attack. Even then, many provinces suffered a great deal. Only Gojjam, because of its size, its topography, the density of its population, and its military establishment, and Ennarya, because of the quality of its leadership, and the impregnability of its defence system, came out unscathed. As for the other provinces, it was their first shock, which hastened

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1. Bahrey, in Some Records of Ethiopia, p. 120.
 2. Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia ... ", p. 335.
 3. James Bruce, Travels to discover ... , pp. 249-50.

the short journey of their disappearance into historical oblivion.¹ The period of the Birmaje gada came to an end at the time when Damot became the headquarters from where the Macha attack was to be deployed in all directions.

The Mulata gada (1586-1594) continued to wage war in all directions. Most of the Borana Mulata held their jarra ceremony² in the safe-base areas in Damot, but one part of them held it in Gojjam.³ This is the first time we hear of the jarra ceremony taking place west of the Abay. Before 1586 it seems to have been held east of the Abay. We do not know why the vanguard of the Borana held its ceremony in Gojjam this time, but assume that it may have been due to the degree of self-confidence which they had gained after their spectacular victories in Waj, Shawa and Damot. Unprepared for the thunderbolt that was to strike them, the Borana bands continued to feast themselves on the cattle they had looted from the peasants. Sarsa Dengel, who was on his way to Damot, heard the frightening news and realized the threat the Borana posed to his refugee mother in Gojjam and rushed to her rescue, administering a very severe blow on the Borana. He attacked them suddenly with his crack force, consisting of musketeers and cavalry armed with iron helmets. The Borana shields proved useless and irrelevant in front of fire power, and swords handled by drilled soldiers. Those Borana who bravely faced the firing were mowed down. The rest did not think of a battle, but sought their safety in flight. As all of Sarsa Dengel's troops were fresh, they were able to pursue the scattered Borana with great vigour; many were slain, and the rest perished at the hands of the peasants. In the words of a contemporary historian :

... He did not act according to the custom of the kings of his ancestors who when making war were in the habit of sending their troops ahead, remaining themselves in the rear with the pick of their cavalry and infantry, praising those who went forward bravely and punishing those who lagged behind. This time, on the contrary, our king put himself at the head of his brave troops and fought stoutly; seeing which the army threw itself like a pack of wild beasts on the Galla, who were all killed without survivors. Most of them fell over a precipice, so that the inhabitants of the country and the labourers killed them wherever they found them. (5)

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1. *Infra*, pp. 331-333.
 2. On the jarra ceremony, see Chapter Two, pp. 129-30.
 3. Bahrey, in Some Records of Ethiopia, p. 122.
 4. By this time, Sarsa Dengel had probably more than 500 muskets, out of which about 300 were the fruit of his victory against Yishaq and the Turks in 1579 in Tigray.
 5. Bahrey, ibid., p. 123.

That day Sarsa Dengel, who was determined to restore his lost prestige, raised the morale of his Christian subjects and humiliated his opponents, the pastoral Oromo. He distinguished himself in the midst of the Borana, by fighting like a common soldier. None of his soldiers thought of sparing themselves and their resolution to fight to the bitter end contributed to the slaughter of the day.

The conversion of the ruling house of Ennarya to Christianity

His resounding victory in Gojjam had its intended effect on the Borana in Damot, who were at the time invading Ennarya. It not only relieved the pressure, but also boosted the morale of the governor of Ennarya. Subsequently Sarsa Dengel correctly decided to go to Ennarya. From a military view, it was a timely and necessary decision. From a religious view, it turned out to be a land-mark in the history of Ennarya. From the political point of view, the decision was imposing. Most importantly, economically it was overwhelming.

... The king desirous to open a communication with a country where there was a great trade, especially for gold, crossed the Nile on his way to that province, the Galla flying everywhere before him. He was received with a very great joy by the prince of that country, who looked upon him as his deliverer from those cruel enemies. Here he received many rich presents, more particularly a large quantity of gold. And he wintered at Cutheny, in that province, where Abba Hedar his brother¹ died, having been blown up with gunpowder with his wife and children.

During Sarsa Dengel's stay, in and around Damot in 1588, the governor of Ennarya came all the way to meet him and brought tribute of gold. The meeting turned out to be the most important event of the decade.

Before the arrival of the Borana in the Gibe region, we have no record indicating whether the leadership in Ennarya had the desire or pressing need for conversion to Christianity. But times had changed, and there was now an urgent desire among the leaders of Ennarya to convert themselves and their people to the ideology which Christianity provided. We have seen above how the Christian leadership time and again refused to baptise the pagan communities. As Galawdewos ignored the pagan request, so did Sarsa Dengel. For example "in 1564 the Shanasha of Bizamo had repeatedly begged a relative of the emperor to stop raiding them and give them priests to convert them."² But their request fell on deaf ears. Now time had changed, and the Christian leadership had to

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1. James Bruce, Travels to discover ... , p. 250.
 2. Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia ... ", pp. 298-9.

change its attitude. This was first seen in 1581, when Sarsa Dengel gave permission for the conversion of the Gafat in Shat.¹ Interestingly, this was at the time when the Borana cavalry was overrunning Shat. At about the same time, the governor of Ennarya, and the successor of Sepenhi, named La'asonhi, approached the Christian court for baptism. The chronicler, who wants to whitewash the king in this affair, squarely puts the blame on his chief treasurer.

... Il apprit que le père de Badanco, chef de l'Enarya, appelé La'asonhi, voulait devenir chrétien, mais que les azaz, chargés des finances du royaume, ne lui avaient pas donné leur agrément, parce qu'ils avaient été retenus par des soucis matériels, par amour de l'argent. (2)

Nevertheless, where La'asonhi failed, his son and successor Badancho succeeded.

... Le roi rappela a Badanco que son père aimait la religion chrétienne, et qu'il n'avait pas reçu la grâce du baptême seulement parce que le temps n'était pas encore venu. Maintenant, montre en action ce que ton père avait médité dans son coeur; accomplis, en recevant le baptême chrétien, ce qu'il avait commencé en désir.. Pour lui faire accepter ce conseil, il lui envoya des docteurs pour le prêcher. (3)

It was Sarsa Dengel's good luck that he arrived in Damot after gaining a formidable victory against the Borana in Gojjam. It was Badancho's good luck that the king arrived after Ennarya had weathered the storm and forced the Borana into retreat. The king was delighted with the governor's performance, and the governor was relieved at the arrival of the king. Rarely did the mood of both men alter so dramatically in a single year from despair to jubilation. The old practices and doctrines gave way to new realities. Ideological unity between the Christian leadership and that of Ennarya opened a new chapter in their relationship.

From the description of the chronicler, Badancho appears to have been a very intelligent man, a statesman par excellence, wholly determined to resist the Borana assault. For his pagan background, he compensated by his sincere desire to embrace Christianity.⁴ He was considered as the centre, the life and soul of his people's desire to embrace Christianity. According to the chronicler

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1. Conti Rossini, Historia regis Sarsa Dengel, pp. 136-7.
 2. Ibid., p. 180. This highly useful piece of information is found in the variant of the long chronicle.
 3. Ibid., p. 136.
 4. Ibid., p. 138.

he was endlessly appreciative and delighted in every manifestation of spreading Christianity in the highest degree. The marvellous thing about the way the chronicler describes Badancho is that it conveys the impression that he was a particularly impressive, brilliant man, even at his most profound never far removed from Christian ideals. Such a description is, of course, amusing; but above everything else, it is unique, and perhaps of all his attributes described and celebrated in this chronicle, it is his "uniqueness" which is the consistent thread, the ideal most manifestly embraced. We are made to feel that limitless advantage flowed from his baptism, both for the Christian church and for Ennarya. This may or may not have been the case. But one thing remains certain. Badancho was a wealthy ruler who was very generous and liberal towards political as well as religious leaders at the camp of Sarsa Dengel. Beneath his generosity and spiritual craving, Badancho was a calculating and meticulous leader who knew what he was doing. He was not born into organized religion, but he did have that precise grasp of the ideological advantage an organized religion offers at a time of crisis.

... Le lendemain, à l'aube, le baptême commença. Le roi Sarsa Dengel tint au baptême Badanco, le chef des myriades (?), lorsqu'il fut baptisé il fut son parrain, selon la loi de l'église unique, et il lui dit : 'tu es mon fils, et je suis ton père à partir d'aujourd'hui'. On lui donna le nom de Zamaryam, qui est un nom chrétien, puisque tous les croyants prennent un nom nouveau au jour du baptême. Ce nom était donc le nom de baptême du fils du roi, qui l'aimait beaucoup : ... Il parla, en présence de tous les habitants du pays de Badanco, en disant : 'Voilà mon fils, que j'aime ! Obéissez-lui ! ' ... Après qu'il eut reçu le baptême, le roi l'habilla avec des robes magnifiques. (1)

The baptism of Badancho and his people was the spectacular bloodless revolution of 1588. It was an overwhelming achievement. Without doubt the star of the day was Sarsa Dengel, paying his first visit to Ennarya for spiritual reasons. It was Christianity which lured him to Ennarya, and now the occasion was being converted into a festival of ideological unity.

Le même jour, le roi donna un grand dîner au chef de l'Ennarya et aux chefs des tribus qui commandaient sous ses ordres; il avait fait préparer les tables, chacune de son espèce et avec ses mets particuliers; il fit abattre des veaux et des taureaux choisis et gras. On passa la journée en grande joie, à manger et à boire. (2)

This festival may have created the conditions of mental exhilaration, which sparked off some yearning in Christian thinking with its nostalgia for older

1. Conti Rossini, Historia regis Sarsa Dengel, p. 138.

2. Ibid., p. 141.

values and simpler virtues. The flood of feeling which wells up through the chronicle transforms the ceremony from an ordinary baptism to a most elaborate and emotional time, when the depths of Christian patriotism overflowed. Under these circumstances the triumph of Christianity might have been expected to be more sure, swift and lasting. But it came too late, and like other measures of Sarsa Dengel which were taken at the eleventh hour, it was bound to fail.

The last campaigns of Sarsa Dengel against the Borana (east of the Abay)

Within two months Sarsa Dengel had achieved three victories. He had opened the route to Ennarya. He had received no less than three thousand ounces of gold tribute from that country. He had gained a momentous victory for the church by the baptism of Badancho and his people. After guaranteeing the establishment of the church in Ennarya, Sarsa Dengel set out for Waj with a firm resolution to punish the Borana who had earlier inflicted considerable damage on the Christians of the province. After a long march, he arrived at Sef Bar, the old court of Galawdewos, but found no enemy to face him.

e/ ... Mais aussitôt que les Galla apprirent la nouvelle de son arrivée, pendant qu'ils étaient dans le Guragé, ils furent saisi de crainte et de frisson, et ils s'enfuirent avec leurs femmes, leurs enfants et leur troupeaux; ils se dispersèrent par toutes les routes, comme la fumée se dissipe sous le vent. (1)

As usual, the Borana avoided confronting Sarsa Dengel in the field. In this they were helped by the nature of his large slow moving army, which included more camp-followers than combatants. The useless baggage train and camp-followers hampered rather than helped the movement.

The number of men at arms ... even if it should be less, makes an excessively big camp because the camp followers and the baggage train amount to many more than the soldiery. The reason is that usually there are more women than men in the camp. Besides the king's being accompanied by the queen, and all or nearly all the ladies who are usually at court, widows, married ladies and even many unmarried ones, and the wives of the chief lords and captains, so that they go to war with their households and families, besides this, every soldier has one or many women with him. (2)

The Borana did not have this type of problem. Their women, children and cattle were kept out of the zone of conflict as far as possible. Any Borana

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1. Conti Rossini, Historia regis Sarsa Dengel, p. 144.
 2. Almeida, in Some Records of Ethiopia, p. 78. See also, Alvares, The Prester John of the Indies, vol. I, p. 320.

band included only warriors, who carried dried meat prepared with butter which was nourishing and easy to carry. As a result the Borana retreated when the king advanced, and advanced when he withdrew. Rapid movement was the source of their strength. The policy of choosing a soft target and a right time was one of their greatest tactics. In the sparsely populated eastern provinces, the tactic was most effective and the Christians found no alternative but withdrawal to provinces which were more densely populated, and therefore easily defensible.

Having failed to punish the Borana in Waj, Sarsa Dengel decided to try his luck against the Jawe, who were the terror of the Christians. The Jawe were a branch of the Borana, who devastated several provinces east of the Abay. The Christians in Waj and Damot, who were harassed a great deal by the Jawe, compared them with an incurable skin disease called dawe, and accordingly they gave them that name. "The Abyssinians call them Dawe because of the trouble they have brought to them."¹

... le roi décida d'aller combattre les Galla qui étaient dans le BATERÀMORÀ, et qui s'appellent les GÀWI; ce sont eux qui avaient fait périr Fasilo et son armée. Mais lorsque'ils apprirent la nouvelle de l'arrivée de ce roi terrible ... ils s'enfuirent au loin, de sorte qu'on ne trouvait même plus les traces de leur abri. Alors les grands du royaume tinrent conseil en disant : 'qu'allons-nous maintenant chercher les traces des Galla ont disparu: on ignore où ils sont allés; il n'y a plus de blee piller ou à acheter. Voici que la famine tourmente beaucoup notre camp; revenons donc à notre campement qui est une Réunion (Guba'e) des apôtres. (2)

Several important points emerge from the above. First, the slow movement of Sarsa Dengel's army enabled the Borana warriors to disappear into their dense forests with all their cattle, children and womenfolk before his arrival. While on the road, Sarsa Dengel's army often resorted to looting to replenish its supply, and this acted as an alarm bell to the Borana bands who were seldom caught off guard. Whenever they were surprised, they were usually slaughtered, as we have seen earlier.³ Secondly, it appears that the damage the Jawe caused in BATER-AMORÀ⁴ was considerable. The governor, who also seems to have been the military commander of this province, was one Fasilo. The latter

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1. Bahrey, in Some Records of Ethiopia, p. 123. Bahrey claimed that dawe in the Oromo language "has the meaning of those who stay behind". Rather it means snake. But we do not know why this group was given this name. Perhaps it may have something to do with their restless character, unpredictable movements and notorious treachery.
 2. Conti-Rossini, Historia regis Sarsa Dengel, pp. 144-5.
 3. *Supra*, p. 316.
 4. This province was bordered by Waj in the east and Gamo in the south. In the west it was separated from Kambatta by the Bilate river, and from Hadiya by the Barbare river in the north-west.

decided to meet the Jawe before they ravaged his land. This was a bold and dangerous strategy, by which he hoped to avert the series of defeats of the kind that put Darahagot into flight. Bold because he took the initiative to meet them before they had overrun the strategically important district of Kuera. By so doing he had hoped to defend Kuera and assure the safety of Gamo, the buffer district between Kuera and Bater Amora. Dangerous, because he committed the classical mistake of meeting the Jawe in a field of their own choice and at a time before they were exhausted by fighting, or burdened with booty. Fasilo's much hoped for victory failed to come. Instead it backfired with catastrophic consequences. Fasilo and his entire army perished somewhere between Gamo and Kuera in late 1586 or early 1587.

... Then the Dawe began to make war on the Christians ... and they devastated the two districts of Bater Amora and Waj ... The Dawe chased this prophet (1), laid waste his country, which was called Gamo, and looted all that he possessed. (2)

Sarsa Dengel's spirited expedition against the Jawe in 1588 seems to have been inspired by his desire to avenge not only the death of Fasilo, but also the ravages the Jawe had caused in the three districts. As we saw above, the Jawe disappeared before the thunderbolt intended for them was launched. To follow them into their dense forests was neither feasible, nor was it possible to wait for their return to Bater Amora. The Borana attack in Gamo, Waj and Bater Amora had already turned the arable land into pasture. The Borana depended on their cattle for their livelihood, which they supplemented with agricultural produce, either through exchange with their neighbours, or by looting. The Christian soldiers depended on corn (grain) which they supplemented with animal produce. With the Borana dispersal before Sarsa Dengel there was neither grain nor cattle to buy or loot.³ Where the Borana feared to face him, hunger fought bravely on their behalf. When we examine how his soldiers reacted to this desperate economic situation, we find that their reactions were an explosion of fear of hunger, which surpassed in degree the Borana fear of his soldiers. We catch a uniform note of panic "... Il vaut mieux mourir en guerre que mourir de famine."⁴ From this it follows that it was not the might of Borana arms that won province after province, but the

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1. i.e. Bahrey himself.
 2. Bahrey, in Some Records of Ethiopia, p. 114.
 3. Conti Rossini, Historia regis Sarsa Dengel, pp. 114-5.
 4. Ibid.

failure of the Christian leadership to cope with the root of the problem. The hunger issue dominated all others. The soldiers' decision to recross the Abay was irrevocable. "Le roi les exauca, en disant : 'Oui, qu'il soit fait comme vous venez de dire': Ayant ainsi parlé, il retourna et se dirigea vers les Guragé; il marchait en vitesse."¹ On his homeward journey in 1588 Sarsa Dengel baptised the governors of Bosha and Gumar, along with their people. Here too Christianity was not destined to succeed, because it came too late. Finally, Sarsa Dengel crossed the Abay without inflicting any injury on the Borana. Whatever hope he may have had of forging a semblance of authority east of the Abay lay in tatters once he had crossed the river, because after he had left the east side the dispersed Borana regrouped and decided to show to him that to come back was well nigh impossible. They devastated both Shawa and Damot,² and kept up the pressure on Ennarya and Gojjam. Sarsa Dengel spent the rest of his life west of the Abay, mainly conducting slave-raids.

The separation of the Macha from the Tulama

Before their separation, the Macha and the Tulama had a common chafe assembly,³ at Oda Nabi in Fatagar.⁴ Since the Macha and the Tulama shared a chafe, they were under a common government and common law. As brothers who obeyed common law they did not fight against each other, but fought in support of one another. Every eight years each group sent its delegation to Oda Nabi for the gada election. It was the gada leaders who were elected at Oda Nabi who executed the duties of central chafe, settled disputes between the Macha and the Tulama, marshalled their resources for the common cause, declared war and concluded peace. The separation of the Macha from the chafe assembly at Oda Nabi was first precipitated by the formation of the Afre confederacy (i.e. the confederacy of the four), composed of the Hoko, Chalya, Gudru and Liban. According to Bahrey, the Afre confederacy was formed during the period of the Robale gada (1570-1578). During the period of the Birmaje gada (1578-1586), the second Macha confederacy, the Sadacha (i.e. the confederacy of the three), was formed. This was composed of Obo, Suba and Hakako.⁵ The Afre spear-headed the Macha migration to the southwestern region. They crossed the Gudar river into Damot, during the period of the Robale gada. During the

1. Conti Rossini, Historia regis Sarsa Dengel, p. 145.

2. *Supra*, pp. 252-3.

3. On chafe assembly ("meadow assembly"), see Chapter Two, pp. 128-9.

4. *Supra*, p. 138.

5. Bahrey, in Some Records of Ethiopia, pp. 112-3.

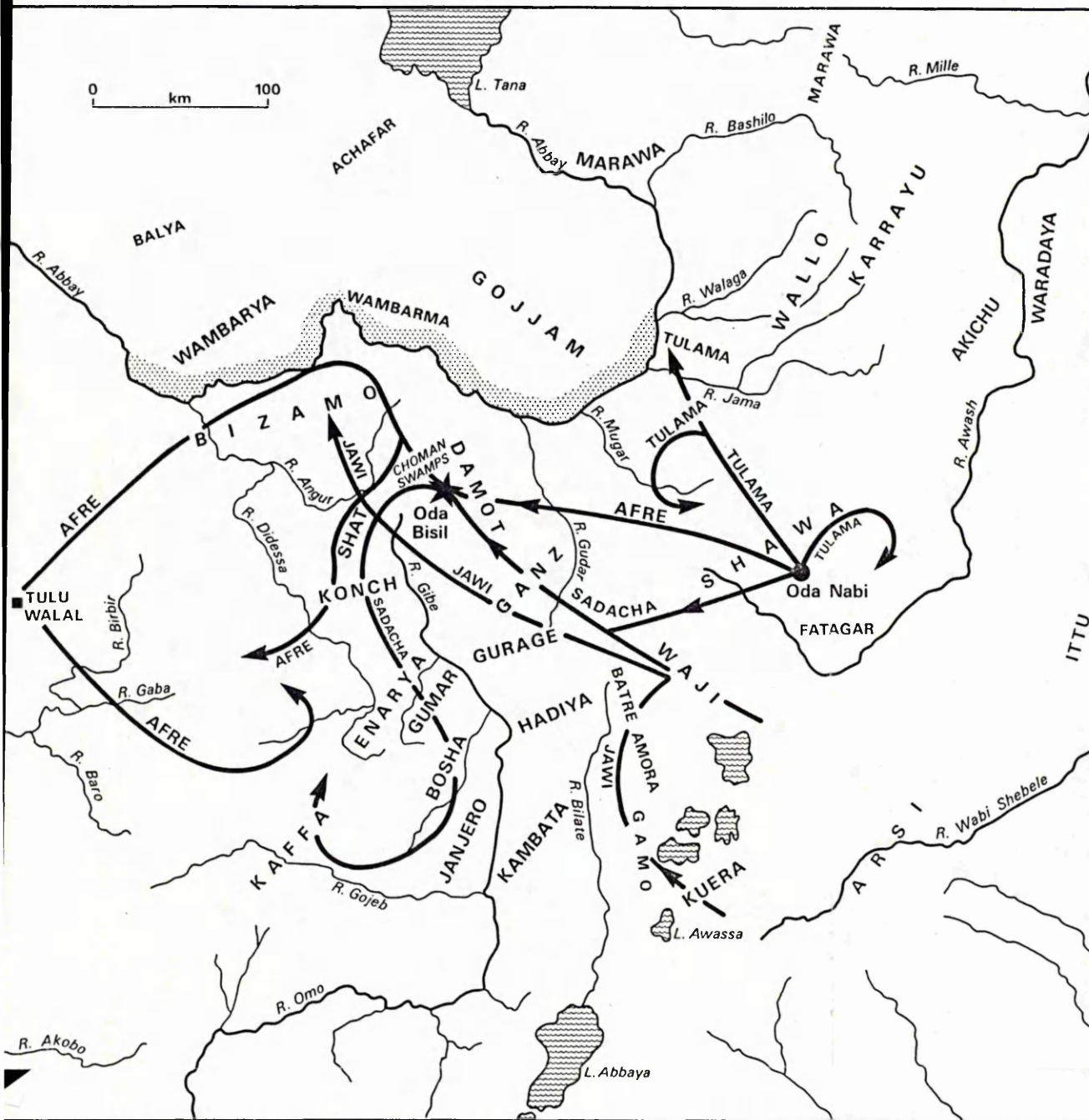
Birmaje gada the Sadacha also crossed the Gudar river and joined with the Afre in Damot. By trekking in the footsteps of the Afre, the Sadacha were completing the separation of the Macha from the Tulama. Once the two groups arrived in Damot, the distance between them and the central chafe at Oda Nabi, (in the heart of the Tulama land), became too extended owing to difficult terrain and unsettled conditions. Travel to Oda Nabi became less common, until the Macha decisively broke from it and founded their own central chafe in the region of the upper Gibe river, some 250 kilometres west of Oda Nabi.¹

The new centre called Oda Bisil (or Tute Bisil) was located between the Gedo, Billo and Gibe rivers. It was located in an ideal environment, endowed with abundant pasturage and adequate water from numerous rivers. In addition to its fertility, good weather and abundant rainfall, Oda Bisil was located in a strategic position, as it was surrounded by a number of hills and enveloped in a deep forest, both of which served as a buffer against sudden enemy attack. It was from here that the Macha directed raids against Ennarya, Bosha, Gumar and Janjero in the south-west and south, against Hadiya and Gurage in the east, against Bizamo, Shat and Konch in the west, and against Gojjam in the north.

Oral tradition gives two versions of the separation of the Macha from the Oda Nabi. The Macha tradition views it as a peaceful act undertaken with the consent of the Tulama. The tradition was recorded at the beginning of this century and remains current in the area. It claims "that before they began their march, the Macha and Tulama gathered at the Awash river (i.e. in the region of Oda Nabi) and said farewell to each other weeping".² On the other hand, the Tulama tradition places all the blame on the Macha.

... before they left the iron bokku was with the Macha. The Gombichu and others sent ambassadors to Macha to request them to return the bokku. The Macha refused. Then Gombichu and others made raids against the Macha; but before the Gombichu retrieved the bokku, the Macha escaped and went further from the attack of the Gombichu. The Gombichu, Ada and other Tulama groups already settled in Shawa held a meeting to decide about the new bokku. The old men said 'cut an olive tree and make of its wood a bokku and honour it'. So it was settled in that way, and³ from then onward, the Macha became hereditary enemies of the Tulama.

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1. K.E. Knutsson, Authority and change, pp. 176-181.
 2. Yelma Deressa, Ya Ityopya Tarik, p. 236.
 3. E. Cerulli, Etiopia Occidentale, vol. II, p. 170.



Migration route

Oda Nabi: Common chafe for

Tulama & Macha

Oda Bisil: Common chafe for

Afre & Sadacha



Areas where Oromo groups

were settled by the Christian

authorities along the R. Abbay



Map 7. THE MACHA MIGRATION TO THE SOUTH-WESTERN PROVINCES.

In its main aspect this tradition deals with three points. First, it dimly refers to the time when the two groups had a common "iron" bokku, and lived together in peace. Secondly, it deals with the importance of the bokku in Oromo society. The third aspect is part of the second. It deals with the consequences of the proliferation of the bokku. When the Tulama and the Macha had a common bokku, the constant friction between them was settled through dialogue in the gada assembly at Oda Nabi. The gada leaders constantly toured by themselves, or sent their delegates to settle disputes.¹ This seems to have provided an outlet for friction before it exploded into bloodshed. In addition, the central gada leaders channelled all the restlessness and war-like behaviour of the pastoralists to its proper object, the raids against their enemies.² This was made possible because of the common chafe and the common bokku, which embodied the spirit of unity, and served as a living constitution. Bokku was a wooden sceptre, which was used as an insignia of authority by the gada leader.

At this point, it is pertinent briefly to state the importance of this ceremonial emblem in the Oromo society of the time. For our analysis we have heavily depended on the precious materials of Shaikh Bakri Sapalo,³ an outstanding Muslim Oromo intellectual from Harar, and the invaluable manuscript of Abba Jobir Abba Dula, the last king of Jimma. What follows is a summary of the important points contained in the works of both authors. In the above

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1. Shaikh Bakri Sapalo, *Kitāb irsāl al-sawarikh ilā samā al-tawarikh* (56 pp. Arabic manuscript which deals with the history of the Oromo nation), p. 44.
 2. The loot gained from the raids enabled and encouraged further raids, while personal glory which individuals gained from warfare in enemy territory attracted their attention.
 3. Shaikh Bakri Sapalo was a remarkable Muslim Oromo intellectual, who during his 50 years of teaching all-round Islamic education, gained considerable popularity, for three main reasons. First, he was a prolific writer. He produced eight major works on history, geography, culture, society and Islamic religion, all of which were written in Arabic. Secondly, he was an outstanding Oromo poet, who won immense popularity by his poems in the Oromo language, short enough for the people to learn by heart. He also produced a quantity of religious poetry in Arabic. Thirdly and equally importantly he was the first man who invented an indigenous Oromo alphabet. On the latter, see *The Oromo Orthography of Shaikh Bakri Sapalo* by R.J. Hayward and Mohammed Hassan in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, XLIV, part 3, (1981), pp. 550-566. I am greatly indebted to Shaikh Muhammed Rashad, a student of Shaikh Bakri Sapalo, who not only gave me copious information about the life of his teacher, but generously provided me with copies of a number of his manuscripts, which are inaccessible. I am likewise indebted to Dima Yonis, who took great trouble in interviewing former students and friends of Shaikh Bakri on my behalf. Shaikh Bakri Sapalo died in April 1980, at the age of 83, in a refugee camp in northern Somalia.

tradition, the common bokku is referred to as being made of "iron". According to our authorities,¹ this was not the case. The term iron should not be taken literally. They imply that it is the quality of iron rather than iron itself which is referred to in this connection. In fact the bokku had always been made of wood. It was a multi-purpose emblem, which had ritual, political and perhaps also military significance. Ritually, every public prayer was concluded with a display of the bokku. Politically, the gada leader kept it in his belt during the assembly meeting and whenever there was disorder he took it out and showed it to the assembly, upon which calm was immediately restored. This shows the awe and reverence in which the bokku was held. It was seen not only as the insignia of political power, but also as a "holy" object. This may also be the reason why the Tulama tradition stresses the point of honouring it,² and why Abba Jobir Abba Dula compared it with Orthodox Christian tabot.³ As an honoured emblem, the bokku was kept only with the leader. "... Nobody except the Abba Gada carried it. At the end of his tenure of office, the incoming leader took it directly from the hand of the outgoing leader."⁴ Abba Jobir even claimed that the bokku was capable of changing the fortunes of a war.

... It was used in a war. When a war became bad for the Oromo, the gada leader took the bokku out of its container and he went with it in his hand from one part of the field of battle to the other striking the ground with it. This raised the fighting capacity of the Oromo⁵ and weakened that of the enemy, resulting in the defeat of the latter.

The usefulness of the bokku in war is open to question. But what is not in doubt is that neither the Oromo political organization of the time, nor their unity, could be understood without recognizing the special role of this object. Both sources acknowledge that the bokku was not only the symbol of supreme authority, but was also enshrouded in an aura which inspired awe and fear. It was by the bokku that all essential celebrations, blessings and legislation received the final touch, and by it were endowed with moral force and divine sanction. Further, it was the possession of a common bokku which above everything else, distinguished the earlier unity of the Macha and the Tulama from

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1. Shaikh Bakri Sapalo, "Kitab irsāl ... ", ibid. pp. 44-5. See also the manuscript of Abba Jobir Abba Dula, p. 9
 2. *Supra*, p. 324.
 3. Ms. Abba Jobir Abba Dula, p.9.
 4. Shaikh Bakri Sapalo, ibid., pp. 44-5.
 5. Ms. Abba Jobir, ibid.

their later disunity. Thus the common bokku engraved in the core of their unity, represented the highest expression of peace that bound them together. In their introduction to the African Political Systems, Evans-Pritchard and Fortes made an interesting observation which may have some relevance to the point under discussion.

Members of an African society feel their unity and perceive their common interests in symbols, and it is their attachment to these symbols which more than anything else gives their society cohesion and persistence. In the form of myths, fictions, dogmas, ritual, sacred places and persons, these symbols represent the unity and exclusiveness of the groups which respect them. They are regarded, however, not as mere symbols, but as final values in themselves. (1)

As is common among other confederacies, Tulama tradition cited above refers to an iron bokku, for reasons which are not difficult to explain. Confederacy, symbolized the quality of iron. Like iron, a confederacy so long as it had a common bokku was hard to break or destroy. As iron made the best of all known weapons of war, so the bokku made for the best unity. When the Macha escaped with the "iron" bokku, the Tulama tried to retrieve it instead of making another iron bokku. In other words, they tried and failed to impose unity on the Macha. Once the hope of unity was damaged beyond repair, the Tulama elders said "Cut an olive tree and make of its wood a bokku and honour it".² The olive tree according to Oromo tradition is the best of all trees, because of its strength, the good smell of its leaves, the medicinal value of its trunk and the several uses made of its stem.³ Internal peace was maintained only among those groups who shared a common bokku. Once the symbol of their unity no longer kept them together, conflicts over scarce resources found expression not through dialogue in the assembly, but through war. So from then onward, the Macha became hereditary enemies of the Tulama.⁴

With their central chafe at Oda Bisil, the Macha people lived together under a common bokku for three decades before the common chafe was divided and replaced by independent Afre and Sadacha chafes in what are today Wallaga and Kaffa provinces respectively. According to a very popular Macha tradition, a certain historical figure called Maqo Bili, played a decisive role at an early stage in the life of the Macha chafe at Oda Bisil. His contribution is

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1. M. Fortes and E.E. Evans-Pritchard, eds. African Political Systems, (London : 1961), p. 17.
 2. Supra, p. 324.
 3. Shaikh Bakri Sapalo, "Kitab irsāl ... ", pp. 44-5.
 4. Cerulli, Etiopia Occidentale, II, p. 170.

well preserved in the tradition, and his name is still fondly recalled among the Macha. The French traveller Antoine d'Abbadie, who was in the kingdom of Limmu-Ennarya¹ in 1843, interviewed many elders, some of whom were reported to be a hundred years old.² On the basis of the information he gathered from these men, d'Abbadie stated that Maqo Bili was a great Macha leader who had invented the gada system. From the number of generations given to him by his informants, d'Abbadie placed the time of the invention of the system in 1589. He arrived at the date on the basis of the number of the gada periods which had taken office between 1843 and 1589. The estimate is plausible, not because the gada system was invented in this year, but rather because of the mentioning of this date in connection with the time of Maqo Bili. The system was clearly much older³ than that suggested by d'Abbadie, but the date is none-the-less extremely important for the period under discussion. The date of 1589 corresponded in a very striking manner with the time of the break of the Macha from the Tulama central chafe. From this we may safely assume that Maqo Bili probably existed at this formative stage in the history of the Macha.

The Macha tradition makes Maqo Bili an ingenious law-giver. Among other Oromo (even among the Tulama, their Borana brethren), both the name and the law of Maqo Bili are unknown. However, among the Macha his law is still told with minor variations, but with much intensity. The central theme of the law is the concept of Saffu, which is very difficult to translate into English. It embodies a concept somewhat closer to the Marxist dialectical law of unity of the opposites. But it differs from this law, in that the opposite do not struggle in unity. They live side by side in harmony. They live without struggling against each other since the moment they do, the basis of their peaceful co-existence will be destroyed.

The main idea contained in [Saffu] is avoidance. Distance ... It includes the idea that in the cosmic order, each thing got its own place, and that these things ought not to be mixed. In this sense it is said that thorns and foot soles are saffu towards each other; that mineral water and normal water are saffu, that master and slave are saffu towards each other. The saffu is mutual ... This saffu dogma is cosmic. It comes from heaven to earth. Apart from this saffu view, we have Maqo Bili, a raji (prophet) who in the name of God applied this cosmic law of the Oromo. Maqo Bili is like Moses or like Christ as people say. His law is unchangeable. It expresses the basic values of the Oromo world view. Maqo Bili was a Macha as people say here. And this explains why he is unknown among the (non) Macha. (4)

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1. *Infra*, pp. 374-5.
 2. Antoine d'Abbadie, *Fr. Nouv. Acq.* 21300 folio, 719-721.
 3. *Supra*, pp. 94-5.
 4. Lambert Bartel in a letter dated 6 May 1971 sent from Wallaga to Addis Ababa. I am indebted to A. Triulzi for providing me with the information contained in this interesting letter.

Maqo Bili must have played a dramatic role at the time when the Macha formed their independent chafe. This may explain why his name has been so deeply involved in the Macha oral tradition. In fact, one Macha traditional historian categorically asserts that Maqo Bili was the great Macha leader who played a dynamic role at the time when the Macha first formed their own independent central chafe at Oda Bisil.¹ The same source makes Maqo Bili even a martyr. It is claimed that when a huge Gabaro² force suddenly and unexpectedly encircled Oda Bisil, thus exposing the Macha to destruction, he quickly devised an ingenious stratagem that enabled his followers to break out of the encirclement. According to this tradition, Maqo Bili himself was killed while trying to escape, but his strategy saved the Macha from extermination.³ Much remains to be understood about Maqo Bili "the law-giver", and war strategist, but enough is already clear to frame a picture of an extraordinary leader who was active in the early stages of the formation of the Macha central chafe at Oda Bisil.⁴

Ennarya and the Sadacha

We now continue with our discussion on the progress of the Macha in the Gibe region, which we left in 1588 when we followed Sarsa Dengel's march to Waj. It appears that shortly after 1589, the pressure on the Macha eased, owing largely to the suspension of the Macha campaigns by the king. By 1590, under constant pressure from the Barentu, Sarsa Dengel's court at Gubay was itself unsafe. As a result he was forced to change his court to Ayba.⁵ By then he had abandoned his attempts to baptise the pagans and commenced a new policy of slave-raids against them. The outcome was as usual the same as

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1. Second interview with Ato Na'a Bassa (a well-known traditional historian). Place - Naqamte, Wallaga, date 27.1.1973, p. 29. I am deeply indebted to A. Triulzi for providing me with a long and immensely rich oral tradition which he gathered from Wallaga, Ethiopia.
 2. On Gabbaro, the conquered people who were adopted en masse by the Macha, see below pp. 347-51.
 3. Interview with Ato Na'a Bassa, *ibid.* pp. 27-29. If we trust this tradition Maqo is reported to have opened negotiations with the Gabaro on their own terms. But during the night, he advised his followers to set up fire everywhere, and while the startled Gabaro were watching what was happening, the Macha observed a weak point in their siege and dashed at it with full speed, thus forcing the enemy to give way,
 4. Maqo Bili seems to have accomplished probably three tasks; he contributed to the foundation of the new and strategically located central chafe. He successfully led the Macha at a difficult time and he set a pattern for the Macha conquest in the south-western region.
 5. *Supra*, p. 252.

all the previous slave-raids; extermination, slavery and depopulation, all of which contributed to the dissipation of resistance against the Oromo. In 1590 Sarsa Dengel's slaving-raids were directed against the Gambo people, who lived in the fertile lands east of the Choman Swamps. The ideological justification for the raids was as a punitive measure "to avenge the Christian blood which had been shed there."¹ The justification was in reality an excuse, as the Gambo were an easy prey to his soldiers. Since 1564, the king had made a number of slaving-raids among the pagans in the regions of the Choman Swamp and Bizamo. The disorganized Gambo proved a soft target. Their men, women and children were taken captive, their cattle looted, and those who resisted put to the sword. The raids were at the time when the territory of Bizamo, which bordered on the land of the Gambo people, was overrun by the Afre branch of the Macha people.

By the beginning of the period of the Dulo gada (1594-1602), two directions of Macha movements were visible. Whether it was by agreement or accident, the Sadacha branch of the Macha directed their entire efforts towards the south and south-east, while the Afre branch directed their movement towards the west and the north.

The first blow of the Sadacha fell on Ennarya. Though they failed to knock Ennarya out of political existence, they succeeded in deflecting the course of her history. The Sadacha attack on Ennarya was so terrible that it forced the latter to abandon all the fertile land between the main Gibe and Gibe Ennarya, the last of which became the strategic centre from which Ennarya resisted the Sadacha assault to the hilt. In the 1580s, it was from the main Gibe that Ennarya resisted the Sadacha. By 1594, the arable land between the two rivers had turned into pasture. The Sadacha attack on Gumar and Bosha left these districts enfeebled. Ennarya, which had lost a piece of fertile territory in the north, took advantage of the feebleness of her two neighbours and occupied some parts from the two districts. By so doing, Ennarya gained back what she had lost to the Sadacha. The ruling houses of Bosha and Gumar desperately resisted both the Sadacha attack on their lands, and Ennarya's enrichment at their expense. Harassed between the irresistible Sadacha and expanding Ennarya, the ruling families of Gumar and Bosha were forced to seek refuge across the Gojeb river in Kaffa. The last rulers of Ennarya were to follow suit almost a century later.

1. Conti Rossini, *Historia regis Sarsa Dengel*, p. 159. See also, G.W.B. Huntingford, "Historical geography of Ethiopia ... ", p. 151.

Guamcho, the new governor of Ennarya, while resisting the Sadacha attack on the one hand, and expanding at the expense of his disintegrating neighbours on the other, appealed to Sarsa Dengel for military aid. We have seen above the special relation between Badancho, the father of Guamcho, and Sarsa Dengel. Badancho came to power as a pagan, but died a Christian in the early 1590s. During his governorship there had been moments of glory and times of tragedy, war and peace, euphoria and near despair. Sarsa Dengel, who virtually depended on Ennarya for his gold tribute, was very anxious to support the son and successor of Badancho. Accordingly he led a swift expedition to Ennarya in 1595. By the time he reached Ennarya, the latter had already weathered the heavy storm, and the Sadacha dispersed before the well-armed force of Sarsa Dengel. As a result, the king was unable to cause any damage on the Sadacha. His long march was not, however, without a result. He baptised Guamcho, as he had Badancho before him. It is probably for this reason that one source claims that Sarsa Dengel introduced Christianity into Ennarya at this time.¹

... He left an additional number of priests and monks to instruct them in the Christian religion, though there are some historians of this reign who pretend that it was not till this second visit that Ennarya was converted. (2)

With the pressure on Ennarya removed, the safety of the route assured, and the baptism of Guamcho accomplished, Sarsa Dengel collected whatever gold tribute the new governor was able to give and commenced his homeward journey without fighting a single battle with the Macha in general. At this time, the Afre were overrunning Konch, Shat, the Choman Swamps and Bizamo. The pagans of these areas, long subjected to intermittent slave-raids, were very far from possessing any strength for resistance, whether organizational or numerical, which enabled Ennarya to withstand and repulse the attacks. While the art of war, that is dependence on cavalry for offensive attacks and fortifications for defence, had made considerable progress in Ennarya, it was at a rudimentary stage in the areas mentioned above. A central leadership that marshalled all the common resources, harmonized skills and animated the mass into action did not develop here. They were equally unskilled in the arts of constructing elaborate fortifications, and defending them resolutely

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1. G.W.B. Huntingford, "Historical geography ... ", p. 152, citing the Cambridge MS. Oriental, 1873.
 2. James Bruce, Travels to discover ... , iii, p. 253.

in the way that Ennarya did. The pagan communities, in these districts, seem to have trusted their defence more to their forests than to their fortifications, and more to their power of flight than of combat. Above all, they were disorganized, lacked unifying leadership, were well linguistically divided, and thus were easily plundered. Consequently the Afre became masters of much of these districts. Between themselves, the Afre and the Sadacha were now in possession of extensive lands of exceptional fertility, excellent pasturage, intersected with many streams and rivers, which drained either to the Abay or the Omo, and enveloped in dense forests, interspersed with the sacred oda (sycamore trees) under the life-giving shades of which the Afre and Sadacha assemblies met. Game hunting, which was the source of food for adults, and a means of practical training for the young in the wielding of arms, was plentiful. These opportunities seem to have increased the spirit of adventure among the war-like Macha pastoralists. The abundant wild fruits supplemented their animal diet. The numerous bee-hives deposited either in the hollow of big trees, or in cavities of rocks, provided additional sources of food for them. The abundance of rainfall, and the luxuriance of the vegetation, all contributed to the increase in the size of the human and animal population.¹

A number of Cushitic-speaking pagan communities of Bizamo and the adjacent districts fled across the Abay into Wambarma, Achafar and Wambarya. The Afre followed them. Probably the majority remained on their land and submitted to their conquerors, by whom they were adopted en masse.²

The Sadacha who fled before Sarsa Dengel in 1595 regrouped the following year, thereby cutting the caravan route to Ennarya. This directly affected Sarsa Dengel, who in 1597 made an ambitious attempt to take the vast land between Ennarya and Gojjam from the Macha who had occupied it. The whole purpose of the expedition seems to have been directed to attack the Macha in their sanctuaries in Damot. With that determination, he crossed the Abay and went to Damot, with the Macha fleeing everywhere before him. From Damot he went to Shat, where he was suddenly taken ill and died on 4th October 1597. Since his return from the long expedition to Waj in 1588, all the provinces east of the Abay, except some parts of Shawa had been lost. By 1597, when

1. This information is summarized from the manuscript of Abba Jobir Abba Dula, pp. 13-16.

2. *Infra*, p. 348.

he died, all the provinces south of the Abay, except Ennarya, were lost to the Macha. A great kingdom, which had become what it was in virtue of having been for centuries the strongest in the Horn of Africa, now suddenly found itself cut off from its former provinces, deprived of its historic role, and thrown back to the areas north of the Abay. Between 1597 and 1603, the leadership in the Christian kingdom turned a blind eye to what Sarsa Dengel had done in the thirty-four previous years. It became clear to the weak and indecisive Christian leadership that while the king's soldiers were strong enough to rout the Oromo warriors time and again, they were not strong enough to pacify them in all the provinces they had progressively occupied. Thus all the campaigns either to the south or east of the Abay were abandoned. However, some elements within the Christian society had been able to produce suitable ideological clothing in which to dress the necessities of coming to the rescue of the lost provinces.¹ It was at this juncture, when the Christian kingdom was very weak, that the period of the Dulo gada (1594-1602) came to an end and was succeeded by the Melbah gada (1602-1610).

In 1603, the Tulama from Walaja and the Afre from Bizamo mounted a simultaneous heavy raid on Gojjam. This had serious consequences for the internal politics of the Christian kingdom. It must have been this and other pressures which forced Ya'eqob to go against the triumvirate at a tender age.² Once in power, the young king had the luck to defeat Ras Athnadius and Za-Sellassie. But he reinstated the former and exiled the latter to Ennarya. The adventurer Za-Sellassie was described by one historian as "... a man esteemed for bravery and conduct, beloved by the soldiers, but turbulent and seditious; without honour, gratitude, or regard either to his word, to his sovereign or to the interest of his country."³ By exiling Za-Sellassie to Ennarya, Ya'eqob probably hoped both to deprive the triumvirate from using this able general and consummate conspirator, and more importantly to tap the energy and organizational skill of this restless adventurer in helping Ennarya to strengthen her defences, which were under threat at the time. We do not know what contribution, if any, Za-Sellassie had made to strengthen the defences of this province. But one thing remains certain. Very soon, Ya'eqob himself was overthrown and exiled to Ennarya, while Za-Sellassie was freed and called back to a prestigious and lucrative position under Za-Dengel, who in the hope of using the military talents of this notorious general even gave him his own sister in marriage.

1. Supra, pp. 264-6.

2. Supra, p. 263.

3. James Bruce, Travels to discover ..., iii, p. 260.

While Ya'eqob was in exile in Ennarya the province was subjected to the most devastating Sadacha attack yet seen. The people of Ennarya put up a very spirited resistance against the Sadacha behind the main Gibe. However, under a heavy assault from the Sadacha, Guamcho, Ennarya's able and brave governor, withdrew his force, and moved behind the impregnable fortress of Gibe Ennarya. The Sadacha misinterpreted Guamcho's tactical withdrawal for general flight, and not for the first or last time they followed vigorously, thus becoming easy victims for his traps. Guamcho's elaborate network of trenches and fortifications which were defended with an inexhaustible and irresistible supply of stone missiles, all contributed to the Sadacha defeat. On that day, probably more Sadacha were killed by the flying stone missiles than by all the arrows, spears and swords of Guamcho's men put together. The humiliated Sadacha were repulsed with shame and great loss. Their defeat seemed to diminish the terror posed by the Oromo.

By choice or accident, the adventurer prince, Susenyos, presented himself to the Sadacha at the very moment when they needed his services most. Shortly before, he had been defeated by Sidi, the governor of Hadiya, and deserted by his own followers. Both found what they wanted in each other. Susenyos, safety and booty, and the Sadacha his leadership. In his desire to share in the loot of Ennarya, Susenyos readily lent his services to the Sadacha.¹ Susenyos was an excellent horseman and able leader, who could endure the want of food, and his mind and body were alike suited for the hard life of a warrior.² He possessed undisputed courage, which animated the pastoralists. He quickly raised the morale and restored the courage of the Sadacha by reorganizing them to face Guamcho. Susenyos's fame and popularity, his oratory and his knowledge of their language, all made him an ideal leader for the task in hand. The hopes of plunder soon banished every idea of danger from the Sadacha. He promised them victory in return for which they promised him rich reward in booty, neither of which ever materialized. The Sadacha, who neither forgot nor forgave Guamcho for what he had done to them, rallied behind Susenyos with one mind. The heat of passion that was aroused for booty and revenge expressed itself on the battlefield. For three consecutive days Susenyos stormed the stronghold of Guamcho with heavy losses on both sides.³

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1. Susenyos had already distinguished himself by his services to the Afre and the Warantisha in their attacks on Gojjam.
 2. Pereira, Chronica de Susenyos, pp. 16-24, et passim.
 3. Ibid., p. 49.

On the fourth day Susenyos introduced a new element in his strategy, which was at first effective, but later proved his undoing. Susenyos, who realized the difficulties of using cavalry in the maze of Ennarya's trenches and fortifications, left behind the Sadacha horses in the forest and attacked Guamcho's strongholds with infantry. The people of Ennarya who were expecting a cavalry attack were taken by surprise. Susenyos's strategy at first succeeded so well that his men were able to penetrate Ennarya's resilient defences. Credit for the success must without doubt go to Susenyos, who after three days of indecisive engagements changed the course of the war. His battle plan was excellent, though the initial successes were not exploited with sufficient energy and imagination. Guamcho and his men were reeling under the shock of surprise when Susenyos's storming party began decapitating his soldiers deep inside his fortifications. This spectacle had just the opposite effect from that which had been intended. Inflamed at the rate with which his men were being decapitated, Guamcho resolved to die like a brave warrior by exciting his men into action. Intoxicated with anger, Guamcho threw himself upon his enemy with great courage. He, and a number of his comrades, fell under the blows of their enemies. Susenyos drew the wrong conclusion from the death of the leader. He thought that this would be the end of the battle. He and his men indeed became so jubilant that they neglected the fighting and began looting Guamcho's camp. The huge booty taken added to the bitterness felt by the people of Ennarya. To add insult to injury, Susenyos decorated with Guamcho's golden sword the man who had killed him.¹

In their moment of trial, the people of Ennarya behaved with admirable discipline and sense of self-preservation, and chose a new leader. The mantle fell on the nephew of the fallen hero. The search for booty which diverted the attention of Susenyos's men enabled the new leader to restore control and surprise the enemy. The cruelty of the enemy inflamed rather than making them panic. The warriors of Ennarya, who seem to have realized the catastrophe that would strike them if they were to be defeated, did not think of sparing themselves. The new leader channelled this popular fury and poured their anger on the enemy. Being numerous, and most familiar with the topography of the area, they rained their arrows, spears and stone missiles on their enemies. Susenyos's men were stunned by the fury of the counter attack.

1. Pereira, Chronica de Susenyos, p. 49.

Rarely had the fortunes of a war altered so quickly, and the mood changed dramatically from jubilation to panic. Oppressed by numbers and shocked by the showers of arrows, their enemy's ruin was inevitable had not Susenyos's ability to escape from grave situations prevailed. The adventurous prince soon found that he was overreached by the superior morale of his enemy. To fly was the only sure way of survival. The Sadacha men, startled at the flight of the prince, took to their heels. Susenyos's followers were nearly destroyed either in the field or in the flight, and as a result about 700 horses fell into the hands of the victorious Ennaryans.¹

This disaster, which Susenyos brought upon his Sadacha followers by walking into the Ennarya fortifications, decisive enough as it was by the rout of his men and the loss of their horses, became still more so from two consequences that followed. First, it brought to an end the unholy alliance between the Sadacha and Susenyos for the loot of Ennarya. As he came with a hope of rich booty, he disappeared with a wave of disaster. He neither gained booty nor rescued his reputation. But a lot of life and pride had been lost. Susenyos escaped to Gurage, where he made peace with Sidi, the governor of Hadiya. The Sadacha abandoned in panic the land between Gibe Ennarya and the main Gibe, and retreated behind the latter.

Secondly, and more importantly, this victory assured Ennarya's existence for one more century as a political entity. It was an overwhelming victory, and the defeated Sadacha were not able to pull themselves together and attack Ennarya for the next six years (the rest of the Melbah gada, 1602-10).

At about the same time (1604), when the Sadacha launched their massive offensive on Ennarya, their brethren the Afre, from Bizamo, crossed the Abay and invaded the district of Wambarama. The Agaw inhabitants of this district, who had been victims of slave-raids earlier, made very little resistance. Encouraged by the happy turn of events in this district, the Afre poured on to Gojjam with apparent determination to loot all and sundry. Their vanguard party alone routed Ras Athnadius, the governor. King Za-Dengel arrived on the scene, and after a hard-fought battle changed the fortunes of the Christian force.

1. Pereira, Chronica de Susenyos. From the chronicler's description of this episode, it appears that Susenyos was routed and his followers suffered real carnage. See also Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia .. p. 409.

... Bore down the Abyssinians with so much violence that the captains finding their battalions recoil, persuaded the king to betake himself to an early flight. He disdained the motion, as arguing effeminacy, leapt from his horse and advanced with his sword and buckler, cry'ed out, here will I die; you if you please escape the fury of the Gallas but never the infamy of deserting your king. The Abyssinians moved with such speech and countenance of their prince, cast themselves into a globe, and with a prodigious fury, like men prepared to die, broke in among the Gallas and constrained them to give back. Which the fugitives perceiving presently returned and renewing the fight gained a glorious victory, such a slaughter of the enemy that a greater had not been made among them at any other time. (1)

This was destined to be Za-Dengel's first and also major victory against the Oromo. The latter left behind no less than 1700 dead.² However, at the very time when Za-Dengel was defeating the Afre in Gojjam, a plot was afoot to dethrone him in Dambiya. Some months later he was killed as a result of a rebellion among the Christian soldiers.³

The disaster of the Afre in Gojjam, and that of the Sadacha in Ennarya, halted the high-spirited Macha offensive under the Melbah gada. With apparent intention to recuperate their strength and replace losses, both the Afre and the Sadacha retreated to the region of their central chafe. Thus for the next six years of the remaining Melbah gada we do not find much report in the Christian literature on the activities of the Macha. Between 1608 and 1610 Susenyos fought a number of major battles, either with the Barentu or the Tulama. The Afre's half-hearted attempt to raid Gojjam was easily repulsed. During the same period neither Susenyos, nor his governor of Gojjam, were able to cross the Abay.⁴

The Mudana gada (1610-1618), came to office at the time when the Macha were still nursing their wounds and replacing their losses. In 1610 the Afre from Bizamo crossed over into Wambarma and Wambarya. However, when they heard the news of Susenyos's arrival in Gojjam, they retreated to Bizamo in fear, before they completed their looting and were fully satisfied. The Sadacha were much more successful in their raids on Ennarya. We have seen above that in 1604, the new leader of Ennarya succeeded in routing and chasing Susenyos and the Sadacha beyond the main Gibe river. Perhaps it is necessary

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1. Ludolf, A new history of Ethiopia, pp. 179-180.
 2. Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia ... ", p. 408.
 3. *Supra*, pp. 266-8.
 4. *Supra*, pp. 276-81.

to say a few words about the complex Gibe river system at this point.

... The main or great Gibe rises near Haratu on the west of the Comman swamp. About 55 miles south of Haratu near Sogido it is joined by another river called the Gibe Ennarya and some 30 miles south-east from this junction it is reinforced by the Gibe Jimma, the two taking their attributes from the states through which they flow, and both of them flow northwards to the main river. The three united rivers, the great Gibe - join the Omo about 7 miles north of Abalti where the Omo is joined by yet another river called Wabi on the maps, coming from Hadya.¹

During the assault of 1604, the men of Ennarya fought behind the Gibe of Ennarya. However, they managed to push the Sadacha beyond the main Gibe. The Sadacha, hovering along the banks of the main Gibe, made it the base from which they attacked Ennarya in 1610. The war-like people of Ennarya were astonished by the Sadacha's repeated incursions into their country. Perhaps they were ignorant of the cause, which was the wealth of their land that attracted the Sadacha. The Sadacha's anticipation of plunder seemed to make them blind to the possible danger. Through repeated attacks they secured entrance into the area between the main Gibe and Gibe Ennarya. However, the people of Ennarya seemed to have lived in full security as long as the Sadacha were kept beyond the Gibe Ennarya, and their defence was still impregnable. The continuous Sadacha assault however showed how that defence was vulnerable. The Gibe Ennarya was no more impregnable as the Sadacha had acquired a great knowledge of the topography of the area. Soon they devastated the land from the Gibe Ennarya to the Gibe Jimma, and the highland Ennarya was now opened for constant Sadacha inroads. Here the Sadacha were unable to gain new grounds. They diverted their energy towards a softer target, the plain and the wealthy district of Bosha, which possessed all that would attract and very little that could resist, once Ennarya was weakened. This change in the fortunes of Ennarya and Bosha was graphically described by a report of an eye witness in 1613.

Father Antonio Fernandez and the ambassador left the court of Enarea and thenceforward always travelled eastwards. On the first day they arrived at a place where the officer was who had to provide a guard for them ... He made them wait here eight days and finally gave them only 80 soldiers to accompany them to the borders of Narea. With this company they advanced for four days, by long stages, through country that was uninhabited because of the Gallas who often used to raid it, being a level plain, where they have a great advantage, as they have many horses ... On the fourth day the Nareas withdrew. The father and his companions were rather frightened but journeyed on in haste ... After midday they began the descent of a high mountain from which open country was to be seen. It is called Baterat and belongs to the province of Boxa. Here the Galla commonly graze their cows. (2)

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1. G.W.B. Huntingford, "Historical geography of Ethiopia, pp. 145-6.
 2. Almeida, in Some Records of Ethiopia, p. 153.

From the above, three important points clearly emerge. First on the eastern front, only for a short distance from the court of the ruler was it safe from the Sadacha attack. Second, a large part of Ennarya had already been wasted and abandoned, because they were unable to stop the Sadacha cavalry in the plains. In other words, Ennarya's defence on the eastern front was slowly but surely disintegrating. Third and more important, the flat district of Bosha was under the firm control of the Sadacha. It had already become a safe area, where they grazed their immense herds and kept their women and children. It seems that some members of the ruling families of Bosha fled across the Gojeb river to Kaffa.¹ "Those of its inhabitants who were not taken captive had withdrawn into the southern and western parts of Ennarya."²

The Sadacha attacks on Ennarya seem to have had far reaching consequences for the internal politics of Ennarya. We do not have written evidence for what had taken place in Ennarya between 1610 and 1611, but from the subsequent activities of the leader elected in 1611, two things can be said with certainty. First, the struggle for power created instability in Ennarya.³ Second, the struggle for power was generated by Ennarya's inability to stop the Sadacha advance.

We have seen above that Ennarya was forced constantly to use her military resources to keep the Sadacha out of her territory. In her three earlier resistances (1580s, 1595 and 1604), Ennarya had managed successfully to repulse the Sadacha with shame and loss. Between 1585 and 1588, Ennarya was supplied with a large source of manpower in the form of the fleeing refugees from the fallen provinces east of the Abay. Probably it was the alluring prospect of using this stream of manpower which pushed Ennarya to occupy some parts of Gumar and Bosha in the 1590s. By the beginning of the seventeenth century, Ennarya was surrounded by the Sadacha on all sides except the south. The Sadacha continued making deep raids into the heart of highland Ennarya. The people defended themselves with more than usual firmness and success in their highland areas, but in the process Ennarya lost the flower of her manhood. The Sadacha success of 1610 precipitated an internal power struggle which culminated in the rise of Banaro. Thus by 1611 an energetic man was at the helm

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1. Werner Lange, Domination and resistance narrative songs of the Kafa highlands, (Michigan : 1979), p. 18.
 2. Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia ... ", p. 517.
 3. Werner Lange, ibid.

of Ennarya's leadership. We do not know anything about the fate of the man who saved Ennarya in 1604. But we do know that the transfer of power was not peaceful.¹

Banaro (1611-1620) was perhaps Ennarya's best equipped leader both physically and mentally. Banaro was ruthless with all his internal enemies.² Beneath his cruelty and ruthlessness towards his enemies, he was an intelligent man who gave the highest priority to the defence of Ennarya. He was not only an able leader but had the superior skill and knowledge of assigning the right officer to the right task at the right place. For example in 1613 his defence minister, Abecan, was placed at the key stronghold of Gonqa, on the border with the district of Konch, which was then under the control of the Sadacha. "... They entered Narea and climbed a steep mountain called Ganca, fully inhabited, where the chief military commander of that kingdom usually lives, since it is their frontier against many enemies with whom they are at war."³

The reason why the military commander of Ennarya lived at such a long distance from Banaro's court is not far to seek. First Banaro was a man who had a precise grasp of Ennarya's strength and importance within the Christian kingdom. The stronghold at Gonqa was the key strategic trading centre through which all the merchants to and from the Christian kingdom had to pass both when coming to and going out of Ennarya. The safety of the Gonqa area was indispensable for the commercial prosperity of Ennarya. Banaro knew very well that Ennarya's importance and survival depended on the continuity of the trade that passed through Gonqa. Secondly, the most fertile, and therefore densely populated, part of Ennarya was located in south-western Ennarya, which had to be defended by an able military officer. Abecan proved equal to the task.⁴ By strengthening the fortifications, assigning the right men to the right task and by flying with rapidity from one point to the other,⁵ Banaro raised the morale of his fighters and assured the safety of his country. By 1613 Ennarya was still the seat of wealth and commerce. The sources of her prosperity and her industrious inhabitants are described below in glowing terms by a contemporary historian.

1. *Infra*, p. 361.

2. His cruelty towards his enemies suggests that Banaro probably did not come to power legally. There is also some internal evidence to be discussed later on which shows that Banaro was not from the old ruling house of Ennarya.

3. Almeida, in Some Records of Ethiopia, p. 148.

4. Ibid.

5. *Infra*, pp. 359-62.

It is because of the trade there is with Cafraria (Kaffa ?) that Narea has so much gold; it is acquired from the Cafres in exchange for clothing, cows, salt and other goods ... A considerable quantity of gold is found in it, but the greater part comes from outside. The natives of Narea are the best in the whole of Ethiopia, as all the Abyssinians admit ... They are men of their word and deal truthfully without the duplicity and dissimulation usual among the Amaras. The country is rich in foodstuffs and all kinds of cattle, mules and horses. They pay gold by weight, ... but small pieces of iron also circulate as money ... Since he succeeds by inheritance from a father to son the ruler of Narea is strictly speaking a king ... Nevertheless, since he had been subject to the emperor he has no longer been called king but ... governor. They habitually pay him their tribute out of their native loyalty, the situation being such that if they wanted to free themselves from it, he could hardly go and wage war upon them in the midst of the Gallas. (1)

The rapid recovery and military revival of Ennarya under Banaro was quite evident by the beginning of 1613. In March of the same year the Sadacha raided, displaying a fierce but artless bravery, eluding Abecan and overrunning the fertile part of western Ennarya, but it seems to have been less costly in terms of human lives. Banaro's court, which was located six days journey from the stronghold of Gonqa, was undisturbed by the news of the Sadacha attack. Banaro was calmly entertaining the ambassador from Janjero at his court, while the people in the areas under attack withdrew to safety, without the confusion and panic which usually followed such withdrawals both in the Christian kingdom and in Harar. For example, when in March 1613 Father Antonio Fernandez went to Banaro's court, he saw no sign of panic and disorder.² The father and the ambassador found amazing calm and peace, which probably reflects the degree of self-confidence prevailing at Banaro's court. Banaro's kind treatment of his guests demonstrates his political shrewdness and the importance he attached to his relationship with Susenyos, though the latter was in no position either to help or to harm him. "He gave the father 50 gold crusados to help on his way and made many excuses for giving so little, because it was the time when he had to send his customary annual tribute to the emperor, which is a thousand ounces ... "³

Interestingly, the said tribute was collected by the messengers of Susenyos in early 1614.⁴ By this time Banaro, through good luck and decisive leadership, had managed to put back Ennarya where she was in the 1580s. This rapid recovery probably surpassed his own expectations and that of his people, but it did not last long.⁵

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1. Almeida, in Some Records of Ethiopia, pp. 149-51.
 2. Ibid.
 3. Ibid., p. 152.
 4. Pereira, Chronica de Susenyos, p. 156.
 5. Infra, pp. 364-5.

The conflict among the Oromo and the rebellion of their subjects.

The previous chapters have indicated some aspects of the strength of Oromo society in the sixteenth century, which allowed them to expand over wider territory. Hiob Ludolf summarized the factors within Oromo society which enabled the pastoralists to migrate to new areas.

... An encouragement of boldness and hardiness to adventure that by such a conspicuous mark, the sluggish and cow-hearted should be distinguished from the bold and daring. In their banquets and feasts the best bit is always set in the middle and he that takes it must be the first in any perilous undertaking: nor is there any long consideration; every one person prepares to win honour to himself, ambition stimulating their fortitude ... But their most prevailing encouragement in battle is that because no man should be thought to fight for base hire, or out of servile obedience for another man's honour, but only for his own reputation, the plunder is equally divided among them all. They go to war, as if they had devoted themselves for victory, with a certain resolution, either to overcome or to die. From whence proceeds great obstinacy in combat. (1)

The factors which made for the strength of the Oromo society in the previous century were becoming a source of weakness for a society which had spread over such a large area. When the Oromo were on the move, fighting for individual honour unleashed a dynamic spirit to push forward; but once they began settling down, fighting for individual honour became the source of perpetual anarchy, the cause for endless war among themselves. Common interest united them and made them a terror to their enemies. With their spread over wider territory, it became very difficult to reconcile the interests of various groups. In the absence of a binding interest, they turned against each other. Clan interest replaced the wider interest of the confederacy. Disharmony undermined their unity and their fighting capacity. With the break-up of confederacies, different groups fought against each other as much as they fought their enemies. By turning against each other, they gave some breathing space to their enemies, and encouraged the rebellion of their subject people. Their sixteenth century capacity to terrorize was second only to their inexhaustible talent for self-mutilation during the seventeenth and subsequent centuries. By the beginning of the seventeenth century, Oromo social organization was starting to break down; which a contemporary historian has explained in terms of the will of God. "If God had not blinded them and willed that certain families and tribes among them should be at war with one another constantly, there would not have been an inch of land in the empire, of which they are not masters." ²

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1. Hiob Ludolf, A new history of Ethiopia, pp. 83-4.
 2. Almeida, in Some Records of Ethiopia, p. 135.

While the Oromo strength was consumed in their own quarrels, their enemies rejoiced in the important discovery of the weakness. It was Susenyos who through his long contact with the Oromo discovered the weakness and tried to turn it to his own advantage. It was not so much the political genius of Susenyos as the readiness of the Oromo to turn against each other which undermined unity and therefore, in the long run, success. In less than ten years Susenyos managed to widen the division among the Oromo. In political terms, this was a considerable achievement unmatched in the history of the Christian kingdom during the previous half century. For example, in his report of 22 July 1607, the Jesuit Azevedo spoke of "the great concern the Galla had on matters of interest to them."¹ By 1614 some sections of the Oromo groups had already broken away from the nation and become loyal subjects of Susenyos. In the previous chapter we saw how the Warantisha, in conflict with other Oromo groups in Walaqa, appealed to Susenyos for help.² In 1612 Susenyos had devastated the Warantisha, and two years later they had neither the love for him nor the desire to ask him for help, but they were forced to appeal to him owing to the pressure on them from other Oromo groups. Susenyos, who appears to have understood the cause of their restlessness, was quick to grasp the opportunity and supported the Warantisha in the struggle against other Oromo. He made a bold and brilliant attempt to drive the Warantisha's enemies out of Walaqa; the attempt failed and he therefore moved the entire Warantisha with their cattle across the Abay in 1614 and settled them in key strategic positions, where they became a secure bulwark against other Oromo attacks on Gojjam. The Warantisha's break from the Oromo nation was total and permanent. It dealt Oromo unity a blow from which it was never to recover. Ever since, the clash of interest produced conflicts too wide and too deep to be closed by the political discussion at the traditional chafe assembly. The conflicts spread, owing to the breakdown of the confederacies, and the insensitivity of individual groups to the interests of the others.

After settling the Warantisha in Gojjam, Susenyos had a number of other opportunities to settle a considerable number of the Oromo in the region west of the Abay. It was this section who settled among the Christian Amharas and furnished the state with an inexhaustible number of soldiers against other Oromo. In short, internal conflicts were the cause for the breakdown of Oromo unity which had been maintained earlier by the remarkable Gada system. A number of internal as well as external factors worked against the proper

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1. Cited in Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia ...", p. 404, see note.
 2. Supra, p. 283.

functioning of the gada, including the topography of the land, the differentiation in wealth and the rapid increase in population. The three factors were more pronounced among the Macha by the beginning of the seventeenth century than any other Oromo group; because first the Macha lived in "...much more mountainous and inaccessible (land)"¹, which hindered contact between groups. The chafe assembly functioned on the basis of contact among people during which differences were resolved and disputes settled in open discussion. The differentiation in wealth, other than cattle, was brought about among the Macha through the enterprising activities of merchants and landowners. On occupying the fertile land between Ennarya and the Abay, the Macha realized that it would be advantageous to maintain caravan routes to and from Ennarya. They depended on the routes that passed through their land for salt, cloth and other essential commodities. The whirlwind of activity let loose by the Macha arrival in the region, temporarily diminished the volume of trade. Nevertheless, the small, but aggressive merchant community in the kingdom had vested interest in the lucrative trade in gold, ivory, slaves and other items with Ennarya and beyond. Both Susenyos and Banaro had a vested interest in continuing the trade, and with their encouragement and support merchants organized large caravans. Since the trade which passed through the Macha territory primarily benefitted the elite within Macha society, they actively supported and protected it. The benefits from trade, both in the form of liberal gifts for protection & for prominent individuals and taxes at key posts, went to a limited number of individuals. The key posts and passes at which important Macha men taxed the caravans in 1613 were probably already hereditary, because in 1845 Plowden wrote that "Some rights of duty in different markets have descended in certain families from father to son ... perhaps to seven or eight generations."² If we take a generation as thirty years, and count back eight generations, it goes back to the beginning of the century under discussion.³ Some wealthy Macha individuals, who championed the cause of commerce and provided extensive protection to many merchants, were owners of extensive land themselves. We have many examples. Perhaps the richest of them all was a certain Amuma. His power and prestige rested on his wealth and not his position

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1. K.E. Knutsson, Authority and change ... , p. 181.
 2. W.C. Plowden, Travels in Abyssinia and the Galla countries (London 1868)p.310
 3. Those Macha individuals who protected merchants and defended caravan routes were perhaps already themselves engaged in trading. This cannot be verified by written evidence. However, there is adequate evidence within the Christian sources which show beyond any doubt that during the 17th century some families among the Macha had accumulated so much wealth that they started to emerge as influential members of society. These wealthy men, some of them very rich in cattle and slaves, not only eclipsed the elected gada leaders, but also became de facto rulers. Among others, see I. Guidi, Annales Iohannis I Iyasu I. Bakaffa, p. 245

within the chafe assembly. He was part of an emerging class, that effectively eclipsed the prestige and usurped the traditional authority of the chafe assembly. Amuma was the de facto leader for the Oromo groups which lived between Bali and Hadiya.¹ His favour and protection were sought by merchants as well as by the Muslim ruler of Hadiya, the Christian governor of Gojjam and by Susenyos himself. Information on the prestige and power of Amuma was related to Almeida by Father Antonio Fernandez, whose life Amuma saved in 1614.

... The emperor's messenger Baharo asked him if he knew another Galla called Amuma, a great man and a close friend of his. The Galla replied that he was his servant and that his master was near at hand. They promised him a valuable reward if he would go and call him quickly, and they promised Amuma that they would give him a horse if he would come. Amuma came within the hour and with his coming their fears and all danger were at an end. He was a great and powerful man; he assumed responsibility for the father and ambassador and all their men and took them under his protection. So none of the Moors of the country dared to take up arms against them. (2)

The emergence of wealthy men like Amuma undercut the effectiveness of the chafe assembly from within. It was they, more than the voice of the majority which had effect at the assembly. Decisions were made in their favour, sometimes going against the interest of the large group, by the assembly which was supposed to defend that interest. War was fought in the name of the assembly, but for the benefit of the new class. A good example is again what Amuma did in 1615. Alico, the Muslim ruler of Alaba, had given a number of his daughters in marriage to some important Oromo leaders,³ perhaps including Amuma himself. Alico was an ambitious man who wanted to expand his territory. Amuma too was an ambitious man, who wanted to assert his authority over large territory. Perhaps at the agitation and on behalf of Amuma, and certainly with the support of Amuma's kinsmen, Alico was deposed by his own cousin in 1615.⁴ The new leader of Alaba was a meek and docile person who was amenable to the manipulation of Amuma.

In short, it is safe to say that during the seventeenth century among the Macha wealthy individuals were not only making names for themselves, but were also becoming hereditary leaders; a practice contrary to the established

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1. By Hadiya it is meant here the small Muslim state (which bore the historical name of Hadiya) located between the Bilate river and the Gurage highlands and inhabited by the people who called themselves Hadiya.
 2. Almeida, in Some Records of Ethiopia, p. 170.
 3. Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia ...", p. 427.
 4. Ibid., p. 525.

tradition of the Gada system. While the gada leaders marched at the head of the Macha warriors and fought against their enemy, the wealthy individuals were making peace with the same enemy. The best example is Abeko, the wealthiest man among the Liban who belonged to the Afre confederacy. When Iyasu invaded the land of the Liban, their Abba Gada Dilamo fought against Iyasu, and died like a brave leader.¹ At the very time when Dilamo was fighting against Iyasu, Abeko was sending him a large gift consisting of numerous cattle, many slaves and a lot of honey. In return Iyasu gave a golden saddle to Abeko and decorated his sons with beautiful ornaments.²

While the gada leaders marched with men and cattle from pasture to pasture as soon as the forage of a place was consumed, the wealthy individuals settled permanently on the lands. Their cattle were looked after by Oromo servants and non-Oromo slaves. The regular movements of the gada leaders seem to have encouraged the transfer of power and authority from one group of individuals to the other from time to time, while permanent settlement on the land seems to have encouraged the concentration and control of authority in the hands of a few individuals permanently. While the movement in search of forage seems to have diffused the spirit of adventure and the desire to advance into new lands in search of riches, permanent settlement seems to have instilled fear of unknown lands, thus weakening the adventurous spirit of conquest that carried the pastoral Oromo over wide territory. While the authority of gada leaders had been based on the voluntary and democratic will of the people, that of the wealthy men was based on their own resources, and it was imposed on others. The gada leaders had been desirous of maintaining the support of the people, the wealthy were anxious to dominate them. While the pastoral practices of the gada leaders adopted many of the vanquished people as members of their own clan or tribe, with all the rights to share equally the advantage of any victory, the wealthy men substituted the noble institution of adoption into the gada system with an entirely new element of slavery and servitude of the vanquished people. Most of the conquered people who had earlier submitted with little or no resistance to the Macha, found that they were no longer equal members of a clan within which they were incorporated, but slaves who were used as gifts and commodities for sale. The conquered people, whose pride was humbled in the dust of slavery, and whose number was reduced through sale

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1. Iyasu's battle against the Liban took place at the beginning of the 18th C.
 2. I. Guidi, Annales Iohannis ... , pp. 238-246.

realized that the only hope of safety was open rebellion against their arrogant masters. One result was a celebrated uprising of conquered people against the Macha, in the region between Ennarya and the Abay. However, before we embark on the brief discussion of the interesting episode, it is necessary to mention two points. First, the effect of the rapid population increase on the Gada system, and second, the background to the uprising of the conquered people.

As we have already seen, the Macha spread over a wide area within three to four decades. Their campaign was stopped in the south by the brave people of Ennarya, to the east by the people of Hadiya, Gurage, Kambata and Janjero, to the north the Abay provided a natural barrier which mitigated the effect of their sudden attack on Gojjam, while at the same time saving them from the rapid pursuit of Christian forces. To the west they found extensive land with a thinly scattered population. Without enemies to impede their progress they spread over the face of the fertile land, reaching the western part of present Wallaga province which "they sanctified by making Walel their sacred mountain".¹ The beautiful mountain of the region, which resembles mount Walal in Walabu, the region of Borana dispersal in the early sixteenth century, aroused the nostalgia of the Borana's original homeland.

... When the (Macha) who did not forget the mountains of Walabu in their oral tradition looked at this wonderful mountain which stood silhouetted pointing up to the sky like a pole from the surrounding region, it aroused their longing for their ancient region ... They named this mountain as Walal ... made it the holy region ... (for butta ceremony as well as for the chafe assembly). (2)

Throughout this vast area the Macha lived among the conquered people, who probably outnumbered them nine to one³: a ratio which seems to have quickened the pace of the disintegration of the Gada system.⁴ Finally, these three factors, the mountainous nature and the inaccessibility of the Macha country, the emergence of a new class, and the sudden conquest of a huge non-Oromo population, presented the Macha gada with serious problems. Whether it was owing to these factors or others, the Afre and the Sadacha were at war with each other between 1616 and 1618. The intensity and bitterness of the conflict, which led to the break-up of the common chafe at Oda Bisil, is well

1. Trimingham, Islam in Ethiopia, p. 94.

2. Yelma Deressa, Ya Ityopya Tarik, p. 242.

3. The old Oromo saying "nine are Borana ('pure Oromo') and ninety the Gabbaro" (the conquered people) expresses the disparity between the two groups.

4. Knutsson, Authority and change ... , pp. 180-1.

preserved in the tradition of the Afre as well as the Sadacha. Understandably, the tradition of each group tends to blame the other for the break-up of the common chafe, but both traditions agree that the originators of the conflict were "bad" individuals who, against the advice and wisdom of the assembly, destroyed Macha unity. The sources give several names of the "bad" individuals, all of them wealthy and newly-emerging leaders who turned Macha against each other. Perhaps the most notorious person whom the Afre tradition condemns is a certain Na'a Doro, who is reported to have burned Oda Bisil.

... When Na'a burned Oda Bisil out of madness ... the Tulama came to attack the Macha. Na'a fought and drove back the Tulama to where they came from. Na'a then advised the Afre to spread in different directions. So the Guduru took one direction, Harro took another. Sibru took one direction and Limmu took another ... So every tribe took different directions and moved out of Oda Bisil. (1)

From the content of the tradition, it seems that Na'a Doro wielded more power than an ordinary Abba gada would have possessed. He led the Afre in their fight against the Sadacha and the Tulama. It was during one of his engagements with the Sadacha that he burned Oda Bisil. He burned the sacred land, where all gada rituals were performed and where the assembly was held. Perhaps Na'a Doro was a defeated Afre leader. In the tradition he is referred to as a "madman", which probably should not be taken literally as it only implies that he acted in an extraordinary way, not accepted to the assembly. The tradition claims that Na'a defeated the Tulama. But this does not seem to have been the case. On the contrary, there is evidence which shows that the Afre, oppressed by the combined force of the Sadacha and the Tulama, were forced to withdraw from the region of Oda Bisil.² The main reason which led to the break-up of the Macha central chafe (according to one authority) was the shortage of land around the chafe. "The fertile land around Oda Bisil was not wide enough for both the animal and human population."³ Be that as it may, while the Macha were fighting among themselves, they were suddenly engulfed by the rebellion of their own subjects.

Even as early as the time of the Bifole gada (1546-1554) Bahrey reported that the Oromo had made the conquered people gabare.⁴ But neither Bahrey nor

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1. Second interview with Ato Na'a Bassa, Naqante, Wallaga, January 27, 1973, p. 26. See also Bakre's Manuscript pp. 4-5. This ms. which is fifty pages long deals mainly with 19th C. history of Wallaga. It depicts the struggle for state formation and traces the rise to power of and the prominence of the Bakre family in Wallaga. I am deeply indebted to A. Triulzi for allowing me to photocopy the translated version of this ms.
 2. Yelma Deressa, Ya Ityopya Tarik, pp. 234-41.
 3. Ibid.
 4. Bahrey, in Some Records of Ethiopia, p. 116.

any other Christian source mentions anything about the rebellion of the conquered people before 1618. Hence, we take the latter date as the start of the rebellion. The term gabare describes the obligatory relation between the conquerors and the conquered. The vanquished, still owners of their plot of land, became serfs or clients of the pastoral Oromo, who now demanded service and tribute from them. The Oromo term for the conquered people was Gabaro ("those who serve"). The Oromo adopted the gabaro en masse, giving them clan genealogy, marrying their women and taking their young into service for herding. Simultaneously adult men were recruited for military service in times of war, and worked on the land in time of peace. While Gabaro was the common term used for describing conquered people, other terms were also used in a different place. For example, both the Barentu and Tulama used the term dalatta ("he who is born") to describe the status of the conquered people. The phrase "he who is born" does not have anything to do with real birth. It only describes the ideal type of relationship that should exist between the conquered and the conquerors, after the latter adopted the former. Earlier the special role of adoption within the Gada system, as well as its effect on the success of Oromo migration, has been shown in Chapter Three.¹ What we need to add here is that "adoption ceremony was performed before the whole people and sacrifices were offered."² The central figure, the Abba Gada, slaughtered the sacrificial animal, led the prayers and concluded the binding oath on both sides. The adopted individuals or groups now became collectively the "sons" of the gossa (clan or tribe) by whom they were adopted. In other words, they were now "born" into a new gossa. The Oromo term dalatta describes this type of unusual birth. Instead of dalatta, the Macha used the direct and simpler term ilma gossa ("the sons of the gossa"). However, the Christian historians of the seventeenth century wrote ilma guozit, instead of ilma gossa, causing some confusion for later historians.³ The Macha also used another more popular and prestigious term, yahabata ("those whose horses are ready for moving"). The Macha used yahabata to distinguish the gabaro cavalry from other ordinary gabaro. The term describes the brave gabaro who swelled the ranks of the Macha cavalry. Probably earlier it was with the support of the yahabata that the Macha won victories against numerous enemies. It was not without reason that the rebellions of the gabaro were led by the yahabata.

1. Supra, p. 155.

2. The Journal of C.W. Isenberg and J.L. Krapf detailing their proceedings in the kingdom of Shoa and journeys in other parts of Abyssinia ..., p. 256.

3. e.g. Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia ...", pp. 422-4.

When the rights of the gabaro were trampled upon, their women and children sold into slavery, by their Oromo masters (who tasted the material benefit of the trade), the yahabata rebelled all over the Macha land. The conflict among the Macha added fuel to the fire of their rebellion. The incitement from the governor of Gojjam and that of Enmarya, gave self-confidence to the gabaro. Tradition claims that the gabaro rebellion was first preceded by a peaceful protest.¹ The Macha failed to react to the demands. As the patience of the gabaro was exhausted, swords were drawn and the first Macha head that rolled down became the signal for the declaration of war. From that day, the gabaro renounced their servitude to the Macha and decided to liberate themselves. The news of the gabaro rebellion was received with jubilation both at the courts of Sela Christos and that of Banaro. "During the rainy season (1618) a great conflict broke between the Galla and the yahabata of the Borana. They fought bitterly because God sent them Satan who caused them to err and destroyed the wall of love between them"² Sela Christos had his own plan to build a new wall of love between the yahabata and the Christians. As a result of the conflict, the Macha found themselves spread over a vast area among enemies more numerous than themselves. Tradition claims that the Macha panicked and made considerable political concessions to the gabaro.³ The same tradition claims that the gabaro rebellion was led by a certain Kuti Bose, a brave gabaro who is reported to have killed five elephants.⁴ It claimed that Kuti struggled to gain the right of forming a separate gada assembly for the gabaro. Kuti was killed while fighting.⁵ The same tradition claims that the cause for which Kuti died was immediately realized. The Macha granted the gabaro the political right to form their own assembly. If true, this was a major victory for the gabaro and a great concession on the part of the Macha. We cannot verify the claim of this tradition from other written sources of the time. However, two things can be said with certainty. First, whether it was as a result of this rebellion or not, we find two assemblies in all the Macha country after this time. One assembly was called Borana chafe (for the "true" Macha) and the other the gabaro chafe (for the conquered people).⁶ Secondly,

1. d'Abbadie, *Fran.Nouv.Acq.* 21300, folio 763.

2. Pereira, *Chronica de Susenyos*, p. 191.

3. d'Abbadie, *ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Ibid.*

6. According to Na'a Bassa, a well-known Macha traditional historian, there were two assemblies. One was called Oda Borana (the Borana assembly) and the other Oda Gabaro (the Gabaro assembly). In this context the term *oda* (sycamore tree) has a double meaning. It means the meeting place, and it also means the assembly itself.

the name of Kuti Bose is immortalized in the tradition of all the gabaro as "a hero of the oppressed." From this it would appear that he was probably an important leader at the initial stage of the rebellion. Be that as it may, the policy of concession failed to conciliate the gabaro, either because it came too late or because it merely encouraged them to fight. The hope of military support from both Gojjam and Ennarya may have hardened the attitude of the gabaro, whose military challenge brought a sense of realism to the Macha. Since the gabaro rebelled against both the Afre and the Sadacha the two groups made peace with each other. They forgot their recent quarrels and became fused together with a new spirit of self-preservation which never left them until the danger was over. Convinced by experience that it was an opportune moment to make peace with the Tulama,¹ the Macha appealed to the latter for help. The Tulama's response was quick and positive. Both the Tulama and the Macha acknowledged their past errors and assessed the present danger. They agreed to settle (albeit temporarily) their dispute peacefully and declared that they were at peace with each other.² The gabaro seem not to have expected such a turn of events. The capacity of the Macha to compromise was found to be greater than the determination of the gabaro to fight alone. The news of the arrival of the Tulama to assist the Macha seems to have spread terror among the gabaro. With one voice they acknowledged that their only hope of safety was to call upon Sela Christos to come and move them across the Abay. "Behold we have quarrelled with our masters the Galla. We have fought them until we have both shed blood. Come quickly and receive us for from old our origins and descent is from you and not from the Galla."³

Sela Christos was animated with the prospect of easy victory; while the hope of rich booty excited the valour of his soldiers. Only a few years before his soldiers refused to follow him across the Abay into Bizamo. But now they were impatient to wait until the end of the rainy season. Sela Christos was not carried away by his soldiers' passion for immediate marching on Bizamo. He respected his men's desire to march, but decided to follow them with cautious step.

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1. After their separation in the late 1580s, the Macha and the Tulama began to turn militarily against each other, the pretext being the daily dispute over pasturage in the no-man's land between them.
 2. *Infra*, p. 354.
 3. Pereira, *Chronica de Susenyos*, p. 191. Translation by Merid Wolde Aregay "Southern Ethiopia ... ", pp. 120-21.

Ras Sela Christos sent Asgdir, his general, with a large number of soldiers in order to receive the yahabata and fight the Galla. Dajzmach Buko also crossed the Abay with a large number of his soldiers. The two commanders met in Damot from where they went to Bizamo. Here the yahabata and ilma guozit (ilma gossa) were delighted by their arrival and they all fought against Chalya and Obo. They massacred many and captured their children, women and cattle. (1)

The Chalya and the Obo were taken by surprise. It seems they only saw the enemy in their settlement and were warned of their danger by the sound of enemy's cavalry. In a moment this changed the fortune of the Macha groups. Panic produced disorder; disorder was followed by flight and utter confusion. In their flight, the Macha lost the greatest part of the booty which they had taken from the gabaro earlier. As they flushed their soldiers with confidence, Asgadir and Buko won the day with little or no loss to their men. The easily gained victory and booty transformed the day into an occasion of great jubilation. This victory was won without cost "because the yahabata who knew the topography of the land, as well as the secret dwelling place of Chalya and Obo led the Christian force to the spot."² With the assistance of expert yahabata guides, nothing could remain inaccessible; resistance was suicidal and submission was equally fatal to the Macha. Only flight held any hope of survival.

Asgadir and Buko sent messages of congratulation to Sela Christos. The latter was delighted with the news. But still he moved cautiously. His experience of the past seven years as the governor of Gojjam had taught him not to leave his province on the spur of the moment. His experience seemed to inspire him to ensure first the safety of his province. Thus, before crossing the Abay, he wrote to Susenyos, asking him to come to Gojjam.

The Galla and Yahabata have quarrelled and fought, and ... there is no peace between them and they no longer live together. As a result, I am going to receive the Yahabata and ilma guozit, and also to fight with the Galla ... come soon to Gojjam, before the Tulama comes to assist the Macha, as we assist the Yahabata. Please, come to help us and reach us soon. (3)

From the above two points can be made. First, before their quarrel, the Macha and the Gabaro seem to have lived in peace to the discomfiture of the

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1. Pereira, Chronica de Susenyos, pp. 191.
 2. Ibid.
 3. Ibid., p. 192.

Christian kingdom. Secondly, Sela Christos knew that the Tulama would come to assist the Macha. The governor knew that the Tulama would attack Gojjam so as to relieve the pressure on the Macha in Bizamo. That must have been the reason why he urged Susenyos to come to Gojjam. Armed with Susenyos's assurance, Sela Christos crossed the Abay around 20 November 1618, at the head of a large army.¹ After a rapid march, he arrived in Bota land where he was warmly welcomed by the two victorious commanders and the multitudes of the gabaro. After indulging the gabaro with splendid feasts,² he turned his attention to the Macha, whose strength was increased by a stream of daring Tulama volunteers. The news of Sela Christos's arrival soon spread terror among the Macha, who fled in fear. By their ignominious flight the Macha had time and again saved themselves from destruction. But this time their disorderly flight contributed to increase their calamities. Hot pursuit and devastation was the only measure which could restore the confidence of the gabaro and vindicate the honour of the Christian leadership. The gabaro who forgot their earlier peaceful relations with the Macha and remembered only their late quarrel with them, put at the disposal of Sela Christos their knowledge of the topography of the land and their large cavalry. Sela Christos took the Macha by surprise but killed only a few, and captured little booty, because the majority had fled before the attack. The next day he left Bota land at dawn and surprised the Macha in their forest hideout at a place called Gogatta.

There he attacked and massacred the brave men of Chalya and Obo, and captured their women, children and cattle ... He ordered the yahabata cavalry to pursue the flying Chalya and Obo, who escaped from destruction. They followed and met them in the land of Jiran, where a lot of the Macha were killed and a large number of their women, children and cattle were taken captives ... Few days later, he sent another commando unit against the Obo, who fled on the first sight of the Christian force, abandoning everything. The victorious soldiers captured Galla women, children and cattle, more than the eye could see. (3)

On this occasion the superior abilities of Sela Christos were found to be even greater than he had demonstrated in the past seven years as the governor of Gojjam. He did not waste time on unnecessary caution. Unlike his

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1. Pereira, Chronica de Susenyos, p. 192.
 2. The feasts were intended to prepare the soldiers for assault as well as to create understanding between the gabaro and the Christian force.
 3. Pereira, ibid., pp. 191-193.

previous engagements he was not disposed to sacrifice any solid advantages for avoiding risk. Sensible of the benefits which would result from quick action, he ably directed the valour of his soldiers, and the yahabata desire for revenge against the flying Macha. By their useless and ignominious flight, the Macha only encouraged the hardy and fast yahabata cavalry to terrorize and disconcert the panic-stricken Macha, everywhere inflicting shameful wounds on the back of the flying enemy.¹

The Macha found themselves under attack from two directions. As Sela Christos marched south through Bizamo, everywhere destroying and looting the Macha, Banaro, the ruler of Emarya, marched north through Konch, everywhere slaughtering the flying enemy like cattle.² Banaro accomplished feats too hard for any Christian force of a few years earlier. "Banaro fought against the Galla called Hakako, whom he destroyed. He captured their children, women and cattle. He completely wiped out their adult men."³ The victorious Banaro probably caused more havoc among the Sadacha than Sela Christos had among the Afre. This may be one of the reasons why the Sadacha avoided meeting Banaro in the field, while the Afre continued to put up resistance from time to time. In short, the Macha were now attacked and pursued on both sides by the allied forces of Gojjam and Emarya. The flower of their youth perished and the bulk of their cattle was looted. The Afre had neither safety nor much property left in Bizamo. Under the shock of repeated massacre, the Afre abandoned Bizamo for Sela Christos and fled en masse to the vast land west of Bizamo, where Sela Christos was unable to follow them. In this flight alone the Afre had a solid advantage over Sela Christos. With whatever cattle they had, the Afre marched several days journey through the deep forests of the west, where they seem to have supplemented their meagre supply of flesh and milk with abundant wild fruit and game.

... The fact that they do not sow is of great use to them in that the Abyssinians cannot penetrate far into their country; when the Gallas know that they are invading with a strong army they retire with their cattle many days journey into the interior. The Abyssinians therefore never sieze, or can seize supplies, and are thus compelled to withdraw to their own territories, often with heavy losses of men from sheer hunger. (4)

The sudden dispersal of the Afre had the intended effect upon Sela Christos. Since farming was abandoned in Bizamo during the unsettled years of conflict,

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1. Pereira, Chronica de Susenyos, pp. 191-3.
 2. Ibid., p. 194.
 3. Ibid.
 4. Almeida, in Some Records of Ethiopia, p. 136.

Sela Christos could not find provisions either to buy or to loot. For the fear of effecting reconciliation between the Afre and the gabaro, the latter were not looted. The shortage of provisions seems to have diffused a spirit of restlessness among his soldiers. The connection between hunger and rebellion was so strong that the slightest exposure to this deadly enemy would have exposed Sela Christos to danger.¹ Thus after six days stay in Bizamo the governor abandoned the land he had won from the Afre and "returned to the land of Bota, where he previously left his provisions."² The gabaro for whose cause he had caused so much devastation upon the Afre, thought of only one thing - the Macha revenge if they were to remain in Bizamo. They asked Sela Christos to take them across the Abay. He gladly accepted them, since it was part of his strategy to strengthen the defences of his provinces by settling them in key places on the other side of the Abay. He was generous in moving them with all their cattle, women, children and arms in hand. But his liberality was accompanied with one vigorous condition. They were to be settled where he wanted it to be, and not where they chose. They were conducted without delay, and when their strength was collected on the other side of the Abay, their new settlement assumed the atmosphere of a solid and dependable fortification for the defence of the region. Their swift horses, and unquestionable hatred for the Macha, excited the pride of Susenyos and elated the hopes of the Christians for the safety of their land. In the words of the Chronicler :

... The emperor was delighted with his achievements and received him with honour, for his victory against the Galla, and for bringing the yahabata, ... The emperor went from Baguna and chose from Wambarma a large and beautiful land convenient for horse racing and for military parade. There he ordered that each of his soldiers should carry shield and spear and all should organize themselves in chiffra according to their origin as if they were going to battle. The cavalry appeared in full battle dress. The yahabata were stunned with the number of his soldiers and impressed with the quantity and quality of their weapons. Then the yahabata greeted him with humility and signs of submission and subjugation. The emperor said to them, 'Thanks to God who saved you from death and liberated you from the servitude of your Galla masters. In the land of Christianity you are now free. Accept Christ so that we all be equal in his kingdom.' From among the yahabata some said 'Let it be according to your words'. Others said 'Leave us until we complete the period of gueta (butta ceremony) so that our laws would not be transgressed untimely' ... He organized them in Machakal, Emfesya, Badene, Arbuke and Yemakal. (3)

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1. The availability of food, and not the morale to fight, seems to have been the most important factor with the Christian army. The desire to loot the weak, the fear of hunger, the uncertainty of finding the enemy if they followed them into the deep forest, the fatigue of the chase, and the unwillingness to take much risk in unknown land seem to have been sufficient excuse for his soldiers. As they came in haste with euphoria, they wanted to leave without despair.
 2. Pereira, Chronica de Susenyos, p. 195.
 3. Ibid., pp. 195-7.

The whole purpose of this grand show was to impress upon the yahabata that Susenyos was mighty - much more powerful than their earlier Macha masters. In that respect it was particularly successful. The yahabata were baptised and they increased the size of the Catholic population in the country. But there are two points worth considering in some detail from the above quotation. The first is about gueta (butta) and the second about Wambarma, and Wambarya, the two districts where the entire gabaro people were settled.

We have already seen that the butta ceremony (which is generally referred to as gueta in the Christian literature) was performed after every forty years by the gada class going out of power.¹ This was done at the time of the Jarra ceremony, which concluded the end of the previous eight year gada period, and signalled the start of the next eight year period, with the coming to power of new gada leaders. Thus the Jarra ceremony was the time at which the two pivotal ceremonies within the Oromo society intersected in time and space. In the above quotation we have seen how some yahabata requested Susenyos not to baptise them before they performed their butta ceremony, that is their fortieth year in the gada cycle.² We do not know from our source whether or not Susenyos had granted the yahabata the short delay they requested before they were baptised. But we do know that a new Macha gada came to office shortly after. This was the Kilole gada (1618-1626). What is important to note here is that those yahabata who wanted to perform their butta were already part of the complex gada system. Culturally and probably linguistically, too, the yahabata may have had much more in common with their Macha enemies than their new masters. Shortly after, whether it was owing to this or other factors, some yahabata reconciled themselves with the Macha and returned to Bizamo. This alarmed Susenyos so much that he quickly moved all the yahabata from the two districts and settled them in Bagameder and central Gojjam in the midst of a predominantly Christian Amhara population. However, in 1618 Susenyos settled all the yahabata in Wambarya and Wambarma and other districts bordering along the Abay. The obvious reason for doing so was that he wanted them to act as a shield against the Macha incursion from across Bizamo. The yahabata were excellent horsemen and brave fighters and above all they had a unique advantage : because of their long association with the Macha they knew their war tactics as well as the likely time they would make make raids - thus it was easy for the yahabata to intercept the Macha raiding

1. Supra, pp. 125-7.

2. Yelma Deressa, Ya Ityopya Tarik, pp. 218-9.

party before it caused any damage. However, the deeper reason for settling the Yahabata in the districts mentioned above is given indirectly by his own chronicler.¹ The Agaw inhabitants of these districts were either sold into slavery or exterminated in the continuous slaving-raids which Susenyos and his governor of Gojjam had conducted between 1607 and 1616. This does not mean that there were no slaving raids in the region before the time of Susenyos. Indeed Sarsa Dengel, Za-Dengel, and Ya'eqob had all conducted slaving raids in the same area. But Susenyos intensified it out of all proportion. As with the Gafat people in western Shawa during the reign of Sarsa Dengel, so the Agaw inhabitants of the two districts were the victims of devastating slaving-raids. Susenyos came to the throne officially for the second time in 1607. He had no sooner done so, than he took a decision which was bound to depopulate these districts. The Agaw inhabitants of the area lacked military organization as well as political unity. Owing to this they were unable to marshal their resources and to defend themselves. For reasons unclear from our sources, they were unskilled in the arts of constructing or defending established fortifications. They had few cavalry. It seems they trusted their defence more to flight than to fight. Their small and badly organized war bands were easily dispersed, even by the Macha, who were not well armed as Susenyos was. Thus, when Susenyos's men suffered any loss among the Agaw, it was probably occasioned more by the quarrels of his men over booty, than from the enemy missiles. It was probably owing to this weakness of the Agaw that Susenyos time and again led his restless soldiers to their favourite amusement of plundering the Agaw. The first act of Susenyos's reign in 1607 was to raid the Agaws of the area. The purpose of the first raid was to replenish the exhausted imperial treasury, and to buy the loyalty of his growing army, by liberal gifts of cattle and slaves. He was conscious of the economic difficulties which his court had faced at Qoga. The provinces under his control were exhausted and the gold from Ennarya was inaccessible at the time. He probably knew both the weakness as well as the wealth of the Agaw and he forgot to think about the effect of his action on them, but only remembered the immediate necessity of supplying his soldiers. Accordingly he devastated the Agaw districts of Wambarya and Wambarna with insatiable thirst for slaves and merciless determination against those who resisted him. Such sad spectacles were repeated a number of times between 1607 and 1616.

1. Pereira, Chronica de Susenyos, see chapter XII. According to what is contained in this chapter, Susenyos stayed for a month (1614) in Agaw land, during which time the Agaw were exterminated and their land became a desert. Those who survived the slaughter were sold into slavery.

The raids of 1610, like those of 1607 and 1608, extended from Alafa to the west of Dambiya. All the way south to the camps of the Gonga refugees along the Blue Nile. The long procession of captives, consisting mainly of women, and children as they were driven into Qoga, is movingly described by Paez. His intercession gained freedom for almost 12,000 of them, but his warning that these raids were opening the way to the Galla, who were massed on the other side of the Blue Nile went unheeded. The 1614 expedition against all the Agaw of Gojam, allegedly brought by their lawlessness and insubordination, was particularly destructive. The Agaw of Achafar considerably debilitated and reduced by earlier raids abandoned their homes and sought refuge among other Agaw of Chara and the Shangela of Matakal, to which district the emperor followed. Not contented with the cattle and slaves he and his soldiers acquired in all these places, he then devastated the extreme south-western parts of the province ... So many cattle were taken in this ... that they offended the eye. Many men and women slaves ... were captured. There was much rejoicing in the camp because of the large quantity of takings. There is not a man in the army of the king, who did not from the spoils then taken come into possession of cattle and slaves ... And the king made gifts of all the cattle which were taken to those who had caught them. As for the slaves he reserved for himself and did (with them) as he wanted. (1)

It was these types of slaving-raids which were the immediate cause for the depopulation of the Agaw districts opposite Bizamo. The cattle and slaves which Susenyos captured were employed in buying the loyalty of his formidable army. The conquest of the pastoral Oromo was the object of his hopes and preparation; but he ruined the Agaw without achieving anything. It is no exaggeration to state that the raids which the Macha conducted from Bizamo into Wambarya and Wambarma and other districts along the Abay for almost three decades before Susenyos came to power, were much less destructive than the slaving raids which were conducted between 1607 and 1616 by the Christian emperor.

The fall of Ennarya

Banaro, who we left while he was marching to the north through the district of Konch in 1618, continued with his devastating war against the Sadacha. He was marching towards Bizamo with the hope of meeting with Sela Christos. While en route Banaro received a letter from Sela Christos which contained an urgent message. "I have crossed the Abay from Gojjam and I am in Bizamo to fight against the Galla. Come and join us so that we destroy them together."² Apparently the letter was written before Sela Christos fought with the Afre. Banaro, whose preparation for the war against the Macha impressed everyone, including Sela Christos, was on his way to Bizamo when he received the news

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1. Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia ... ", pp. 479-480.
 2. Pereira, Chronica de Susenyos, p. 194.

that the latter had left Bizamo because of the shortage of provisions.¹ Banaro changed his direction and continued with his fight against the Sadacha. The Sadacha either were unwilling to meet with him in the field, or unable to stop him, and abandoned the districts of Konch and Shat and fled across the Gibe into Damot. By arms, diplomacy and gifts, Banaro attracted a number of the Yahabata warriors to his standard. Satisfied with the discovery of his own strength, and the weakness of his enemy, animated with the prospect of winning even more Yahabata warriors to his cause, Banaro returned to Ennarya at the head of an army enlarged by the Yahabata warriors and encumbered with the Sadacha captives and booty.

Banaro, who seems to have been intoxicated with his victory beyond the boundary of Ennarya, soon led his second expedition against the Sadacha. He passed through Konch, Shat and to Choman Swamp without meeting any resistance from the Sadacha. He then crossed into Damot, where he met with stiffer resistance than he had reason to expect from the fleeing Sadacha. The stream of Tulama volunteers who came to help the Sadacha joined hands with the latter and answered Banaro's challenge. They put up a resistance worthy of their name. After a number of engagements, Banaro was forced to withdraw from Damot. He was neither satisfied with his men's performance, nor satiated with the outcome of the expedition. Perhaps at the suggestion of his captains, or else by his own decision, Banaro did not return to Ennarya. Instead he marched towards the edge of the Abay valley, where he surprised and massacred a number of small Sadacha groups. In his own words "... I went up to Warab and fought the Borana and killed a great number of them, captured their women, children and cattle. As a result, many Yahabata cavalry and infantry surrendered to me."² This was contained in a message Banaro sent to Susenyos in early 1619. Shortly after, Banaro met Susenyos and delighted him with his gold tribute. "... Banaro ... brought tribute of gold, together with his son whose name was Yaman Christos. He said to the king 'Oh my Lord! Here is your tribute of gold as well as my son, your servant.' "³

It was at the moment of his triumphal return to Ennarya, at the height of his power, that Banaro took a step which had all the appearance of success,

1. Pereira, Chronica de Susenyos, p. 194.

2. Ibid, p. 209.

3. Ibid.

but because of the circumstances failed to materialize, culminating in his tragic end. To the people of Ennarya it was the defence of their own country which was important.¹ To Banaro it seems the defence of Ennarya could not be guaranteed without the conquest of the Sadacha in the surrounding districts. His main objective was to conquer the Macha in the surrounding districts. This difference in outlook on matters of defence had unexpected consequences. It alienated Banaro from his people.² To the people, it seems it was the price which Banaro's policy involved that counted most. To Banaro, no price was too high to strengthen the defence of Ennarya. For a man who probably came to power by force, and certainly had strong political enemies,³ this was an unnecessary gamble. But he did not stop here. Banaro proposed to Sela Christos a joint offensive against the Borana.⁴ He did this not only for policy considerations but because he also wanted to strengthen his tie with the governor of Gojjam. Although at the height of his power, Banaro was conscious of the activities of his internal enemies. His exceptionally good relations with both Susenyos and Sela Christos was thus intended to frighten and disarm his enemies. In 1619, Banaro sent messages and gifts to the court of Sela Christos in Gojjam. The gifts, for which the people of Ennarya must have been taxed,⁵ was intended to win favour and the friendship of the governor. In the same year, Banaro himself took the annual tribute of Ennarya directly to Susenyos. Double taxation may have angered the people; since they accused him of exploiting them. This was his undoing. And yet at the cost of incurring even deeper public hatred, Banaro continued to flatter Sela Christos with his liberality. The governor of Gojjam was impressed not only with Banaro's gold, but also with his bold proposal for the conquest of the Borana. This animated Sela Christos, who soon entertained a grand project

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1. It may be that the spectre of previous defeats inhibited the people from endorsing the new aggressive policy, beyond highland Ennarya. The security of highland Ennarya may have weighed more with the people than the exploitation of new opportunity which the Sadacha weakness provided them.
 2. *Infra*, p. 366.
 3. *Infra*, p. 365.
 4. Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia ... ", p. 519.
 5. Pereira, *Chronica de Susenyos*, pp. 239 -240.
 6. *Ibid.*

aimed at "... the recovery of Damot and the Gafat districts beyond the Blue Nile"¹, an idea which was buried with Sarsa Dengel in 1597. However, before the project was carried out, it was to be superseded by events which changed the course of history.²

It was probably Banaro's bad luck that the usual weakness of the Christian leadership and the ability of the Oromo to recover after defeat converged at a critical moment when he expected swift action. The Afre, who in 1618 dispersed and disappeared from Bizamo, regrouped and appeared with strength at the beginning of 1620. Sela Christos soon received an intelligence report which claimed that "the Macha wanted to attack Gojjam and Ennarya".³ Alarmed, Sela Christos appealed to Susenyos for immediate assistance. The latter quickly mobilized his force and arrived in Gojjam. Their two forces met at the confluence of the Bir and Qachamo rivers, where they discovered that the news about the Macha attack on Gojjam was false.

... Both have agreed not to cross the Abay by raft towards Bizamo, because of the number of their soldiers. They said 'It will take us more than seven days to cross the river, and if the Galla hear we are coming to attack them they will have seven days' start in removing their cattle and property. We will not be able to find them as they can go wherever they like. (4)

These few lines sum up the hidden strength of the Macha. Whenever the Macha got wind of an enemy's movement they dispersed and disappeared into their forests covering several days journey where their enemy could not follow them. Dispersal and disappearance were part of their strategy by which they minimized casualties, even when they were vigorously pursued by a strong enemy. This was one of the reasons why they were able to regroup and come back with strength. The Macha bands usually consisted of three to six thousand men. Even if an entire band was massacred (which had happened many times), the loss to the strength of the whole group was not so great. Any misfortune to one band was the signal for a general dispersal of the whole group over many days journey. The mobility of the Macha bands, the unpredictability of their attack and retreat, their disorderly flight in the face of danger all added to mitigate their damage. Christian forces usually moved in large numbers and

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1. Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia ... ", p. 519.
 2. *Infra*, pp. 363-4.
 3. Pereira, *Chronica de Susenyos*, p. 217.
 4. *Ibid.*, p. 220.

their movement was slow and predictable. Any Christian victory usually lulled their own people into a sense of false security. It was at such a moment when their enemies least expected it that the Macha attacked and caused considerable damage. There are many good examples of this in the chronicle of Susenyos. Perhaps the best one is the following. Within eight days from when Susenyos and Sela Christos separated, thinking that the Macha were not crossing the Abay at that time of the year, the Macha poured on to Gojjam with flood-like speed. They attacked Gojjam on two fronts simultaneously, causing considerable havoc and terror in the province.¹

Crossing the Abay at places where they were not expected, coming at a time when they were unsuspected, and attacking an area which was unguarded, was a complex Macha strategy which the Christian leadership found difficult to cope with. It was to overcome this difficulty that the Christian leaders adopted the policy of settling numerous Oromo who "... from wars among themselves, have gone over to the king ... and obtained lands on the banks of the river opposite to the nation they have revolted from, against which they have ever been the securest bulwark."²

The governor of Gojjam appealed to Susenyos, and he arrived at Addis Alem, the headquarters of Sela Christos, at the time when the latter was under heavy Macha attack. When Susenyos descended on the Macha like a whirlwind from the hill above Addis Alem :

... The Galla fled like animals chased by a lion and they were killed wherever they were found. When the Galla fly, they do not say this is a precipice, this is thorn, but jump upon everything as if it is a plain where there is no obstacle. If it was not for the darkness of the night that covered them, no one would have escaped to tell the tale. (3)

We have already seen that shortly after this battle the Tulama came to the support of the Macha, overrunning and looting almost half of Gojjam, and devastating all the lands inhabited by Shime, Chome, Gafat and other Agaw tribes.⁴ The attack on Gojjam by the Macha and the Tulama at a few days

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1. Pereira, Chronica de Susenyos, pp. 220-1. See also Chapter Four above, pp. 287-8.
 2. Bruce, Travels to discover ... iii, p. 238.
 3. Pereira, ibid., p. 222.
 4. Ibid., pp. 223-4.

interval in separate places was a deliberate common strategy which had three main purposes : first, they wanted to divide and weaken the Christian forces arrayed against the Macha. Secondly, it seems they wanted to loot the riches of Gojjam to replace the losses they suffered since 1618, and thirdly and more importantly, it seems they wanted to put an end to the alliance between Ennarya and Gojjam, thus isolating the former while harassing the latter. The first two purposes met with varying degrees of success. The third was particularly successful, with tragic consequences for the ruler of Ennarya.

We have seen above that Banaro came to power at a time when Ennarya was under heavy Sadacha attack. By providing dynamic and creative leadership, he was able to save his land from anarchy and disintegration. He restored Ennarya's prosperity and strengthened the defence of the highland area. In both fields he succeeded all too well. Animated by his successes and deceived by the difficulties of the Sadacha, he started attacking them in the neighbouring districts. He won repeated victories. These victories had been his personal achievements. He had fought beyond the Gibe until he had reached the edge of the Abay valley, where no previous governor of Ennarya had ever fought. Between 1618 and 1619 he returned from a number of expeditions with military strength and prestige greater than any previous ruler of Ennarya had ever enjoyed. It was at this moment of triumph that Banaro wanted to extend his conquest to all the Borana. On this issue he staked the wealth of Ennarya and his prestige. The great stimulus for his project came from the weakness of the Macha. But the Macha managed to overcome their weakness. Their alliance with the Tulama dismayed their enemies. The Borana irruption on to Gojjam changed the course of events.

Towards the end of 1619, Banaro sent his son, Yaman Christos, to the governor of Gojjam with a rich gift and a proposal to launch a joint offensive against the Borana. In early 1620 instead of coming back with much hoped for good news, Yaman Christos came with two alarming pieces of information from his short visit to the court of Sela Christos. First the hope of joint action against the Borana was distant and doubtful, as the Borana had put heavy pressure on Gojjam itself. Second and even more alarming, Yaman Christos seems to have told his father that the Sadacha, who lately fled before his sword, had returned to the surrounding districts of Konch and Shat and that they were agitated with the prospect of revenge and hopes of booty from Ennarya.

Either to repeat his earlier victory, or to intimidate the Sadacha, Banaro led his last expedition against them. It is not clear how far he may have gone this time. But he does not appear to have gone beyond the Gibe Ennarya. It seems Banaro had been disappointed by the refusal of his men to go beyond this river. Probably they were persuaded by their experience that the Gibe Ennarya was the only line of defence that could save them against the sudden attack of the Sadacha. Perhaps to show moderation, or suspecting some secret plan against him, Banaro decided not to proceed further, and returned to his court without any engagement with the Sadacha. His political enemies, who condemned him for everything, took this as a sign of weakness and decided to act. The opposition to Banaro was led by a man called Sisgayo, who seems to have been related to the old ruling house which Banaro overthrew in 1611. It is said that Sisgayo's party "... had killed (Banaro) by treachery".¹ What this treachery involved is not clear from our sources. But two things can be said with certainty. First, it seems Sisgayo attacked Banaro at an unguarded moment, when the latter was probably accompanied by few of his valiant supporters. Banaro was killed while fighting. We do not know how many of his supporters were killed with him, but we know that some of them hid and saved the life of his son Yaman Christos. Secondly, the opposition to Banaro seems to have been supported by a large section of the population. It was probably his heavy taxation which caused the anger of the people, on top of his wars beyond the Gibe, which exhausted their resources.

The sad end of Banaro changed in a moment the dynamic policy that characterized Ennarya between 1611 and 1620. The new leader was not a military man like Banaro, but possessed abilities which enabled him to assess realistically what Ennarya could and could not do. Instead of aspiring to continue with the aggressive policy of his predecessor, Sisgayo limited his attention to the vital defence of highland Ennarya. It seems a number of fortifications built by Banaro in surrounding districts were abandoned. When the party of the dead leader smuggled out Yaman Christos to Gojjam, Sisgayo knew that neither Sela Christos nor Susenyos were in any position to restore Yaman Christos to power in Ennarya. Nevertheless, the kind treatment Yaman Christos received at the court of Sela Christos angered Sisgayo, who used it as a pretext for making a veiled attack and warning to Susenyos not to meddle in the affairs of Ennarya.

1. Almeida, in Some Records of Ethiopia, p. 150.

... They sent a written message saying that 'we have killed Banaro because he massacred the people without justice, and amputated the hands and legs of some and pulled out the eyes of others. He showed no mercy even towards the young and old ... He kept for himself the tribute of the king which he extracted from our houses ... He enriched himself through rapine and fraud ... He practised adultery and took wives of others ... As a woman conceives for nine months and gives birth to a baby in the tenth month ... we kept in our stomach all his iniquities for nine years and gave birth to his death in the tenth. We killed him because he vigorously continued with the destruction of all the people of Ennarya. Instead of the cruel and unjust man, we have appointed a nice and pious man whose name is Sisgayo.

From the content of this bold and insulting letter four things can be said with certainty. First, it seems Banaro was killed by a large number of people. Second, it appears that the opposition to Banaro simmered underground for nine years, before it exploded in the tenth. Thirdly, it appears that Banaro oppressed the people by heavy taxation, all of which he seems to have used either for financing his aggressive policy against the Sadacha, or for winning favour at the courts of the Christian leaders. Fourthly, and most importantly, it also appears that Banaro's wars against the Macha in the surrounding districts were not popular with the people. It seems the people were persuaded by their past experience and fear to distrust the aggressive policy of Banaro, which sacrificed the lives of its people in the areas far from the frontiers of Ennarya. The choice of a "nice and pious" man to replace a "cruel and oppressive" one was regulated by the difference of their policies. Banaro was a man of war while Sisgayo was a man of peace. Two of the actions which Sisgayo took leave no doubt that he wanted to break with the policy of his predecessors. First he suspended sending tribute to Susenyos. Second he abandoned fighting with the Sadacha beyond the Gibe Ennarya. Susenyos's reaction to the above letter and the suspension of tribute by Sisgayo was a mixture of an explosion of anger (which he poured out in the following letter) and a pragmatic approach and friendly gesture to Sisgayo.

... He dictated a letter and message of anger to the people saying, 'If Banaro was bad to you and if he had offended you with all his iniquities, and bad things, you should not have killed him. You should have sent us your grievance and notified us to demote him and appoint another instead of him. Why did you kill our governor who was appointed nine years ago? You have not done a good thing. You have committed greater arrogance by your own will by killing him without our order. As for Sisgayo, since he had not joined in the killing of Banaro, let his appointment be confirmed. However, send us our tribute and compensation as well as gift for confirmation'. Having dictated this, he sent Mustaf Basha (a Turk captain in his army) with all the Turks towards Ennarya. (2)

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1. Pereira, Chronica de Susenyos, pp. 239-40.
 2. Ibid., p. 240.

From the above it appears that Sisgayo had the support of the people. Susenyos did not want to go against the man who had this support, and instead he decided to derive the best possible material benefit from the situation. Thus he requested the people of Ennarya to send him tribute, compensation for the blood of Banaro and a gift for confirming Sisgayo's appointment. He backed his request with a show of strength by sending his message by Turkish musketeers from his army. Sisgayo, who did not want to incur the anger of the Turkish musketeers at close range, or offend the pride of Susenyos at a distance, seems to have sent rich gifts, but was "... unable to meet the repeated demands made upon (him for tribute)." ¹

While Susenyos was absorbed at the consideration of material benefit from the changed situation in Ennarya, Sela Christos remained loyal to Banaro and treated his son with affection. Sela Christos, who was an ardent Catholic, converted Yaman Christos to Catholicism, and gave him his own daughter for marriage. His kindness towards the young man was not without effect, nor Yaman Christos's prospect for return to power without success. The young man gave an account of himself as a loving husband and "a good Catholic".² He was highly thought of as the torch for the spread of Catholicism in Ennarya. It was the irony of history that Yaman Christos came to power in Ennarya in 1632 at the very time when the fate of Catholicism was irreparably destroyed in the Christian kingdom.³

Sisgayo ruled Ennarya between 1620 and 1632, for which period we lack sufficient information on which to base an in-depth analysis. But the following remarks can be made with certainty. During the twelve years Sisgayo ruled the strength of Ennarya was wasted in useless inactivity. Relieved from the pressures of Ennarya, the Sadacha spread themselves over the face of the fertile land as far as the edges of highland Ennarya. The Sadacha attacks on Ennarya could not be stopped by the leadership, whose spirit of resistance appeared to have been exhausted. The failure to stop the Sadacha created instability in Ennarya. It seems even the ardent supporters of Sisgayo in 1620 had by 1632 questioned his abilities and started deserting his sinking cause. In contrast to this, the supporters of Banaro maintained their loyalty to his exiled son. The attempt to end the rule of Sisgayo in the manner by

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1. Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia ... ", p. 491.
 2. Almeida, in Some Records of Ethiopia, p. 150.
 3. Supra, p. 295.

which he came to power culminated in 1632, when "... Those of Banaro party killed him (Sisgayo) and all his minions and then sent for his son Emana Christos to put him in control of the kingdom."¹

Satisfied with the actions of his supporters, and delighted with revenge for his father, and excited at the prospect before him, Yaman Christos returned to Ennarya after an exile of twelve years. The pride of his supporters was elated by the memorable return of a Catholic prince, who was destined to be the first king of independent Ennarya. Yaman Christos seems to have possessed a considerable share of the vigour and ability of his father. His triumphal return restored the courage, raised the morale and animated the spirit of his people for resistance. However, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to know whether or not Yaman Christos was able to stop the Sadacha advance. This is not because he was inactive, but because we lack information on his period. In fact our sources of information on Ennarya stop in 1632, with his return to his land.² Following the civil war of June 1632 in the Christian kingdom, the death of Susenyos in September of the same year and the removal of Sela Christos from office, and his subsequent execution, the political link between Ennarya and the Christian kingdom was damaged beyond repair. Ennarya became a little kingdom under Yaman Christos. Our information on Ennarya sadly ends with the end of political contact between the two. It was only in 1704 that some information about Ennarya was reported in the Christian literature. This was in connection with Iyasu I's war against the Macha. At that time Ennarya was a divided land on the verge of political disintegration. Without doubt it was the developments which took place between 1632 and 1704 which led to its disappearance as a political entity in 1710. It seems Ennarya survived so long because of the strength of her political institution, her economy and topography. We do not know whether the debilitating factional conflicts flared up while Yaman Christos was on the throne. But we do know what while Ennarya's public strength was consumed in internal quarrels it was surrounded on the north, west and east, and was continuously harassed by the Sadacha arms. Highland Ennarya itself seems to have become the theatre of Sadacha attack. In the process the flower of Ennarya's men perished in the struggle without end and hope. In the face of ever-increasing Sadacha attack, the people of Ennarya were unable to close

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1. Almeida, in Some Records of Ethiopia, p. 150.
 2. According to some sources, Yaman Christos is reported to have once come to Fasiladas "laden with gold". See for instance, R. Pankhurst, An Introduction to economic history of Ethiopia, p. 185. No date is given for this event. In all likelihood it must have taken place at the earliest before the re-establishment of the old church, and at the latest before Sela Christos (the father-in-law of Yaman Christos) was removed from power and executed.

ranks and stand together. The factional conflict was bitter and it was the fight of despair against sorrow and anger. Usurpation of power by factions involving either the Sadacha or the rulers of Kaffa became common practice in the politics of decaying Ennarya.

... Internal struggles for power marked the closing years of the Hinmaro (Ennarya) kingdom ... A considerable part of the competition involved factions of the Kafa Minigo ruling dynasty expanding their power base throughout the Kafa highlands in the late seventeenth century and the Hinmaro-Busaso dynasty rapidly losing their positions of power during the same period. Both were to lose areas north of the Gojeb river to the third competitor : the Oromo. (1)

As the political institution of Ennarya was disintegrating, so was her economy. Both agriculture and commerce rapidly declined. In other words, the Sadacha raids and internal power struggle decayed agriculture and diminished trade. The exhausted land could no longer afford to provide luxury for the quarrelling aristocracy of Ennarya. Everyone seems to have been ignorant of the causes for the economic decay of their land. Each faction put forward its own leader to salvage the situation and save Ennarya. Thus they neglected the unity of the people and inadvertently contributed to and hastened the destruction of Ennarya. The following song, supposed to have been produced by a musician during the period under discussion, a supporter of a would-be usurper (against the usurper on the throne), expresses the intensity of factional conflicts and the degree of economic decay in Ennarya.

After the death of Gomma Kegocci
Tumi Take has left me empty-handed
There are cows full of milk,
but he never orders the people to milk them
There are beehives full of honey,
but he never orders the people to empty them
He had become just like a medium
Since he has become king.
Sorghum does not grow.
... I am surrounded by weed.
Let Sisiti become king,
and make the country greater.
The kingship would be in good hands with him.²

It seems owing to the bitter factional conflicts highland Ennarya itself was divided into two parts and ruled by rival leaders, who probably fought more with each other than with the Sadacha. When in 1704 Iyasu arrived at Gorqa, the earlier stronghold fortification of Ennarya on the Gibe river, two rival rulers applied to him for investiture.

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1. Werner Lange, Domination and resistance narrative songs of the Kafa highlands, p. 18. I am indebted to the author for the information on the closing years of Ennarya's history.
 2. Ibid.

... The emperor confirmed the governorship upon one of the rivals, he took no steps to prevent the renewal of fighting between the supporters of the two rulers. If Iyasu's assaults on Konch and particularly on the markets near the Gibe river, were intended to help the ruler of his choice, his intervention was more harmful than useful. His licentious soldiers looted all the defenders whom they were unable to kill. (1)

Unable either to come to terms with each other, or to stop the advancing Sadacha, the rival rulers of Ennarya urged by fear and despair, fled one after the other to take refuge across the Gojeb river in Kaffa. So ended the existence of Ennarya as a political entity in the Gibe region. It existed first as a kingdom on its own; it became part of the Christian kingdom in the fifteenth century, while retaining considerable internal autonomy. At the beginning of the seventeenth century it seemed capable of expanding. By 1632 it became a small independent kingdom which was to disappear at the start of the next century. Its political extinction, so complete and irretrievable, was owing chiefly to its own internal weakness.

The Sadacha were now in possession of Ennarya, a land of uncommon fertility, blessed with all that they needed. There was nothing to resist the Sadacha advance up to the Gojeb river, and a considerable wealth to attract them. At this time, the little state of Seka, located between Ennarya and the Gojeb river, had a king by name of Bedi Gaecci. This man tried to come to terms with the situation by absorbing into his administration the energy of ambitious Sadacha individuals. This proved to be the cause of his destruction. By favouring the Oromo at his court, Bedi Gaecci alienated his own people. The ambitious Oromo individuals at his court harnessed the popular fury to their own advantage. The following song expresses the anger of this king.

Are you angry with me ?
 You are just like a pot covered with mud.
 I washed you and made you clean.
 I wish I had never washed you.
 You were bent just like a crooked tree.
 I made you straight.
 I wish I had never straightened you.
 O, Galla, you are not thinking correctly,
 ... Yesterday Wadagi came;
 I wanted him as a son-in-law;
 I gave him my daughter.
 Today Dali came,
 I gave him a bride for his bed alone.
 He had no ring of copper;

1. Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia ... ", p. 592. See also I. Guidi, Annales Iohannis I ... , pp. 245-6.

I got him fat golden ring.
 You are just like small animal,
 which has seen some food.
 You are just like a fox,
 which runs into its hole.
 O, Galla, you are lying.
 I am the creator of war.
 Bring your allies.
 Bring forty local leaders,
 If I come to you,
 you would defecate.
 O you foolish men;
 let us fight. (1)

They fought, and the outcome was a foregone conclusion. The Sadacha won decisively. The aristocracy of this little state also fled to Kaffa across the Gojeb. The triumphal advance of the Sadacha was stopped at the valley of the Gojeb river. Here they found formidable natural barriers that opposed their advance towards Kaffa. The hot valley of the Gojeb, infested both with terrible mosquitoes² and tsetse fly, covered with tall grass and dense forest, made rapid cavalry attack and retreat virtually impossible. This natural protection which the Gojeb valley afforded to Kaffa was further strengthened by an elaborate and highly complex man-made fortification which dotted all the entrances to that country. To all intents and purposes the defence system of Kaffa was impregnable. Thus Gojeb remained the boundary between the Oromo and Kaffa.³ With their further progress stopped at the Gojeb, the Sadacha were obliged to settle in the Gibe region and henceforward devoted their energies to developing a system of agriculture combined with cattle-keeping.

To summarize what has transpired thus far : As we saw earlier in the chapter, the Macha crossed the Gudar and Mugar rivers in the 1570s. By the first decade of the eighteenth century, they were the masters of the vast land which extended from the Gojeb in the south to the Abay in the north, from the western and southwestern parts of what is today Shawa province in the east, to the provinces of Wallaga in the west and Illu Abba Bor in the southwest. The Afre section of the Macha spread mainly to the region of the latter two provinces. The Sadacha section of the Macha spread from Jibet and Macha⁴

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1. Werner Lange, Domination and resistance ... , pp. 21-22.
 2. Max Grühl, The Citadel of Ethiopia : The empire of the divine emperor, translated from the German by Ian F.D. Morrow and L.M. Sieveking (London : 1932), p. 207.
 3. Ibid., pp. 170, 205-12. See also Antonio Cecchi, Da Zeila alle frontiere del Caffa, (Roma : 1886), vol. II, p. 484.
 4. e.g. Daba Hunde, "A portrait of social organization and institutions of the Oromo of Jibat and Machcha in the nineteenth century till the conquest of Menelik II", B.A. thesis Haile Sellassie I University, Addis Ababa, 1972, p. 14.

(the westernmost awaraja sub-province of Shawa), across Shat, Konch, Ennarya, Bosha and up to the Gojeb valley. In other words, the Sadacha mainly spread to the Gibe region. Both the Afre and the Sadacha moved across lands that were devastated and depopulated by slave-raids conducted by the Christian kings, the lands relatively empty of people, and in most cases the scattered people either fled before them or were adopted and assimilated by them. The Macha success can be accounted for by the warriors' speed in attack and retreat, by the mobility of their cavalry over long distances, their dependence on cattle, and by their being able to gain knowledge of their enemy. News of their cruelty spread far and wide, causing panic among their thinly-spread enemies, and this frequently enabled the Macha simply to disperse them. The plains, particularly in Shat, Konch, Bosha and Ennarya, were more affected by depopulation than the highland areas. The general danger encouraged a concentration of population in highland Ennarya. In short, the highlands of southwestern Ennarya were relatively densely populated. After the division and later disintegration of the state of Ennarya, it was mainly the ruling groups who fled across the Gojeb river and took refuge in the kingdom of Kaffa. The bulk of the population of Ennarya remained on their land. This was true of Shat, Konch and Bosha. Thus in the Gibe region the two cultures - the agriculturalists of the people of the region and the pastoralists of the Macha - became mutually dependent on each other. The Macha came to rely on the people of the area for agricultural products and probably the latter on the former for their animal products. After almost two centuries of living side by side and then later together, the Macha were no longer a threat to the people of the region. The Macha settled among the sedentary agriculture population, especially in Ennarya, who initially may have outnumbered them, but through extensive inter-marriages, and the constant stream of new emigrants, the Oromo eventually equalled and probably came to outnumber the Ennaryans. It must be remembered that there was a less dramatic and yet slow and continuous process of migration into the newly-conquered areas, as the tradition recorded by Lambert Bartels for southern Wallaga and northern Illu Abba Bor, clearly shows.

... The eldest son always remained on his father's land; the other sons went in search of new land for themselves; later the sons of those eldest sons, in their turn, followed their relatives who went before, and joined them in the new country ... 'It is thus that you find our names everywhere in the country between Ghimbi and Dembidollo.' (1)

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1. Lambert Bartels, "Studies of the Galla in Wallaga: their own view of the past", in Journal of Ethiopian Studies, (1970), vol. VIII, No. 1. p. 139.

In the course of the many decades during the seventeenth, and the first half of the eighteenth, centuries, the ground was prepared and the stage was set for the transformation of the Macha mode of production from pastoralism to sedentary agriculture, combined with cattle-keeping. This in turn set in motion a dynamic political process that eventually culminated in the formation of the five Oromo Gibe states around the beginning of the nineteenth century. The next two chapters will examine the process of state formations, the political organization, the economic foundation and ideological orientation of these states.

Chapter Six

The Gibe States from ca. 1800-1850s.

For this and the following chapters, our major sources¹ are the European travellers of the last century, who either visited the Gibe region itself, or gathered information about it in northern Ethiopia from traders coming from the region. The second source of information is Oromo oral traditions recorded either by European travellers and missionaries or by the Oromo themselves during the present century. Among the European travellers and missionaries, Antoine d'Abbadie, Charles T. Beke, Cardinal Massaja, Antoine Cecchi and Enrico Cerulli are most worthy of mention. D'Abbadie was in the Gibe region between 1843 and 1846.² If his stay in the area was brief, the product of that stay was immense.³ He gathered his information about the geography, history, economy and politics of the Gibe region from a wide circle of merchants, elders and political leaders, including Abba Bagibo himself, the famous king of Limmu-Emmara. An intelligent observer, he kept dated records of everything he heard and so chronicled his own research. It is perhaps because of this that one historian describes him as "... a giant among all our informants, whether travellers, missionaries or government agents."⁴ What is more, his information bears the stamp of authenticity. Dr. C.T. Beke was in Shawa and Gojjam in 1842 and 1843, where he was able to gather from traders

1. In the previous five chapters we have made extensive use of Ethiopian Christian sources as well as a few Muslim ones. These sources now dry up for the period under discussion. At first glance, it seems to pass from the use of those sources to new ones is to bid good-bye to the waters where every detail of navigation is well-known and to embark upon an uncharted sea. However, even before surface digging, it becomes very apparent that there is another rich source of information. It is for this reason that we briefly say a few things about these sources right from the start.

2. The following are among the published works of Antoine d'Abbadie.

- a) 1877, "Les causes actuelles de l'esclavage en Ethiopie", extrait La Revue des questions scientifiques (Loubain), pp. 409-434.
- b) 1880, "Sur les Oromos, grande nation Africaine" Annales de la société scientifique de Bruxelles, vol. IV., pp. 167-192.
- c) 1890, Géographie de l'Ethiopie, (Paris)

3. D'Abbadie's unpublished materials are found at the Bibliothèque Nationale of Paris. Altogether there are twenty-seven volumes, most of which deal with Ethiopia, though some contain the private papers of d'Abbadie's family. This unpublished material has provided me with what is truly a mine of information, without which this thesis would have remained incomplete.

4. M. Abir, "Trade and politics in the Ethiopian region 1830-1855", Ph.D. thesis School of Oriental and African Studies, London, 1964, preface pp. x-xi.

certain limited but reliable information about the Gibe region.¹ Guglielmo Massaja, the first Catholic bishop of the Oromo territory, was in Ethiopia for three decades, some of which time he spent in the Gibe region. Three of his twelve volumes² contain much useful information about the situation in the Gibe region. Antonio Cecchi was in the Gibe region in 1879 and 1880 during which time he visited and gathered information from almost all the Gibe states.³ If d'Abbadie's information on Limmu-Ennarya is excellent, Cecchi's information on all the Gibe states is highly useful. Finally, in the early part of this century, Cerulli visited the Gibe region, and gathered much useful information before the last autonomous Gibe state - Jimma - was annexed by the Amhara administration. Both in his earlier major work⁴, and his later traveller's account⁵, he provides us with useful information especially concerning the spread of Islam in the area. The preceding are our major travellers and missionary sources.⁶

Our Oromo sources come essentially from three documents. The first is the manuscript of Abba Jobir Abba Dula, the last king of Jimma. This document contains recent history, oral traditions as well as fantastic legends of bygone ages. Careful interpretation of this information provides a very valuable insight into the process of the formation of the state of Jimma Abba Jifar. The second source is the Jimma interview programme sponsored by the Addis Ababa University in 1974 and conducted by a group of university students. While the above-mentioned manuscript deals mainly with the history of Jimma, the interview programme covers all the five Gibe states. Very little could be known about the economic resources of Jimma from Abba Jobir's manuscript, partly because his aim was to refute those who distorted Oromo history, and partly because he did not pay much attention to economic matters. However, the Jimma interview programme includes the economic aspect of the Gibe states.

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1. The following are only few examples from among the published works of C.T. Beke.
 - a) 1843, "On the countries south of Abyssinia, Journal of Royal Geographical Society, vol. III, pp. 254-69.
 - b) 1852, Letters on the Commerce and Politics of Abyssinia and other parts of Eastern Africa, (London)
 2. G. Massaja, 1885-1895, I miei trenta cinque anni di missione nell' alta Etiopia, (12 volumes).
 3. A. Cecchi, 1886, Da Zeila alle frontiere del Caffa, (3 volumes).
 4. E. Cerulli, Folk literature of the Galla of southern Ethiopia, (1922).
 5. Idem, Etiopia occidentale, (1933), 2 volumes.
 6. The Catholic mission in the Gibe region did send many letters and reports to their headquarters in Europe and those letters and reports were recently published in G. Massaja, Lettere e scritti minori (Roma, 1978), 6 volumes. Volumes II and III are useful.

Our third Oromo source is the unpublished manuscript of Tasawo Merga,¹ a modern Oromo historian, who conducted extensive oral interviews all over Oromo territory, including the Gibe region. The three sources tend to complement each other and judicious interpretation of them may give a version of history which is the Oromo view of their own past. We have to allow a large measure of truth to these sources, not merely for what they have to say, but also for what we ourselves may learn from them. At the same time we cannot accept certain parts of these materials, especially those which deal with the introduction of Islam and the formation of states in the area. This is because the first two of these sources push the events back across five hundred years, while in reality both took place only in the early part of the nineteenth century. In short, by careful use of European travellers accounts and Oromo oral traditions, supplemented by various other sources which include the recent works of M. Abir on Limmu-Ennarya,² and H.S. Lewis on Jimma,³ it is possible to give a general picture of the process of state formation in the Gibe region.

In the previous chapter we saw that her political weakness made Ennarya a prize within reach of the Sadacha. The long history of Ennarya gave a special significance to the capture of its highlands. Here was located the capital of Ennarya, at the junction of a series of caravan routes. From here radiated the trade routes leading to Kaffa, the land of coffee, ivory and slaves; to the western region, the land of gold and other precious commodities. From here, too, originated the trade routes that went northwards to Shawa and beyond, to Gojjam and the Red Sea. Here was located land of unusual fertility, the commercial emporium of the region. This marked out Ennarya as an important centre of long distance trade. After the Sadacha captured Ennarya, the old state disintegrated, but this did not directly lead to the emergence of the new Oromo states. Many decades had to elapse before the Oromo formed their own states on the ruins of the earlier ones. The formation of the new Oromo states has been explained either as "borrowing from their neighbours", or created by leaders who wanted to control trade routes and the lucrative markets, or as a result of the introduction of Islam into the region, or because of

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1. Tasawo Merga, "Senna Umatta Oromo: Jalqaba jarra kudda jahafti hama dumiti jarra kudda sagalefanti", ("History of the Oromo people : from the beginning of the sixteenth century to the end of the nineteenth century")
 2. M. Abir, Ethiopia : the era of the princes 1769-1855, (London : 1968) Idem, "The emergence and consolidation of the monarchies of Enarea and Jimma in the first half of the nineteenth century", Journal of African History, vol. VI, (1965), pp. 205-219.
 3. H.S. Lewis, A Galla monarchy : Jimma Abba Jifar Ethiopia 1830-1932, (Madison 1965), Idem, "Reconsideration of the socio-political system of the western Galla", Journal of Semitic Studies, vol. IX, (1964), pp. 139-143.

the threatening pressure of their Amhara neighbours.¹ Excepting the last point, the consolidation of the Gibe states owed something to all of these factors in one way or another. But these explanations tend to view the formation of the Gibe states as a sudden phenomenon, whereas in fact it was a long process. Not a single one of these states sprang into existence all at once, nor were they formed at the same time, but at different times, one after the other. Limmu-Ennarya, the first to be formed came into existence around 1800, while Gera, the last state to be formed, came into existence only after 1835. Gumma was formed around 1810, while Gomma came into existence around 1820. Jimma was formed in 1830. In short, all the Gibe states developed by internal processes. As examples of state formation from other parts of the world show, "nothing is made of nothing : if a people has not developed to the point of state formation, that formation cannot be superimposed."²

It would be absurd to deny the Sidama influence (especially that inherited from the old state of Ennarya) on the monarchic institutions among the Oromo. A gold ring as an insignia of authority, and an umbrella as a symbol of royalty are two examples which should suffice to show unmistakable Sidama influence. What scholars generally tend to overlook is the fact that, during the period of Macha migration, and their subsequent settlement among the sedentary agriculturalist population, there took place a fusion between Oromo culture and the culture of the assimilated people, which resulted in the foundation of a new civilization in the Gibe region. Only this accounts for the truly advanced development which the Oromo of the Gibe region achieved in the fields of agriculture, handicrafts, architecture, commercial prosperity and the generally higher standard of living - all of which matters will be discussed below. Moreover, the cultural fusion between the people of Ennarya and the Macha, coming from the latter's settlement among the former, had a far-reaching effect on the Macha, which was also to be seen in the economic life.³ The intensive

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1. M. Abir, *Ethiopia ...*, p. 93. See also his "Trade and politics in the the Ethiopian region", pp. 109-10; G.W.B. Huntingford, *The Galla of Ethiopia, the kingdom of Kafa and Jangero*, p. 55; G. Massaja, *In Abissinia e fra i Galla*, (Roma, 1895), p. 279.
 2. Lawrence Krader, *Formation of the state*, (New Jersey, 1968), p. 74. See also, M. Fortes, E.E. Evans-Pritchard, eds., *African Political Systems* preface pp. xii-xxiii, and also the introduction, pp. 1-23.
 3. As indicated in Chapter Two, p. 87, the Oromo were engaged in mixed farming long before their epoch-making migration. During the two centuries of their migration (ca. 1500-1700) they were pastoralists by profession and warriors by tradition. Pastoralism was a profession that suited their movement and was more compatible with their warrior tradition.

agriculture of the people of Ennarya exerted great influence on the Macha themselves, the majority of whom became settled mixed farmers. The transformation of the Oromo from pastoralism to settled sedentary agricultural life was more profound in the Gibe region¹, as it also was in the province of Amhara in the north.

There is an important fact which has relevance to our discussion, but which scholars usually tend to overlook. This concerns the development of various Oromo groups. It is generally assumed that states developed among the Oromo only in the Gibe region. (The outlines of states, still in the process of formation, are not usually mentioned). States actually developed among the Oromo in three regions, namely, Wallo, the Gibe region and Wallaga.² The last was a development of the second half of the nineteenth century, while the first was a development belonging to the last part of the seventeenth century. In Wallo, the Oromo settled among a large sedentary population, whose agricultural practice exerted considerable influence on the newcomers. As a result, in some parts of Wallo, especially north-east Amhara, mixed farming became a dominant mode of the Oromo economy. It was not by accident that the first recorded account of a local Oromo dynasty, that of Arreloch, was formed in north-east Amhara.³ By the beginning of the eighteenth century, almost a century before the formation of states in the Gibe region, another dynasty had already been formed in Wallo. By the second half of the eighteenth century the new dynasty of Warra Himanu, or the Mamadoch, according to local tradition had already overrun the territory of the Arreloch. "Mohammed Ali, otherwise known by the name of his war horse, Aba Jibo, is considered to be the real founder of the Mamadoch dynasty."⁴ Abba Jibo died in 1784, but the dynasty he founded dominated the Wallo region up to 1815.⁵ We make this brief reference to Wallo for three reasons. First, the Oromo in Wallo were Muslims long

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1. G.W.B. Huntingford, in Some Records of Ethiopia, preface, p. lxxviii.
 2. The Afre section of the Macha who mainly spread to the region of Wallaga remained pastoralists much longer than the Sadacha. This may account for the delay in the formation of states in Wallaga.
 3. Zergaw Asfera, "Some aspects of historical development in Amhara (Wallo) ca. 1700-1815", pp. 10-16. Zergaw does not clearly state the Arreloch was an Oromo dynasty. But the names of all the principal actors in the story are unmistakably Oromo names. What is more, the name of the dynasty, Arreloch, is an Oromo clan name. Furthermore, Zergaw does not dispute the fact that the Oromo element constituted a considerable number of the population in north-east Amhara.
 4. Ibid., p. 20.
 5. Ibid.,

before they formed a dynasty. The implication of this will become clear further on in our discussion. Secondly, the control of trade routes and market centres was essential, but not decisive, for the formation of dynasties in Wallo. Thirdly, and more importantly, it was an agricultural peasant economy which formed the material basis of the Oromo dynasty in Wallo. As in the latter, so in the Gibe region, agriculture became the material foundation for the formation of a monarchic institution.

In the course of many decades, out of the masses of the mixed farmers and pastoralists of Macha, a number of rich families pushed themselves into the foreground, gradually eclipsing the traditional gada leaders.¹ This tendency was observable by the beginning of the eighteenth century,² and by the end of the same century a new aristocracy was already formed. This Macha aristocracy, distinguished by its influence and wealth of cattle, land and slaves, was given the name of sorressa,³ in contrast to the pastoral nobility, who were known as Borana.⁴ The distinction between the victorious Macha horde and the conquered gabaro disappeared and they all became an homogeneous mass of common people, equally subjugated by the new aristocracy.⁵ How this new class acquired wealth in land and slaves is the subject of our later discussion. Here it should suffice to say that the fundamental reason for the formation of a monarchic institution among the Macha was the transformation of their mode of production from pastoralism to sedentary agriculture. And the agricultural peasant economy furnished bricks and mortar for the formation of the states. Thus the simplistic answer of "borrowing from their neighbours" overlooks this vital development.

The claim that the Gibe states were created by leaders who wanted "to control the trade routes and lucrative markets"⁶ is partly true, but it fails to take into account the development just mentioned. It is partly true, however, because wherever traders found a strong leader who guaranteed safety and security for their persons and property, they travelled frequently, harvesting rich profits for themselves and diffusing substantial benefits to their protector in the form of taxes for protection, customs-dues and gifts. The protectors, who controlled both caravan routes and market places, were themselves

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1. *Supra*, p. 347.
 2. e.g. I. Guidi, Annales Iohannis I ... , pp. 238-46.
 3. *Infra*, p. 391.
 4. *Infra*, p. 386.
 5. *Infra*, p. 391.
 6. M. Abir, "Trade and politics ...", pp. 109-11.

extensive landowners. The rise to power of the family of Gama-Moras in Gudru, around the middle of the nineteenth century, and his formation of a small state, in the full light of history could be taken as a classic example.

According to Massaja, the father of Gama-Moras came to Gudru from Gojjam and was adopted by one of the Borana nobility. Despite the adoption, the Borana nobility in general regarded the son many decades later as a "stranger" and "inferior", because "... he had neither wealth in land nor in cattle - the two items which brought honour to a family among the Galla".¹ Gama-Moras inherited a large fortune, which his father made from commerce. Gama-Moras not only bought lands with his money, but also won friendship among the Borana nobility.

"... Mainly because of their manners, generosity, hospitality and talent ... the greatness of his family spread far and wide, so much so that the most important commercial affairs of the market of Assandabo is concluded in his house, and even that of the remote market of Egibe, so that it could be said that Gama-Moras held in his hand the key to all the market centres (in Gudru)". (2)

A few observations could be made on the above. First, wealth in land and in cattle was the source of honour and prestige for the Borana nobility. Earlier during the course of the migration, only wealth in cattle had counted, land being the common property of the whole clan. With the transformation of the Macha mode of production, land not only gained economic value, but also generated struggles among the war leaders for its possession.³ It was out of this struggle that the new institution was born.⁴ Secondly, money was not a source of prestige and honour by itself, but when it was converted into land and cattle it became so. This was a reflection of a peasant economy, in which barter was prominent. Thirdly, those individuals who made good use of their wealth for public relations and for winning friends and supporters had a good chance of making themselves hereditary leaders. In short, along with wealth in terms of cattle, there now appeared wealth in terms of land and slaves. Wealthy men fought for the control of more land, and the control of land made kings.

Massaja's argument that the introduction of Islam led to the formation of the monarchic institution in the Gibe region,⁵ could only be correct if by

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1. G. Massaja, I miei trenta cinque anni di missione nell'alta Etiopia, (Roma, 1886), vol. III, pp. 52-3.
 2. Ibid., pp. 52-3.
 3. Infra, pp. 452-3.
 4. Infra, p. 395.
 5. Massaja, In Abissina e fra i Galla, p. 279.

this argument it is meant that Islam helped the Oromo kings to consolidate their power and authority,¹ as Massaja himself asserts when referring to Jimma.² Without doubt, when the agricultural mode of production was breaking up the traditional political system, Islam not only provided an ideology for the new rulers, but also served as a focus of tribal loyalties. However, three points must be mentioned. First and foremost, Islam did not come to the Gibe region at the beginning of the nineteenth century, when these states were formed. Islam had been in the Gibe region at least since the sixteenth century. Over and above this fact, some of the Oromo themselves had become Muslims, even as early as the sixteenth century.³ Secondly, and even more importantly, after the disintegration of the old state of Ennarya in 1710, the commerce of the region had never really died, so that the adventurous Muslim merchants were still coming to the Gibe region, only probably less frequently.

The Galla to the south were mostly Mohametans; on the east and west, chiefly pagans ... The Moors, by courage, patience and attention have found out the means of trading with them in a tolerable degree of safety ... The Mohametan traders pass through (a number of tribal groups) in their way to Narea, the southernmost country the Abyssinians ever conquered. (4)

Three points could be deduced from the above. First, the disintegration of the state of Ennarya only disrupted, but never destroyed, the commercial importance of that region, and slowly trade with Ennarya revived, so that by the 1770s, when Bruce recorded the above information, Ennarya was once again a busy trading centre. Secondly, neither Islam by itself, nor the continuity of the caravan trade led immediately to the formation of new states. Both of these factors consolidated the position of the state makers, but were not the fundamental causes for the formation of the new institutions. Thirdly, we should note that all the five Gibe states had kings before Islam became their official religion. But once Islam became the religion of the kings, each found in the other what they wanted. Islam found champions and propagators in the kings, while the kings found a powerful ideology, a literate class and a writing system in Islam, all of which contributed to the consolidation of monarchic power in the Gibe region.⁵ In other words, the old religion was

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1. The Jimma interview programme, p. 5.
 2. G. Massaja, I miei trenta cinque anni ... , VI, p. 10.
 3. *Infra*, p. 490.
 4. James Bruce, Travels to discover, III, pp. 243-245.
 5. *Infra*, p. 493.

incapable of strengthening the new rulers. There remained only Islam with its literate, business-minded preachers, teachers and traders, and their writing system, which enabled rulers to engage in correspondence with their neighbours.¹ What is more, Islam provided the new rulers with a powerful ideology, one which justified absolute power.²

The outward similarity of the symbols of kingship used in Kaffa and the Gibe states, seems to have led some writers to assume that the latter borrowed their monarchic institution from the former. However, the Gibe states did not borrow their symbols of kingship (such as a gold ring, gold bracelet or an umbrella) from Kaffa. On the contrary, these features, which provided points of contact between the institutions of Kaffa and the Gibe states, had a common origin. This was the historical state of Ennarya. The Macha who settled in Ennarya and assimilated the Ennaryans, adopted a number of things from them, among which the symbols of kingship were probably the most important. As we saw in the previous chapter³, during the long period of Macha attack on Ennarya, a number of ruling groups from Ennarya fled across the Gojeb and took refuge in Kaffa. There is ample evidence to show that Ennarya's symbols of kingship were brought to Kaffa by some of those refugees.⁴ In fact, one of the refugee groups, the Minjo, even succeeded in usurping power in Kaffa, where they established the celebrated Minjo dynasty, which dominated that country from the first half of the seventeenth century to 1897, when the Minjo dynasty itself was abolished by the victorious imperial Shawan Amhara soldiers. This historical link between the institution of Kaffa and the Gibe states is usually overlooked. This may explain why some scholars claim that the Oromo borrowed their monarchic institution from their Sidama neighbours.⁵

Notwithstanding the common origin of the symbols of kingship, a comparison of the institution of monarchy both in the Gibe region and Kaffa shows that there were some striking differences between the two institutions. As we shall see further on in the discussion,⁶ the Gibe kings had absolute power.

1. *Infra*, p. 399.

2. G. Massaja, I miei trenta cinque anni ..., VI, p. 10.

3. *Supra*, p. 370.

4. Amnon Orent, "Lineage structure and the supernatural : the Kaffa of south-western Ethiopia", Ph.D. thesis, University of Boston, 1969, pp. 59-62. See also A. Cecchi, Da Zeila ..., II, p. 489.

5. G.W.B. Huntingford, The Galla of Ethiopia ..., p. 55. See also M. Abir, Ethiopia ..., p. 93.

6. *Infra*, p. 385.

while the power of a king of Kaffa was limited by the power of the councillors of the state. While the Gibe kings appointed and dismissed their councillors, in Kaffa the seven councillors (mikrecho) made and unmade kings. In the Gibe states all government officials were appointed by the kings and offices were not hereditary. The political structure of Kaffa was composed of a series of hierarchically organized clans, at the apex of which stood the royal clan, the Minjo, and under it were the seven most important clans in the kingdom, and the seven councillors of the state were the representatives of the seven clans. As a result, a king of Kaffa did not enjoy a constitutional prerogative which would allow him to decide on the important matters of the state without the consent of the seven councillors.¹ The Gibe kings were accessible to their subjects. They sat in the court of justice in public; received and entertained foreign and local dignitaries both in public and in private, and the range of their daily activities was not limited by taboos. A king of Kaffa was subjected to all sorts of restrictions.

Because of his semi-divine nature, there were many restrictions surrounding the daily activities of the monarch. No one was allowed to see him (he wore a crown with a veil and he sat behind a curtain); he could not put his feet on the ground and therefore, cotton cloth was always placed where he desired to walk; he was washed and fed, not being allowed to touch his own food; and anyone who was part of an act that caused these restrictions to be violated was put to death.²

These few examples (and there are several others) should suffice to show that the monarchic institution in the Gibe region was not the replica of the Kaffa institution.

Finally, Abir's claim that the pressure from the Amhara led to the formation of the new institution³ among the Macha is also untenable. First and foremost, all the five Gibe states were formed in the first half of the nineteenth century, while the Amhara pressure was felt in the Gibe region only in the second half of the same century. Secondly, and even more importantly, the Amhara pressure had been deeply felt by the Tulama Oromo in Shawa since the last quarter of the eighteenth century. But they had never formed any state.

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1. Among others see, A. Cecchi, Da Zeila ..., II, pp. 487-8. G. Massaja, Lettere e scritti minori .., II, p. 360. Max Gröhl, The Citadel ... pp. 219, 282-300. F.J. Bieber, Kaffa : Ein alt-Kuschitisches Volkstum Imer-Afrika (Wien : 1923), vol. II, pp. 170-179, 290. H.S. Lewis, A Galla Monarchy, pp. 123-5.
 2. Amnon Orent, "Lineage structure ...", p. 84, citing E. Cerulli, Etiopia Occidentale, II, p. 184. Lewis Krapf, Travels, Researches and missionary labours, p. 48. F.J. Bieber, ibid., p. 133. Paul Soleillet, Voyages en Ethiopie, (Rouen : 1886), p. 192.
 3. M. Abir, Ethiopia ..., pp. 93-4.

The reason for this is not far to seek. Social stratification based on wealth and privilege, and differences in status corresponding to the distribution of power and authority, was much less developed among the Tulama than among the Macha in the Gibe region.¹ Among the Macha the process of class formation and differentiation into rich and poor, rulers and ruled, was much more developed, and by the beginning of the nineteenth century, the stage was set, the moment was ripe for the birth of the new order, provided by the Gibe states. In the process of formation of classes and of class stratification into the ruling and the ruled, the old order, its politics and ideology disintegrated.

... The forces of development of the state are internal to the society; a people increases its resources of wealth by advanced economic organization, technology, and control of natural resources. The economic goods produced are unequally distributed, and one class of the entire society controls a greater amount than any other. More importantly, the ruling class has a greater share of land, cattle, and other means of economic production, and by using its greater part in the economy it is able to assert control over all the other social classes, which are now inferior to it. The means whereby this control is achieved is political force, including physical power, the highest, (that is, most centralized), tightest and most monopolistic control of the political power resides in the state, which is the organ of the ruling class. (2)

The formation of the Gibe States

It is difficult to give the exact date, but some time after 1800, the new political structure of the Gibe region was framed, and the Oromo society was launched on a course which more or less shaped its development down to the 1880s, when these states were annexed one after the other by the imperial armies of the Shawan Amharas. Although the existence of these states spanned no more than a few decades, this brief period was packed with events of crucial importance. It witnessed rapid, religious, social, cultural, political, industrial and commercial progress unsurpassed in any of the other Oromo areas in Ethiopia. Although in terms of size the area over which the Gibe states spread was negligible, their achievement in the cultural field was immense. Before going on to describe the formation and development of one of the most important of these states,³ it is imperative to discuss the features common to them all.

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1. e.g. Svein Ege, "Chiefs and peasants: the socio-political structure of the kingdom of Shawa about 1840", pp. 64-92.
 2. L. Krader, Formation of the State, pp. 14-5. This is a summary of the Marxist literature on the formation of the state. See also Frederick Engels, The origin of the family, private property and the state, (Peking, 1974), pp. 205-206.
 3. Limmu Ennarya was the most important state in the region for many decades. However, it was gradually eclipsed by the state of Jimma Abba Jifar after the 1860s and that is outside the scope of this thesis. Our discussion on the state formation and development will therefore concentrate heavily on Limmu Ennarya, though Jimma will also be discussed briefly.

First and foremost, all the Gibe states were the creation of war leaders.¹ War made the Gibe kings, and all the Gibe kings made war the prime business of their administration. Secondly, in all the Gibe states there was centralization of physical force under the command of the kings. It has been said (and the history of the Gibe states confirms it) that this centralization of force did not precede the state. It was developed within the state and was the sign that the state had been formed.² The concentration of power in the hand of a king was the dramatic break with the gada government. As we saw in Chapter Two, the power of the gada government was vested in the chafe assembly ("meadow assembly"), which met under the shade of a sycamore tree.³ The various Oromo clans or tribes in the Gibe region had their own independent chafe assemblies. The Limmu group had their own, so did the Jimma, as well as others at different places.⁴ Each assembly dealt with matters of supreme importance - making laws, declaring war, concluding peace agreements, electing new officials who would run the government for eight years. However, none of the gada officials had executive power, and the major force behind gada government in the implementation of the assembly decision was strong public opinion.⁵ Leadership within the gada had to be achieved, and achievement was based on social recognition of leadership qualities.⁶ The absence of any office with executive power, and the principle of rotation of office, among others, were the distinctive features of gada government. With the formation of states, the kings wielded supreme executive authority, against which there was no appeal.⁷ With sufficient surplus from their extensive estates, from tribute, taxation and trade, the Gibe kings were able to maintain permanent military and police forces with which they carried out their will. The kings alone declared war and made peace, and took both the lives and property of their own subjects.⁸ The classic example for

1. *Infra*, pp. 396, 423.

2. Krader, Formation of the state ... p. 102.

3. *Supra*, p. 128.

4. Antoine d'Abbadie, *Nouv. Acq. Fran. No. 21300 folio 797*. The Jimma interview programme p. 18.

5. Virginia Iuling, "Government and social control among some peoples of the Horn of Africa", pp. 145-152.

6. H.S. Lewis, A Galla monarchy, pp. 127-8. See also his "Reconsideration of the socio-political system of the western Galla", JSS, p. 140.

7. A. Cecchi, Da Zeila ... , II, p. 151.

8. Ibid.

for what has transpired thus far, which is well-known and documented, was Gama-Moras, who formed the little kingdom of Gudru. We saw above how Gama-Moras, who inherited a large treasure, converted it into land and cattle, thus raising the honour of his name and spreading his prestige far and wide. Now we can observe how the same man utilized his immense wealth for maintaining his own soldiers, with whom he made himself the sole leader of the little state of Gudru.

The conquest of his main rival was the object of his hopes and preparation, but he kept his plan secret so as not to provoke him into action before the moment was ripe.¹ All the time Gama-Moras's deepest aim had been to be the king of all Gudru, by breaking the power of the nobility. For this purpose he continued not only gathering fire-arms and training his own soldiers, but also cultivating friendly relations with all his neighbours. The Gudru nobility's opposition to Gama-Moras's ambition was engineered and led by a certain wealthy man called Fufi, who lived in Assandabo, the capital of Gudru. Fufi's capacity to insult was second only to his followers' exaggeration of their own strength. Fufi promised his supporters that he would expel the "stranger" from the land of Gudru.² To Gama-Moras it was the throne which was the main issue. To Fufi it was the ambition of the "stranger" which was unbearable. To Gama-Moras it was the gathering of fire-arms, the training of and the discipline of his crack force which was vital.³ To Fufi it was the character assassination which was part of the psychological warfare. Fufi's supporters were large in number, but it was in number alone that they surpassed their formidable enemy. Gama-Moras perfected his preparation and kept his soldiers with exemplary patience, until this was interpreted as cowardice. Insults were imprudently exchanged, a sword was hastily drawn by Fufi's followers, and the first blood that was spilt became a bad omen for their own defeat. They were saved from general rout by the intervention of the elders. Both the victors and the vanquished agreed to take their case to the chafe assembly at Qobo in southern Gudru.⁴ What followed was very interesting. After many days of deliberation, the chafe assembly decided to maintain the status-quo. Gama-Moras was left in full control of the market of Assandabo; but he was ordered to pay blood money for the soldiers of Fufi killed by firearms. Fufi was ordered to pay blood money for the soldiers of his enemy that had been wounded. Both men were ordered to fulfil the decision of the assembly, with the proviso that if either

1. G. Massaja, I Miei trenta cinque anni ... , IV, pp. 53-54.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 170

3. Donald E. Crummey, "European religious missions in Ethiopia, 1830-1868", Ph.D., London University, 1967, p. 349.

4. Massaja, ibid., pp. 171-172.

of them failed to implement the decision he was to be declared as the enemy of all Gudru.¹ Satisfied with the success of his fire-arms, which delivered him from the insults of his arrogant enemy, and elated by the decision which favoured him, Gama-Moras immediately paid the blood money. What is more, he lavishly feasted the Gudru nobility and honoured them with liberal gifts. The Gudru nobility were flattered by his hospitality and generosity, and delighted by his political wisdom. They compared Gama-Moras's generosity with Fufi's meanness, and admired the former's willingness to carry out the assembly decision with Fufi's flat refusal to do so. Fufi's refusal to pay compensation demonstrated the helplessness of the chafe assembly. Massaja, who was an eye-witness to this drama, states that since the assembly did not have its own army, it could not enforce practically any of its decisions.² In the unsettled situation where powerful men fought with each other for supremacy, poor men sought the protection of more powerful leaders. The chafe assembly itself depended on the good will of powerful men. The assembly had nothing now, save its name and prestige. It was not capable of implementing either its own decisions, maintaining peace, or defending the society against the dangers that threatened it. Accordingly it did not shape important political events. It was only the shell of the chafe assembly that continued to exist in the name of the old political institution. But the moral influence and its traditional conception of political thought³, together with religious ideas survived for some time to come, and only died out gradually.⁴ Gama-Moras, by implementing its decision, was appealing to its moral influence and on that ground he won a decisive victory.⁵ Fufi, by refusing to implement its decision, was even questioning its moral influence, and on that ground he earned public outrage.

From the day of the hostilities stopped by the elders' intervention, up to the defeat of Fufi, there elapsed three months of an uneasy lull, during which time both sides were engaged in frantic preparations. When the hostilities were resumed, Gama-Moras was not again disposed to sacrifice any solid advantage for the elders' call for peace.⁶ On the contrary, he ably directed the valour of his soldiers and chased out his enemy. Instead of expelling

1. G. Massaja, I Miei trenta cinque anni, IV, pp. 171-2.

2. Ibid.

3. The Jimma interview programme, p. 21.

4. Ibid.

5. Massaja, ibid.

6. Ibid.

Gama-Moras from Gudru, as Fufi pretended, he had to flee to save himself. His flight betrayed his intention of abandoning everything in the face of danger to his person. Oppressed by fire-arms, and startled by the flight of their leader, Fufi's supporters fled in total disarray. By a single victory Gama-Moras achieved the ambition of his life. That successful day put an end to the time of uncertainty characterized by anarchy.¹ From that day onward Gama-Moras abandoned his humble speech of "calling every Gudru my lord".² He became their master.

... After becoming victorious he not only confiscated the property of his enemies and distributed it among his soldiers ... but also became the prince of all Gudru ... Having achieved his aim, he began to reorganize his little kingdom. First and foremost he thought of the military ... and adopted a well-known gunner as his son and made him the leader of his soldiers. Secondly, he made a rich merchant a judge of the market place with authority over caravan, over the merchants, and over all that pertains to commerce. (3)

In all the Gibe states the kings were the highest judges. In the field of justice, the law was bent in favour of the wealthy class. A gift of a well-fattened bull (the natafo) or some other valuable object to the king or his governors was the key to winning a case. In short, justice was there to be bought in all the Gibe states.⁴ In each of them the king was helped by a council of state, usually consisting of three top dignitaries of the state, and while the kings made and unmade the composition of the members of the council of the state,⁵ they usually heeded its advice.⁶ Below the council of the state came the provincial governors, called Abba qorros, who in one way or another were related to the kings, and exercised administrative, judicial and military powers in their respective areas.

... Each governor had his own estates and massera or masseras, in which he housed his family, followers and slaves. In time of peace the governor ruled his district, dealt with most of the judicial problems and with the help of an especially appointed administrator collected the taxes from the peasants. In time of war, the governor was the commander of all the able-bodied men in his province and at the head of his contingent took part in the battles under the command of the king. (7)

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1. *Infra*, p. 417.
 2. *Massaja*, I Mieì trenta cinque anni, IV, p. 174.
 3. *Ibid.*, p. 179.
 4. A. Cecchi, Da Zeila ..., II, p. 164.
 5. Ibid., pp. 151, 270.
 6. Ibid.
 7. M. Abir, Ethiopia : the era ..., p. 83. See also H.S. Lewis, A Galla monarchy, p. 80; E. Cerulli, Etiopia occidentale, vol. ii, p. 76.

Under the abba qorros, came abba gandas, governors of villages, and under them came abba fugnos ("the fathers of ropes"), who in the name of the king imposed a tribute in kind and in salt, which was levied in relation to a person's possession. They also arrested offenders, directed corvee labour, and served as messengers between abba qorros and the king.¹ This social pyramid was maintained by the labour and produce of the free population of the Gibe region together with the slaves.² Thus one obvious economic consequence of the differentiation into classes in the Gibe region was the exploitation of the majority by the minority. This is probably the clearest confirmation of Engels universal thesis: "... Every step forward is relatively a step backward, in which prosperity and development for some is won through the misery and frustration of others."³

Each of these states had a defined territory, with defined borders surrounded by strategic lines of defence, strengthened by the work of man and fortified by the physical configuration of the land.

... First there was the mogga, a belt of land circumscribing the country and left uncultivated, in which roamed bands of thieves called ketto. The mogga was a battlefield in which all the wars were fought ... Next came the lines of the defence proper, made up of palisades, ditches, rivers, swamps and thick forests. Wherever a road from a neighbouring area entered the country, the defences had a gate called kella. Each such gate was guarded by a unit of cavalry commanded by an officer called abba kella. This officer helped a special representative of the king count all incoming or outgoing merchants, inspect their merchandise, and collect the customs. In this way the king had the strictest control over the people entering his territory, and at the same time could prevent the many thousands of slaves employed by himself and by his subjects from escaping. (4).

In all the Gibe states, the main residence of the king, the massera, represented the most remarkable feature of political as well as commercial development. The main massera was the nerve centre from which new political ideas radiated. Here questions of war and peace were decided, new proclamations announced. Here was where important political prisoners were kept or executed.⁵ Near the main massera were located commercial centres of two kinds. The first sector was for local trade, while the second, known as mandera, was built by the king for the exclusive use of foreign merchants.⁶

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1. Cecchi, Da Zeila ..., II, p. 166; see also Jimma interviews, pp. 12, 26.
 2. On the slaves in the Gibe region, see below, pp. 457-62.
 3. F. Engels, The origin of the family, private property and the state, p. 75.
 4. M. Abir, Ethiopia ..., p. 81. Abir's description was meant for Limmu-Ennarya, but it could equally apply to all the Gibe states. See for example, Cecchi, ibid., II, pp. 233-4 and the Jimma interviews, pp. 5, 9.
 5. Cecchi, ibid., pp. 163, 206, 272.
 6. Infra, p. 483.

In all the Gibe states, the spirit of independence for the defence of the frontiers of each state, was tempered by the mutual dependence and cooperation between them in matters of commerce. As a result, there developed an impressive network of institutionalized trade, in which the markets were named according to the day of the week, and the market days were arranged in such a way that traders who went from one state to the other were able to buy and sell at different market places along the route, neither losing a single market day nor wasting time unnecessarily.¹

In all the states, the wedding, birth or death of a member of the royal family, or a successful hunting expedition of the king, or victory in battle were celebrated by spectacular public processions. On such occasions, the king, surrounded by his elite cavalry, accompanied by the governors and dignitaries, and followed by the infantry, who chanted his praises, led the procession. The infantry was followed by the royal slaves, eunuchs and women, musical bands and thousands of people, who danced to the tune of music.² These singular conditions, created by the music, the presence of the monarch and high dignitaries, turned the occasion into the manifestation of considerable collective sentiments and pride in belonging to that particular state. The songs of heroes, and the boasts of singers about their land, fused the emotions of the young and the old into loyalty to the ruling house, the end result, developed by the medium of mass contact, and nourished by the great feasting and drinking which usually consummated the procession. The food and drink from the king's table created among the nobility an unusual mental exhilaration, which expressed itself in a blind devotion to, and fear of, their sovereign.³

All the Gibe kings had the Oromo title of moti ("king" or "conqueror") and they were known more by the name of their war horses,⁴ than by their personal names.⁵ The queens were addressed by the Oromo title of gemme ("the lady") followed by the name of the country of their origin. The princes were called by the names of their war horses, while the crown princes were addressed by the title of donachaw, which was again followed by the names of the war horses. Once a prince was made donachaw, he was authorized to wear one of the golden bracelets.⁶ The Gibe kings had gold rings as the insignia of royal power, gold

1. *Infra*, p. 487.

2. Cecchi, *Da Zeila ...*, II, pp. 238-9.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 262.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 137. See also A. d'Abbadie, *Nouv.Acq.Fran.No.* 21300, folio 753.

5. All the kings had at least three names; their personal names, which were seldom used, their Muslim names, which were not used at all, and their war horse names, which were always used.

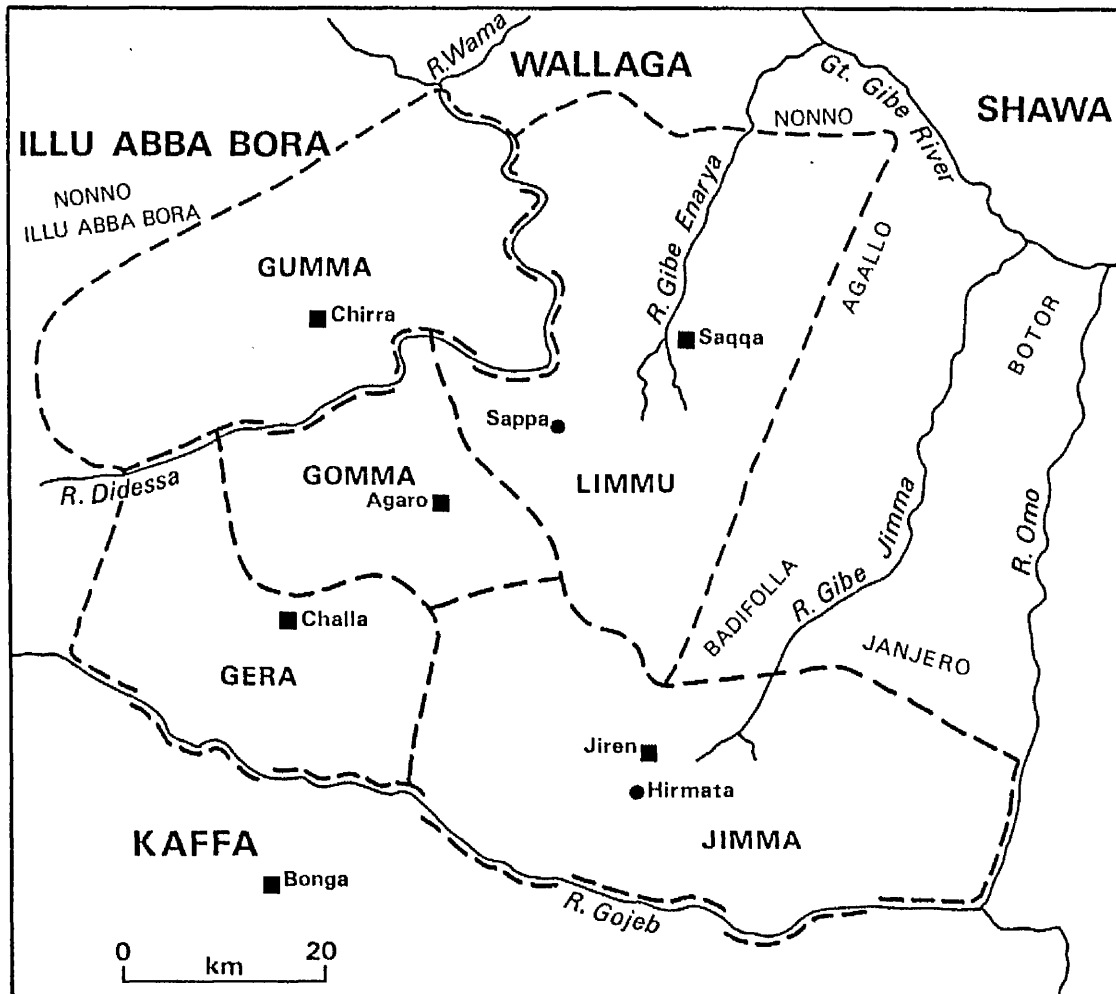
6. Cecchi, *ibid.*, p. 165.

earrings, silver bracelets, and an umbrella as the symbol of royal authority. As the symbol of their Muslim faith, the kings wore black caps made of goat leather, and on special occasions they put an ostrich feather in their hair and held an alanga (a whip made of hippotamus's hide) in their right hand, both of these being the symbols of traditional gada leaders. Other symbols of royal authority were the crown, the throne, double-bladed spears, which also served as the seal of the king, and two gold arm bracelets.¹ In all the states succession to the throne was in theory hereditary.² But more often succession was marked by a power struggle. In the absence of legitimate successor, a leading member of the sorressa (wealthy dignitaries) could be elected by his colleagues to occupy the throne.³

In all the states the lion's share of fertile land belonged to the king and the nobility, who spent most of their time either hunting, fighting or eating and drinking at the main massera (royal residence), being supported in these activities by the fruits of the toil of the peasants. The wealthy land owners used their slaves for cultivating their lands, while those who were short of slaves distributed their land to free tenants, who cultivated it in their master's name and interest.⁴ The nobility differed from the common people in their increased share of material possessions, their manner of dress, their place of residence, and even in their hair style.⁵ Among them luxury had become a necessity and the taste for the products of distant countries, together with their new habits and the acquisition of elite foreign goods,⁶ added lustre and glamour to their residences, which were built on the model of the royal masseras.

All the Gibe kings were engaged in wars with each other, and these wars were a heavy burden on the peasants who were called upon to fight for their kings at their own expense.⁷ Failure to fight with the enemy of the king, at the right time and right place would result both in the confiscation of property and the enslavement of the entire family.⁸ Bad as it was, the condition of the

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1. Cecchi, Da Zeila ... , II, p. 197.
 2. The Jimma interview programme, pp. 27-9.
 3. Cecchi, ibid., pp. 165-6.
 4. Ibid., p. 277.
 5. The manuscript of Abba Jobir Abba Dula, p. 14.
 6. Cecchi, ibid., p. 174.
 7. Ibid., p. 327. See also d'Abbadie, Nouv.Acq.Fran.No. 21303, folio 496.
 8. Ibid., According to the Jimma interview programme, pp. 4, 21, alarm about an approaching enemy was sounded by hitting bedru or gonno (drums). Through a system of gonno placed at appropriate intervals, the news of an imminent enemy attack could spread all over a country within a short time and every able-bodied man had to leave his field to join the army of his abba gorro. Those who failed to do so were enslaved and their property confiscated.



- State boundary - - - -
- State capital ■
- Commercial centre ●

Map 8. THE GIBE STATES IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY.

free people of the Gibe states was much better than the wretched condition of the slaves.¹ In fact, it seems that one of the main reasons why class antagonism did not develop in the society of the Gibe states was that the ruling classes, instead of exploiting the free population to the maximum, mainly exploited the slaves, who constituted about one third of the entire population.² Only the wealthy men had the means to acquire slaves and they alone received slaves as present from the kings.

Finally, the Gibe states were interlocked through political marriages and secret military alliances. When one state was attacked by another, it called to its assistance certain others, and a conflict involving some or all of the states would be provoked in a short time.³ The spread of the conflict and the diplomatic arm twisting would be enough sometimes to persuade the two original contenders to stop the hostilities. Thus political marriages and secret alliances not only guaranteed the survival of every state, but also prevented them from coalescing into one unified political entity. Though these states had cultural homogeneity, common language, common religion, close commercial contacts, similar administrative establishments, similar agricultural practices and land holding systems, they failed to coalesce into one political entity. These then were some of the common features of the Gibe states. We now proceed to detailed discussion of the history of one of these states - the most important one at that.

Limmu-Ennarya

It was the Limmu group of the Sadacha confederacy that formed the first modern Gibe state and gave their name to the new political entity. Their state was better known by the historical name of Ennarya, the best part of the original territory of which they had occupied. In order to distinguish the new state from the historical one, and at the same time maintain the popular name of the new state, Limmu-Ennarya, the combination of the two names which the people themselves gave to their state (perhaps to symbolize the unity of the Ennaryans and the Oromo), will be maintained in this and the next chapter.

Why the Limmu group were the first to form a state is not hard to understand. They were the first whose mode of production was transformed from pastoralism to

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1. To the category of slaves also belonged the eunuchs, who guarded the wives and numerous concubines of the kings.
 2. Cecchi, Da Zeila ... , II, p. 289.
 3. Infra, pp. 429.

one in which mixed agriculture was dominant. This was facilitated by the environment in which the Limmu settled. The fertile highlands of Ennarya yielded a plentiful cereal crop produced by the labour of the industrious indigenous people.¹ Located at the most active centre of trade, the Limmu were probably pulled into the trade of the region much earlier. In short, the fertility of the land of Limmu, and the labour of its people, gave rise to a viable economy, which led to a division of labour and specialization.

With agriculture as the determinate mode of economic production, the division of labour was also enhanced. The new mode of production required a different technology, new implements and tools were produced. Some of the implements were made by every family for its own use. But the most important ones had to be produced by specialized craftsmen. At this stage, therefore, there were one or more families in every locality engaged in the production of metal tools (tumtu), tanned leather goods (faqi), etc. The cultivation of cotton in the warm river valleys of Dedessa, Gibe, Wama, etc., helped weaving to emerge as a family-based craft. The craftsmen who were collectively known as ogessa (the "skilled ones") exchanged their products with agricultural products at the market places or at their work places. (2)

More than the division of labour, what was perhaps more noticeable was the division of the society into classes of rich and poor. Some wealthy men owned as many as 7,000 head of cattle,³ extensive land and a large number of slaves. The wealthy class was not engaged in material production, but only in consumption and in warfare. Perhaps the best example to substantiate this statement comes not from the Limmu, but from their neighbours, the Botor, among whom A. Cecchi stayed for some days in the 1870s.

The private life of one of these chiefs of Botor can be summed up more or less as 'sweet-to-do-nothing'. At the break of the day, the chief took his spear and went out of a house, followed by slaves who carried his barchuma (stool) or soft hide, and sat on the hill, located near his residence. Here, wrapped in his beautiful waya (dress) he waited for the arrival of coffee and gaya (pipe), which every wealthy man used. Surrounded by his dependents, he counted his cattle as they came out of their enclosure ... In the evening he returned to a clean house, where he was served with coffee and a gaya, and discussed tribal affairs with his friends, and contemplated and planned the next raids on their neighbours. (4)

Thus the nobility of the Botor, who lived in the midst of luxury and idleness,

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1. On agriculture in Limmu-Ennarya, see below, pp. 446-7.
 2. Mekuria Bulcha, "Land ownership and social class formation among the Macha of south-western Oromia-Ethiopia". Unpublished paper presented to the institute of sociology, University of Stockholm, 1980, p. 28. I am indebted to the author for sending me a copy of his useful paper.
 3. A. d'Abbadie, Fran.Nouv.Acq.No. 21300, folio, 797.
 4. A. Cecchi, Da Zeila ... , II, pp. 131-4.

made raiding the consuming passion of their lives. One institution within the disintegrating gada government particularly favoured the rise of kingship. This was the office of Abba Dula ("the father of war"). Previously Abba Dula had been an elected officer, who led voluntary warriors against an enemy only when the chafe assembly declared war. The Abba Dula exercised effective authority only during the course of a campaign. Once hostilities ceased, he was merely one among equals. However, with the disintegration of the gada government, the office of Abba Dula was radically transformed, becoming hereditary. The new generation of hereditary Abba Dulas, who were mainly members of the nobility, struggled with each other for supremacy. Raids formerly conducted for booty, revenge, or to extend tribal territory, were now conducted for bloody plunder, a practice which ruined the poor man for the sake of establishing the authority of the Abba Dulas.¹ Raids conducted by the Abba Dulas became not only a source of wealth and power, but also a means by which free peasants were reduced to the state of tenants on their own lands.² The victorious Abba Dulas, besides taking the lion's share of booty of movable property, virtually monopolized the uncultivated arable lands of the vanquished groups, which they distributed among their followers. It was in this manner that the state of Limmu-Ennarya was created.³

Bofo (Abba Gommol), ca. 1800-1825.

The state of Limmu-Ennarya was created by Bofo, a famous Abba Dula, who was known popularly by the name of his war horse - Gomol. In dealing with the history of Abba Gomol, one comes up against a difficulty. The records of his rise to power are adequate, but they were all written between 1843⁴ and 1879.⁵ The oral traditions recorded by travellers and missionaries between these two dates do not give a definite year for any events that took place at the beginning of that century. From internal evidence it would appear, however, that Abba Gomol founded the kingdom of Limmu-Ennarya probably between 1800 and 1802.

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1. Massaja, I miei trenta cinque anni ... , IV, pp. 555-6.
 2. Ibid., pp. 68-9.
 3. Infra, p. 396.
 4. In 1843, Antoine d'Abbadie was in Saqqá, the capital of Limmu-Ennarya, where he recorded the history of Bofo's rise to power from many elders, including the father-in-law of Abba Gomol himself. See also the Jimma interview programme, p. 50.
 5. In 1879, A. Cecchi recorded a version of another tradition which depicts the history of Bofo's rise to power.

Abba Rebu ... who is today (1843) an energetic old man was the most important soresa of Ennarya or at least of the Limu tribe. Bofo, the son of bokku, was a poor noble man. He worked his land, on the border of Nonno, who often invaded Limu. In one hand he held his shield and in the other his spear and the plough. From time to time he raided the Nonno country, always returning with booty. Abba Rebu gave his daughter to Bofo and from her Bofo had his son Abba Bagibo, or Ibsa. Young Bofo went on a raid to Nonno riding his famous horse Gomol and he returned with 3,000 head of cattle. (1)

A few important points emerge from the above story. First, Abba Rebu, who was still alive in 1843, was the most important and wealthy man among the Limmu. Secondly, Bofo, the son of a hereditary Abba Bokku, was a self-made successful war leader, who expanded his land at the expense of his neighbours, the Nonno. As we shall see below, Bofo, powerful in war, quick to defend his interests, jealous of his power, and suspicious of his rivals, became a formidable war leader. The wealthy Abba Rebu may have tried and failed to defeat him. At least there is a piece of internal evidence,² which seems to suggest it. It is probable that Abba Rebu, having failed to stop Bofo's rise to power, came to terms with the young warrior and cemented their relations with the hand of his daughter. Thirdly, it was out of this marriage in or around 1802, that there occurred the birth of Ibssa ("the light"), better known by the name of his horse Bagibo, who was to succeed his father in 1825. According to one recently received piece of information, Abba Bagibo came to power at the age of twenty.³ According to Beke, Abba Bagibo was somewhere between forty and forty-five years old in 1842.⁴ Forty would put his date of birth in 1802, while forty-five would place it in the closing years of the eighteenth century. Antonio Cecchi especially stated that Abba Bagibo came to power at the age of twenty-three.⁵ This would also mean that he was born somewhere about 1802. If accepted, this date is important, not only because it establishes the year of the birth⁶ of an important figure, who dominated the politics of the Gibe region between 1825 and 1861, but also because it indirectly helps to establish the time when the kingdom of Limmu-Ennarya was formed. Fourthly, Abba Bagibo

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1. Antoine d'Abbadie, *Nouv. Acq. Fran. No. 21300, folio, 569-572*. Translation by Abir, "The emergence and Islamisation of the Galla kingdoms of the Gibe and north Ethiopian trade with these kingdoms 1800-1850", unpublished African History Seminar papers, S.O.A.S. (1962-3), p. 2. See also A. Cecchi, *Da Zeila ...*, II, p. 156.
 2. *Infra*, p. 398.
 3. Massaja, *Lettere e scritti minori*, II, p. 372.
 4. Beke, "On the countries south of Abessinia", *JRGS*, vol. XIII, p. 259.
 5. Cecchi, *Da Zeila ...*, II, p. 157.
 6. The Gibe region into which he was born and which he was to dominate for three decades gave an unusual impression of chaos and anarchy at the time of his birth. Limmu-Ennarya was being formed by his father and the rest of the states were in the throes of power struggles among rival war leaders.

was born at the royal massera of Sappa, the capital of his father. It was in Sappa that Abba Bagibo was "educated"¹ and brought up. The implication of the phrase "educated" will be discussed below, but here it should suffice to say that Sappa was already a capital of the kingdom, and by 1802 without doubt Abba Gomol was already a king. This is supported by some written evidence, which categorically states that Limmu-Ennarya became a kingdom at the beginning of the nineteenth century.²

The marriage alliance between the wealthy Abba Rebu and the first king of Limmu-Ennarya does not seem to have brought peace between two rivals. On the contrary, Abba Rebu refused to recognize the supremacy of his son-in-law, until he was soundly beaten by the latter. The earlier cited tradition continues to tell the rest of the story in a somewhat confused manner.

(The tradition) ... goes on to describe at length how Bofo quarrelled with his father-in-law and was disgraced. Meanwhile, relations with the jealous Gumma neighbours rapidly deteriorated and finally the Gumma invaded Enarea. The Limu people led by their chief Abba Rebu could not withstand the Gumma attack and they escaped to the mogga. The victorious Gumma who overran the valley of Enarea were celebrating their success when Bofo and a few of his friends penetrated into their midst, took them by surprise, and killed many of them. When the battle was over and the Gumma were completely defeated, the Limu people returned to Enarea and fell on their knees before Bofo and said, "We do not want any other master but you". Ever after, Abba Rebu was one of Bofo's most devoted subjects. (3)

By connecting Abba Rebu's quarrel with Bofo with Gumma's war against Limmu-Ennarya, this tradition points to a significant event which is implied but not expressed. This was the war fought between Abba Rebu and his son-in-law, in which the Gumma joined with the former against the latter. Encouraged by the Gumma, Abba Rebu seems to have ignored the strength of his son-in-law. The latter, according to the same tradition, possessed genuine courage, and was also an expert horseman, who could inspire his followers.⁴ Abba Rebu seems to have expected immediate assistance from the Gumma. But that assistance may have been slow in coming and as every day strengthened Bofo's

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1. Massaja, In Abissinia, p. 165.
 2. A. d'Abbadie, Nou.Acq.Fran.No. 23851, folio, 34.
 3. Idem, Nouv.Acq.Fran.No. 21300, folio, 569-572. Translation by M. Abir, Ethiopia, the era of the princes, pp. 78-9; see also G. Massaja, I miei trenta cinque anni ..., IV, p. 144; W.C. Harris, The highlands of Ethiopia, (London: 1844), vol. III, pp. 53-4; A. Cecchi, Da Zeila, II, p. 157.
 4. A. d'Abbadie, ibid., folio, 571-2.

determination to attack, Abba Rebu resolved too hastily to risk an immediate clash with his son-in-law. The war between the two is reported in a confused manner in a recently published document. Here the conflict is presented as the one between Abba Rebu and Abba Bagibo.¹ But in reality it was between Abba Rebu and his son-in-law, and we should read Abba Gomol instead of Abba Bagibo. According to this tradition, Abba Gomol not only defeated his father-in-law, but also burned his massera at Saqqa.² Abba Rebu was forced to flee to Gumma having suffered shame and loss, where he seems to have told the Gumma that his defeat was their own defeat. The Gumma rallied to Abba Rebu's call and invaded Limmu-Ennarya. Abba Gomol at the head of a small but handpicked cavalry, advanced stealthily towards the valley of Limmu-Ennarya, where he surprised the enemy, killing many and capturing his father-in-law as a valuable prisoner of war.³ Following this victory, Abba Gomol was ruled by his head rather than his hand, and earned the title of a "wise prince".⁴ He was magnanimous towards his father-in-law and forgave and forgot his rebellion, and ever after Abba Rebu became not only one of his most devoted subjects, but also his principal advisor.⁵

Abba Gomol was not only the founder of a new dynasty, but he also left his name to posterity as the first Muslim Oromo king in the Gibe region.⁶ Today tradition claims that he was converted by "the miracles of a famous Ashrafi Shaikh (a descendent of the prophet)".⁷ In the early 1840s, Captain Harris heard in Shawa that Abba Gomol was converted to Islam by his uncle.⁸ The validity of both claims will be examined in the next chapter. Here, it should suffice to state only a few facts. There is reason to believe that Abba Gomol had a breadth of vision which enabled him to grasp the importance of embracing Islam. He did so only after becoming the king of Limmu-Ennarya. This was shortly before the birth of his son Ibssa (Abba Bagibo) in 1802. This is supported by four independent sources. First and foremost, the oral tradition

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1. G. Massaja, Lettre e scritti minori, II, p. 372.
 2. Ibid.
 3. Ibid.
 4. Ibid., p. 371
 5. A. d'Abbadie, Nouv.Acq.Fran.No. 21300, folio, 199-200.
 6. The Jimma interview programme, pp. 26-27.
 7. Ibid.
 8. W.C. Harris, The highlands of Ethiopia, vol. III, p. 54.

collected from the region makes it abundantly clear that Bofo was the first Oromo king who embraced Islam in the Gibe region. This source stresses that the first Muslim king of Limmu-Ennarya gave permission to the Muslim teachers and preachers to teach Islam to the children of the nobility.¹ Secondly, in 1840 Captain Harris heard in Shawa that "... prayers are held at the tomb of Bofo the first convert to the faith."² Thirdly, in the late 1850s Massaja actually visited the tomb of Bofo³, which by then had already taken on the character of a shrine. Fourthly, in 1879 in Limmu-Ennarya, A. Cecchi wrote that "... today after nearly eighty years, Islam is found at full vigour, being already adopted even by the most pauperized classes."⁴ In short, there is no doubt that Abba Gomol embraced Islam after becoming the king of of Limmu-Ennarya. He accepted Islam for ideological and political purposes. It provided him with a focus of unity transcending tribal loyalty, and helped him to justify his ruthless actions. It also created the proper atmosphere for the hundreds of Muslim merchants and preachers to propagate Islam freely.⁵ In other words, by accepting Islam, Abba Gomol forged an ideological unity with the many merchants and preachers in his capital, and the latter spread Islam and championed the cause of the king.⁶ However, his acceptance of Islam may not have had any profound effect on his spiritual life. On the contrary, the old religion and Islam operated side by side for a long time, and the new religion limited the scope of the old only in the 1860s.⁷ There is nothing to show that Abba Gomol himself had ever received any kind of Muslim education. However, his capital at Sappa was teeming with Muslim merchants and teachers at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and some of them were engaged in the teaching of the royal children and those of the nobility.⁸ From the way Abba Bagibo compared the illiterate Christian priests and traders with the literate Muslim traders in 1843, from the way he was fascinated by written words and exchanged letters with his neighbours,⁹ and from the way he accorded special place of honour to literate men, including Catholic missionaries,¹⁰ it would appear likely that he was exposed to some form of education at any early age. It is not possible to say whether he was able to write either in Oromo or in Arabic, though he may have been able to read the Quran. Certainly his correspondence was conducted both in Oromo and Arabic.¹¹

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- 1.. The Jimma interview programme, pp. 8, 16.
 2. W.C. Harris, The highlands of Aethiopia, vol. III, p. 53.
 3. G. Massaja, In Abissinia, p. 165.
 4. A. Cecchi, Da Zeila ..., II, p. 160.
 5. The Jimma interview programme, pp. 6,8, 35.
 6. Ibid., p. 5.
 7. Infra, p. 491.
 8. The Jimma interview programme, pp. 6,8, 16.
 9. Infra, pp. 419-20.
 10. G. Massaja, ibid., p. 283; see also Donald Crumney, "European Religious Mission in Ethiopia, 1830-1868", p. 361.
 11. Infra, p. 418.

Abba Bagibo was generally described both in oral tradition and by foreign travellers as "white",¹ a notion which gives credibility to the legend of the "Portuguese" origin of his dynastic line. The dynasty founded by his father was known as Saperera, based on a famous historical name. As we saw in Chapter Two,² Saperera was the name of the mythical father of the Borana. Even towards the end of the sixteenth century, when the Tulama and the Macha fought together against a common enemy, they called themselves Saperera³ in memory of their mythical ancestry. In order to glorify the origin of the family, a legend was invented,⁴ probably during the reign of Abba Gomol, and later elaborated under his successor, in order to connect the dynasty with two "white men", named Saperera and Sigaro. As Saperera was a historical name, so was Sigaro. When the legend was recorded by the European travellers and missionaries, who knew about the Portuguese assistance to the Ethiopian Christian kingdom in the 1540s, the two "white men" became Portuguese, adding additional credibility to the legend. These two, it is said "had come to Abyssinia with Cristovao da Gama, who brought help to Galawdewos against Gran."⁵ The legend goes on to say that the two men were later expelled by Galawdewos and that they escaped into Ennarya, where with their fantastic skills and courage they earned a great reputation among the people. Sigaro fixed his residence in the northern part of Ennarya near Saqqa, while Saperera settled further south near Sappa. The two eventually became the founder of dynasties.⁶ The legend reflected, of course, the reality of the struggle between two clans; the one settled near Saqqa and the other settled near Sappa. Abba Rebu, the wealthy man in Limmu, was the leader of the clan around Saqqa, while Bofo was the war leader of the clan around Sappa, and when the latter established a new dynasty it was called Saperera. The founder of the dynasty may have not believed in the legend, though his two successors believed in it passionately, referring to European travellers and missionaries as "our white brothers".⁷

Abba Gomol conducted wars against his neighbours, mainly the Gumma, for political and economic motives. Gumma at the time was in the process of state

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1. A. Cecchi, Da Zeila ..., vol. II, pp. 157, 173; see also G. Massaja, Lettere e scritti minori, vol. II, pp. 371-2.
 2. *Supra*, p. 69.
 3. Bahrey, in Some Records of Ethiopia, p. 113.
 4. Three other Gibe states namely, Gumma, Gomma and Jimma invented legends which glorified their dynastic origin.
 5. G.W.B. Huntingford, in Some Records of Ethiopia, preface lxi; see also F.J. Bieber, Kaffa, vol. II, pp. 510-11.
 6. Huntingford, ibid.; see also A. Cecchi, ibid., p. 157.
 7. A. Cecchi, Da Zeila ..., II, p. 173.

formation and the rival Abba Dulas had brought their conflicts into Limmu-Ennarya, even threatening Sappa, the capital, which was not far from the Gumma's frontier. Again the unsettled situation in Gumma was a menace to Limmu-Ennarya's commercial lifeline to Kaffa. Even after the formation of the Gumma state, Abba Gomol was able to defeat Gumma time and again, but he was never able to take it over completely, probably because he was engaged in expansion against other neighbours such as the Nonno in the north, the Agallo in the east, the Gomma and the Jimma Badi in the south. By launching wars of conquest against these neighbours, Abba Gomol sowed the seeds of future conflict for his successor.

The young, handsome,¹ eloquent, and promising Ibssa, who is said to have possessed a considerable share of his father's vigour, though lacking his courage,² had spent his early years in learning the art of war in his father's army. He had probably been engaged with his father in subjugating the surrounding tribes through war and diplomacy. It was during those years of training and ideological preparation for the leadership, that Ibssa acquired his popular name from that of his horse Bagibo. In those early years the young Abba Bagibo does not seem to have ventured to advance any independent claim to the leadership, and apparently his father was not frightened by his rising popularity. On the contrary, Abba Gomol seems to have trusted his son and rewarded him by making him donachaw,³ the heir apparent to the throne. It also seems that it was his father who arranged Abba Bagibo's marriage to the sister of the king of Kaffa.⁴ Abba Bagibo's first wife, Genne Minjoti ("the lady" from the Kaffa kingdom) remained his principal wife, until her death. Abba Bagibo's connection with Abba Rebu, through his mother, his marriage link with the powerful kingdom of Kaffa, his association with the Muslim traders and preachers in Sappa, must all have contributed to his rising

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1. All sources agree that Abba Bagibo was very handsome, fair in colour, tall and well-built.
 2. Antoine d'Abbadie, *Nouv.Acq.Fran.No.* 21300, folio, 572.
 3. G. Massaja, Lettere e scritti minori, vol. II, p. 372.
 4. Abba Bagibo married another wife, the daughter of Kamo, the reigning king of Kaffa in 1843. In other words, Abba Bagibo married two wives from the ruling house of Kaffa.

popularity. His long training in the army, his exceptional qualities of leadership and "cunning and crafty diplomacy"¹, together with his organizational ability, may have won him widespread support among his father's soldiers. While the popularity of the son was rising, that of the father was declining, and this may at last have aroused the jealousy of the father. What probably brought the matter to a head was the beginning of discontent and revolt in various areas, more particularly near Saqqa, the old power base of Abba Rebu. Previously Abba Gomol appeared to deal very ruthlessly² with every rebellion, but now adopted a policy of moderation, perhaps suggested by the fear that something was in the air. Before going on to describe the power struggle between the father and his son it is necessary to mention a few vital points. First, our information on this episode is very slight, and some of our conclusions about it are no more than conjecture. Secondly, Abba Gomol is said to have had a very good relationship with the governor of Gojjam. This relationship was the result of an agreement between the two rulers, brought about by mutual commercial interest. This aspect will be discussed in the next chapter,³ here it should suffice to say that Abba Gomol depended on the governor of Gojjam for mutual cooperation in maintaining the safety of the caravan route between the two countries, while the governor of Gojjam depended on the ruler of Limmu-Ennarya for the rich gifts which the latter sent from time to time to the former.

Limmu-Ennarya depended on Kaffa, no less than it depended on Gojjam. Kaffa was the source of many luxury goods which Limmu-Ennarya exported through Gojjam. For this and probably for security reasons as well, Abba Gomol cultivated a good relation with the king of Kaffa. The marriage bridge between the two states had clearly been generated by the desire to maintain good relations. What is interesting to note here is that Abba Gomol did not interfere with the flow of trade between the two countries. On the contrary, he seems to have permitted the northern Muslim merchants, the Jabarti, to go as far as Kaffa. This policy was dramatically reversed by his successor, who banned the Jabarti traders from going beyond Saqqa, the new capital of Limmu-Ennarya, after 1825.⁴ In fact, we suspect that the overthrow of Abba Gomol by his son may have been supported by the newly emerging merchant class of Limmu-Ennarya, the Afkala.⁵

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1. Antoine d'Abbadie, *Nouv.Acq.Fran.No.* 21300, folio, 572,
 2. The journal of C.W. Isenberg and J.L. Krapf - detailing their proceedings in the kingdom of Shoa and Journeys in other parts of Abyssinia, p. 114.
 3. *Infra*, pp. 471-2.
 4. *Infra*, p. 476.
 5. *Infra*, pp. 475-7.

The aristocracy of Limmu-Ennarya itself had its own stake in the affair, and the king himself was among the biggest of merchants. It is not far-fetched to assume that the change of rulers was the outcome not merely of political struggle between the father and the son, but also of a class interest, in which the son represented the interest of the Afkala, while the father represented a "fee-for-all" policy. Abba Gomol was aware of the rising fame of his son, but was probably unable to devise effective measures for curbing his popularity. His kingdom lacked unity, because he alienated even members of his family by threatening them with death.¹ And he failed to protect the interests of the newly emerging merchant class, by following an open door policy towards the northern traders. Even the Jabarti traders, whose interest was threatened by the weakness of his government, may have betrayed him. Isolated and frightened Abba Gomol adopted a policy of moderation, but by then it was already too late.

Abba Bagibo was probably twenty-three years old before he felt himself strong enough to challenge his father and stage a coup d'état. Having built up a solid basis of political and military support, he decided to take over the government and dictated the conditions for his father's abdication. Each condition was an insult to the pride of the ageing father. "... My father, please, eat and drink and I will reign for you,"² was the declaration with which he surprised his father. Abba Gomol was shocked by the rebellion of his son, but he was not prepared to step down without drawing sword. So by 1825 Abba Gomol was faced with two parallel crises. There was a rebellion of a sort around Saqqa, based essentially on an old problem, but looking for a new catalyst; and there was Abba Bagibo's threat to overthrow him, essentially a new crisis looking for a detonator. This it found in the Saqqa rebellion. Abba Gomol seems to have thought that only the punishment of his son could restore the confidence of his soldiers, and bring back his honour and prestige. He forgot about the popularity and strength of his son and remembered only his own old military exploits. In a moment of uncontrolled wrath, fuelled with bitterness and sense of lost pride, he even sought to destroy his sons and brothers, who probably supported the cause of his rebellious son.³ Deserted by his own sons, brothers, slaves⁴ and soldiers, the hopeless courage of the

1. See below.

2. G. Massaja, Lettere e scritti minori, vol. II, p. 372.

3. Antoine d'Abbadie, Nouv.Acq.Fran.No. 21300, folio, 199.

4. G. Massaja, ibid., p. 372.

remnant of Abba Gomol's supporters melted under the weight of their large enemy, so that eventually the determination of Abba Gomol to fight to the bitter end had to yield to the suggestion of an honourable peace formula. Abba Bigabo's close supporters being desirous of legalizing his seizure of power supported a peaceful resolution of the event. Besides the motives of political expediency which might have prompted Abba Bagibo to come to terms, there was the experience of the settlement which Abba Gomol had reached with his father-in-law, two decades before. Abba Gomol handed over the gold ring to Abba Bagibo, signalling not only the transfer of power, but also marking the end of one reign and the beginning of another. Abba Bagibo was magnanimous to his father, as his father had been magnanimous to his father-in-law. Abba Gomol was left in his massera at Sappa, with some control over the surrounding district.¹

In his struggle for power Abba Bagibo was said to have been helped by two of his sons, and two cousins.² As we shall see later on, he was embroiled in political dispute with all of them at different times, and three of them became his victims.³ This brings us to an important point. Perhaps we have much more information on his reign than on any of the contemporary rulers of the Gibe states. But this otherwise adequate source of information paints two contradictory portraits of Abba Bagibo. On the one hand, some oral traditions recorded by Cecchi and others depict him as a hot-tempered, and superstitious man who enslaved or killed people for minor offences; as a dandy, who squandered his wealth on clothes; as cruel, even killing his own son.⁴ On the other hand, he is generally depicted as an extraordinary king, endowed with a liberal and generous hand, a consummate and accomplished politician, a patient and exceedingly tolerant father-figure, and a man of peace.⁵ There are elements of truth in both aspects of the above description. Without doubt he was one of the outstanding politicians of his time; but his achievements were stained by bouts of licentious passion, during which he indulged in acts of cruelty with too little regard even to his own flesh and blood. The character of the real Abba Bagibo may be understood if we divide his long reign into two periods. As we shall see below, during the first part of his reign he was cruel and impatient,

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1. The Journal of Isenberg and Krapf ... p. 14.
 2. A. d'Abbadie, Nouv.Acq.Fran.No. 21300, folio 199; see also, M. Abir, Ethiopia: the era ..., p. 79, note 2.
 3. Infra, pp. 413-4.
 4. A. Cecchi, Da Zeila ..., II, pp. 159-60.
 5. G. Massaja, I miei trenta cinque anni, VI, pp. 16-7.

while during the second part he ruled by his head and patience rather than by his hand and passion, thus becoming a statesman who dominated the Gibe region by political marriage and diplomacy, rather than by the sword.

The reign of Abba Bagibo, 1825-1841.

Probably the first task Abba Bagibo had to face after accession to the throne was the suppression of the rebellion around Saqqa. But he did not act hastily. He "consolidated his power considerably and made certain the readiness of his soldiers."¹ The time so consumed enabled him to win fresh political grounds. He sought the support of his grandfather, Abba Rebu, for settling the Saqqa rebellion. This was perhaps intended to divide and weaken the opposition. In other words, Abba Bagibo did everything with full knowledge and the support of Abba Rebu.² As a result the resistance put up by his enemies did not match the amount of effort Abba Bagibo had put in the preparation. His easy victory in Saqqa opened the way for his long and continuous wars against his neighbours, the Nonno and the Agallo, at whose expense he expanded his territory.³

At Saqqa, Abba Bagibo found a commercial town surrounded by a land of uncommon fertility, which probably surpassed his own expectations. Along with his wars against his neighbours (which will be discussed later on)⁴, Abba Bagibo built a new capital at Saqqa. The transformation of Saqqa into a new capital was naturally connected with the implementation of a new commercial policy. Sappa had been the capital of the kingdom of Limmu-Ennarya, during the reign of his father. Probably as part of the peace formula, Abba Bagibo left Sappa under his father's hand and founded a new capital. Saqqa, favoured by a most fortunate geographical position and the fertility of its surroundings, was a flourishing commercial town. The policy which had the most fruitful influence in the short run was that of banning the Jabarti traders from going beyond Saqqa.⁵ This gave the Afkala the monopoly of the trade beyond the Gojeb. It also contributed to the growth of his capital and to the king's own prosperity.

1. G. Massaja, Lettere e scritti minori, II, p. 372.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Infra, pp. 415-6.

5. This will be discussed at some length in the next chapter. See pp. 476-9.

By 1840 Saqqa had a population of ten to twelve thousand.¹ This constituted ten to twelve per cent of the entire population of Limmu-Ennarya, since her population at the height of her power was said to have been just over 100,000.² Such a concentration of population in the capital was probably preceded or accompanied by remarkable progress in the division of labour and a specialization of workers, not witnessed anywhere up to that time among the Oromo, if not among the sedentary agricultural population of the Ethiopian region. This was not without far-reaching consequences for the development of art and industry in Limmu-Ennarya.

The inhabitants of Enarea enjoy the reputation of being the most civilized of all the Gallas and manufactures flourish here in a higher degree than anywhere else in this quarter of Africa. (3)

Nothing could give a better idea of the wealth of Abba Bagibo and his firm grip on his subjects than his many masseras, which spread all over the country and included "... Sapa, Grauqqe, Saqa, ... Uga, Darru, Kocaw, Gena, Gu-ujujo, Du-ujuma, Tuniqe, Tora, Kusae, and Laga Sombo."⁴ All the fifteen masseras⁵ (royal residences) were built on the tops of hills wide enough to accommodate many huts, but high enough also to dominate the surrounding areas. Of his many masseras the most beautiful, and the largest one was that of Garuqqe near Saqqa, the capital.⁶ However, the massera about which we have the fullest information is that of Saqqa itself. It was the heart of the kingdom, where the king lived most of his time, the political nerve centre from which orders radiated to all corners of the country, and the commercial capital of the region, where the largest concentration of Jabarti traders were found.⁷ This massera of Saqqa can be considered as a prototype for the masseras of other states of the Gibe region. Except in size and beauty, the masseras of the Gibe states were very similar in their layouts, structure, composition and activities.⁸

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1. J.L. Krapf, Travels, researches and missionary labours, during an eighteen years residence in Eastern Africa, (London, 1860), p. 64. See also W.C. Harris, The highlands of Aethiopia, vol. II, p. 53.
 2. M. Abir, Ethiopia ..., p. 80.
 3. C.T. Beke, "On the countries south of Abessinia", JRGS, XIII, pp. 258-9.
 4. A. d'Abbadie, Géographie de l'Éthiopie, p. 21.
 5. A. d'Abbadie, The Athenaeum : Journal of Literature, Science and the Fine Arts, No. 1042, p. 1078.
 6. A. d'Abbadie, Nouv.Acq.Fran.No. 21303, folio, 220.
 7. Infra, p. 474.
 8. A. Cecchi, Da Zeila ..., II, p. 158. See also G. Massaja, In Abissinia, pp. 158-9. Another massera on which we have adequate information is that of Jiren in Jimma. See for instance, H.S. Lewis, A Galla monarchy, pp. 68-73.

The massera of Saqqa was a large village, built to accommodate the king, his family, his body-guards, his wives, numerous concubines and slaves. Such a complex and sophisticated settlement could not have been built without the organization of a massive labour force, and the involvement of architects, artists and craftsmen of all kinds. The labour force was composed of three elements: the king's ever-expanding slave population, the free peasants of Limmu-Ennarya who had to work for the king whenever he demanded their labour, and the gubsisa, that is the king's tenants who had to work "... twice a week each Monday and Friday"¹ either on the royal residence, the royal estates, the building of bridges across rivers or on the maintenance of roads. Judging by the nature of the construction, the unskilled labour force provided the building materials, prepared the ground, built the walls and constructed the fences. The specialist craftsmen handled the roofs, the doors, and internal decorations, and furnished the houses with the necessary utensils. The organization of such a co-ordinated labour force would have needed a vigorous man of action and indeed Abba Bagibo was not only such a man, but also had an insatiable appetite for refined things. His interest in the expansion of industry and arts enabled him to build an elegant and splendid massera at Saqqa.

When we arrived near to the first entrance gate we were ordered to descend from the mules for the respect of the royal residence. The more we advanced towards the massera, the greater our admiration increased, because despite previous descriptions by our men, (2) about the beauty of the court, we had not expected to see so much luxury and so much elegance in the construction of various huts some of which for their architecture, and internal decoration would have deeply impressed our own engineers ... Cleanliness and order which excited our curiosity dominated every corner. (3)

The Saqqa massera was a large compound surrounded by a high fence made of interwoven boughs in the midst of which were found at equal distances from each other trees⁴ whose branches, leaves and flowers, added their own share of beauty to what was already elegant. As with all other masseras in the region, the Saqqa massera had three large fences, and at the main gate of the outer fence was a high tower, upon which stood guards who were intended to observe any suspicious movement. As in Jiren, the gates of the first and second fences were guarded by armed men.⁵ Within the outer fence lived the elite troops,

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1. The Jimma interview programme, p. 24
 2. i.e. the Catholic missionaries who had lived in Limmu-Ennarya since 1854.
 3. A. Cecchi, Da Zeila ... , II, p. 158.
 4. e.g. H.S. Lewis, A Galla monarchy, pp. 68-70.
 5. *Ibid.*, pp. 68-72.

the body-guard of the king, numbering around 200 cavalry and the same number of infantry.¹ Within the second fence were found many huts, destined for the use of the king's guests, and for the court of justice. Here the beautiful reception hall was located. This hall, where foreign guests and ambassadors were received and entertained, was also the place where great banquets were offered to the dignitaries of the land on many occasions. The reception hall was surrounded by a wide and elegant fence, whose entrance gate was decorated with designs of a Chinese fashion, which had produced a strong impact on the minds of his subjects.²

... I found the king seated in the middle of (ca.50) great dignitaries of the kingdom and the top officials of his residence. I have seen many princes during my many years stay in Ethiopia, but none had made so much impression upon me like Abba Bagibo ... He sat on the throne, ... and had such majesty in posture, to which at the first sight the imagination resorted to fly to what was used to be said of King Solomon. The fruits of the royal residence, the walls built with such magnificence and skills could not find a match in the whole of Ethiopia. (3)

As the beneficiary of Abba Bagibo's moral and material support (not to mention his protection and liberal tolerance of the activities of the Catholic missionaries), Massaja may have exaggerated the wisdom of Abba Bagibo and the greatness of his massera at Saqqa. No louder praise of Limmu-Ennarya under Abba Bagibo can be found than in Massaja's writings. Thanks to the administration of Abba Bagibo, Massaja maintains that prosperity flourished and peace was established in the kingdom.⁴ Massaja finds nothing blameworthy in Abba Bagibo. To him the king was an exceptional person, and he adds that if Abba Bagibo had received a European education he would have been a great philosopher and the leader of a great nation.⁵ Be that as it may, on the question of elegance of the massera of Saqqa, other sources also agree.⁶ What gave this massera a special character was the conspicuous demonstration of wealth, which was meant to impress both the local people and foreigners alike. Abba Bagibo was not only the wealthiest king in the region, but also he knew how to use that wealth to impress outsiders with his power and the greatness of his

1. A. Cecchi, Da Zeila ... , II, p. 158.

2. Ibid.

3. G. Massaja, In Abissinia, p. 159.

4. Ibid., p. 283.

5. Ibid., p. 160.

6. Cecchi, ibid.

country. In this he must have met with success after success. By his diplomacy¹ he divided and dominated his neighbours,² by the generous use of wealth he won many friends and neutralized enemies. Nothing can give a better idea of how he used his wealth to further his cause than his letter of 1840 to the governor of Gojjam. This interesting letter will be analyzed further in the discussion,³ but here it should suffice to say that Abba Bagibo seems to have believed that if he opened his hand in generosity, men from far and near would love, adore and praise him. He knew he was blessed with wealth,⁴ and for his kingdom to endure and increase from age to age, and for him to enjoy power and respectability in the Gibe region and beyond, he had to use his wealth. Gift-giving was the mechanism with which he redistributed to the privileged few, what he received from traders in taxation and from his subjects in tribute. Gift-giving was the corner stone of his diplomacy, as was political marriage.

Abba Bagibo knew how to make good use not only of his wealth, but also of the faith of his subjects. As a Muslim king, he was the champion of Islam in his country, and the presence of a large number of Muslim people in Saqqa added spiritual lustre and glamour to his capital. Notwithstanding the fact of being a Muslim king, Abba Bagibo remained a believer in traditional Oromo religion. In the 1840s, Antoine d'Abbadie recorded the following under the title of "the Oromo sacrifice".

The great priest was Abba Bagibo, in person and the God was good old mount Agamsa. The king himself walked towards the sacrificial animal pronouncing loudly; Oh God (Qallo Agamsa) where the goats are fed, I give you a bull, so that you favour us, protect our country, guide our soldiers, prosper our country side, and multiply our cows: I give you a bull, I give you a bull. This done the animal was knocked down and the king cut its throat with a sabre, without stooping to do so. A small piece of meat was cut from above the eye and it was thrown into the fire together with myrrh and incense. Then all the courtiers returned to the palace. Someone told me that the slaves of the king would eat the flesh of the sacrificed animal. (5)

From start to finish, this had nothing to do with Islam. It was pure and simple Oromo religious practice. There is no Islamic influence even in the prayer uttered by the king. By such a performance the Muslim king was fulfilling

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1. A. d'Abbadie, *Nouv.Acq.Fran.No.* 21300, folio, 572.
 2. G. Massaja, *Lettere e scritti minori*, II, p. 372.
 3. *Infra*, pp. 419-21.
 4. *Infra*, p. 420-21.
 5. Abbadie, *ibid.*, folio, 789-91.

the double role of an Oromo priest (qallu) and a political leader Abba Gada. In fact according to one source, Abba Bagibo considered himself as the chief qallu of his kingdom.¹ As such he practised and protected the old religion. Thus even in the 1840s "... notwithstanding the conversion to (Islam) of so large a portion of the population"² of his country, Abba Bagibo was still making sacrifices to Waga (the Oromo god). What is more, Abba Bagibo continued to treat kindly not only the jila, the Oromo pilgrim to the land of his spiritual father, but he also sent gifts to the Abba Muda himself.³ We saw above that the two main tasks of the jila were to maintain the link between the spiritual father(s) and the various Oromo groups, and also to try to make peace among the competing Oromo groups.⁴ During the reign of Abba Bagibo the jila continued performing their traditional tasks, but with one important difference. Now they maintained the peace of the king, in his name and for his benefit. They made peace between the king and his subjects and among the people themselves.⁵ In short, by being a (nominal) Muslim king, Abba Bagibo may have raised the morale of the Muslim community in his capital. By continuing to practise the traditional religion he may have allayed the anxieties of traditional believers. By tolerating the Orthodox Christian traders in Saqqa to propagate their faith freely, by allowing the Catholic missionaries to establish their centre of operations in his country, Abba Bagibo not only raised the morale of his Christian subjects and foreign guests, but also earned the reputation of being the most liberal of all the Gibe kings, the protector of the Christians in the region.⁶ Thus even in spiritual matters his influence was pervasive.

We continue with the description of the massera of Saqqa, which we left at the reception hall, where the king used to feast his guests and dignitaries. The gate of the third fence was guarded by eunuchs and no-one was allowed to go beyond it, especially during the night, without permission from the king.⁷ This section of the massera contained three courtyards - for the king, his wives and other personnel of the royal house, including the concubines, the slaves and the eunuchs, and the latter watched over the king's women. In this

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1. The Jimma interview programme, p. 5.
 2. W.C. Harris, The highlands of Aethiopia, III, p. 56.
 3. A. d'Abbadie, Nouv.Acq.Fran.No. 21300, folio, 789-91.
 4. Supra, pp. 112.
 5. The Jimma interview programme, ibid.
 6. Among others see Donald E. Crumney, "European religious mission...", pp. 358-61.
 7. A. Cecchi, Da Zeila ..., II, p. 381.

section of the massera, the king built a stone house where he deposited his riches and clothes.¹ Probably here, too, he kept his few fire-arms. It was also in this section of the royal residence where the notorious state-prison the so-called Gindo was located. The term gindo had two meanings. First, it signified the huge tree to which the prisoners were chained. Secondly, a heavy log weighing as much as 60 kilograms,² was shackled to one leg of a prisoner, and was also known as gindo. In short, the gindo was the state-prison, and a unique place of torture. Prisoners who were sent to the gindo were as good as dead. There was no way of escaping from it, since the prisoners with the heavy logs attached to their feet were chained to the huge tree. Political prisoners, slaves who had run away from the king but had been recaptured and brought back to the massera, were imprisoned at the gindo, where their feet would rot, and they would suffer until death freed them. Governors who failed to carry out their duties also received a "short sharp shock" treatment at the gindo.³ The gindo was one of the best indications that Limmu-Ennarya's governmental system had already developed such judicial sanctions as torture, mutilation and slow killing which were intended to serve as an example for others. Rebellious members of the royal family, too, were subjected to the torture at the gindo before they were banished to one of the surrounding kingdoms.⁴

The presence of the gindo inside the third fence of the massera of Abba Bagibo reminds one that he was a tyrannical ruler, while the presence of the reception hall in the second fence remains suggestive of the majesty, the wealth, generosity and magnanimity of that same king. The negative aspects of his reign were over-shadowed by the positive ones, and the wealth which he spent lavishly on feeding his dignitaries or presenting them with precious gifts,⁵ covered more miseries than was usually recognized.

One important aspect of the Saqqa massera which has so far remained unmentioned is that it was the busiest industrial centre in the kingdom. Though active and skilled, this industry worked only to provide the necessities of the massera, as well as to furnish those items wanted for gift-giving. As with Jiren,⁶ among the buildings within the massera were workshops for the

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1. A. Cecchi, Da Zeila ... , II, p. 158.
 2. Ibid., pp. 163, 166, 205.
 3. Ibid.
 4. Infra, p. 438.
 5. Infra, p. 477.
 6. H.S. Lewis, A Galla monarchy, p. 70.

various artisans, goldsmiths, carpenters, armourers, weavers, tanners and artists. The king had a total monopoly of gold, and the work performed on it was in the hands of the king's goldsmiths, who made rings, or eardrops only to his order.¹ The carpenters made beds, doors, windows, and above all else stools, for which the Gibe region is still famous. The armourers produced both weapons for war and farm implements, which were needed on the king's estates. Weavers made various types of cotton clothes, some of which were of excellent quality.² Tanners produced leather clothes for many hundreds of female slaves who lived in the massera and were distinguished by their noisiness and leather dresses.³ Leather working was highly developed. Shields were made from buffalo skin, and excellent drinking cups were made from buffalo horns. Leather saddles, jackets and leather bags were also produced.⁴ Over and above this self-sufficient massera based industry, the king also received tribute in kind from many artisans all over his country. Abba Bagibo was justifiably praised,⁵ for encouraging art and industry.

... I have seen daggers with well-wrought blades and ivory handles very elegantly inlaid with silver as well as clothes with ornamental borders, brought from Eharea, such as would in vain be looked for in Abessinia. (6)

Outside the main fence of the massera lived several important officials of the kingdom. Among them three members of the council of state were the most noticeable. In 1843 the council of state included top personalities, such as Abba Rebu, the grand father of the king, Abba Jobir, and one unnamed uncle of the king. Abba Rebu was an energetic old politician, while Abba Jobir was the Abba Mizan⁷ (treasurer and minister for foreign affairs). Unfortunately, we do not know the name of the third most important personality in the council of state, but we do know a few important points about him. First, he was one of the uncles of Abba Bagibo, who had helped him to seize power in 1825. Secondly, he had been involved in the conspiracy against Abba Bagibo in 1835, which had been quickly crushed. After the failure of the conspiracy he fled

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1. A. Cecchi, Da Zeila ... , II, p. 289.
 2. Ibid. p. 289. See also the Jimma interview programme, p. 2.
 3. Ibid., p. 290.
 4. Ibid.
 5. C.T. Beke, "On the countries south of Abessinia", JRGS, XIII, pp. 258-9.
 6. Ibid., p. 259.
 7. On Abba Mizan, see below p. 481.

to Jimma Abba Jifar, where he lived in exile for seven years. Following the conclusion of peace between the kings of Jimma and Limmu-Ennarya in 1842¹ this uncle made peace with Abba Bagibo and returned to Saqqa, where the king made him one of his confidants and a member of the council of state.² As in Jiren,³ several important governors and the wealthy men of the kingdom probably had their houses just outside the main fence of the Saqqa massera. In short, this massera was the nerve centre of the kingdom.

Attached to the court were a number of courtiers called dagno, who carried the royal insignia, usually double-bladed spears, and were known to every official in the country. These were in fact the immigration and custom officials who were entrusted with the inspection and counting of those entering the country, and who accompanied all those permitted to leave the country. The very extensive political life, the intrigue and the negotiation of treaties with the neighbouring countries necessitated a large number of messengers and ambassadors called lemi. The importance of the lemi varied according to the duties they were entrusted with. For minor affairs, the king employed less important personalities, where for treaty-making and important messages he would employ a well-known dignitary (soressa) or even an abba koro. A number of translators of the different languages in use in the surrounding kingdoms were also employed in the court of Abba Bagibo. (4)

According to a recently collected tradition from the Gibe region, it was claimed that political offenders with the royal blood were neither subjected to the gindo, nor eliminated, but were punished by honourable banishment to one of the surrounding kingdoms.⁵ But this claim is contradicted by accounts of many irrefutable cases from all the Gibe states, which show beyond any shadow of doubt that members of the royal family who lost in the power struggle were punished by death just as other political offenders were. Many examples could be given from these states, but here it should suffice to give a few examples only from Limmu-Ennarya. We saw above that when Abba Bagibo seized power in 1825 he was helped by two of his sons and cousins. One of these sons was probably his first born. It was said that Abba Bagibo ordered the drowning of his first born son in the river Didessa, where the young man was treated as food for the crocodiles.⁶ The king justified this cruel action on the grounds that his son did not look like him. It is not possible to establish the date of this event. The only thing which could be said is that it took place before the conspiracy of 1835. Coming as it did before the conspiracy

1. *Infra*, p. 431.

2. A. d'Abbadie, *Nouv. Acq. Fran. No.* 21300, folio, 199-200.

3. H.S. Lewis, *A Galla monarchy*, p. 72.

4. M. Abir, *Ethiopia ...*, p. 84.

5. The Jimma interview programme, p. 30.

6. A. Cecchi, *Da Zeila ...*, II, p. 159. See also G. Massaja, *Lettere e scritti minori*, II, p. 372.

and at a time when the king was preoccupied with rebellion and intrigues,¹ the elimination was probably politically motivated. This harsh action against his own son was perhaps justified in the eyes of the king as a measure not only to deny the opposition of a political leader, capable of uniting them, but also to show to them that he would not show mercy to rebels even if they were his own flesh and blood. Abba Bagibo was unmoved by the pleas and tears of his wife, pleading for the life of her son. The affliction of the mother was alleviated only by the promise of the king to make her second son the next heir apparent to the throne.² But she found reason to distrust her cruel and hot-tempered husband,³ who had sacrificed her first son, and, as we shall see, the fate of the second son turned out to be no better.⁴ If Abba Bagibo had sacrificed his first born son to deprive the opposition of an effective leader, he must have been disappointed to discover a new conspiracy to unseat him organized by his uncles, around 1835. As with his son, so with his uncles, the king took immediate and decisive action.

"Abba Bagibo had drowned⁵ and buried with two sons, one of his [uncles] who wanted to seize power. The other [uncle] then succeeded in escaping and stayed in Jimma for seven years. He subsequently made peace and today (1843), he is one of the confidants of the king, and takes care of state affairs, with Abba Bagibo, Abba Rebu and Abba Jobir." (6)

From what has transpired thus far, it is apparent that the contradictory character of Abba Bagibo, which was mentioned at the start of the discussion of his reign, was a real one. On the one hand we saw his cruelty even extending to his relatives, and on the other hand we have noted the magnificence of his massera at Saqqa, and his generosity. However, there is an aspect of his generosity which has so far remained unstressed. The wealth radiating from the massera of Saqqa benefitted only the wealthy class of Limmu-Ennarya and the rulers of the neighbouring states. Only the wealthy dignitaries were entertained at his lavish feasts and received his gifts. The luxurious tastes which were gradually spreading to the wealthy class made Saqqa a centre of attraction for manufactured foreign goods, which the king distributed to his officials from time to time. He even distributed to them the gifts and tributes which the Jabarti traders had to present to him on their arrival in

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1. A. d'Abbadie, *Nouv.Acq.Fran.No.* 21300, folio, 199.
 2. A. Cecchi, *Da Zeila ...*, II, p. 159.
 3. *Ibid.* See also G. Massaja, *Lettere e scritti minori*, II, p. 372.
 4. *Infra*, p. 438.
 5. Since there was not enough water in the river to drown the men, they dug a hole into which they put the heads of the guilty until they suffocated. They then buried all three in a trench next to it.
 6. A. d'Abbadie, *ibid.*, folio, 199-200.

his capital.¹ The consequence was inevitable. The wealthy class developed to a hitherto unknown extent a taste for luxury. Thus the luxurious and costly articles which were mainly imported became necessary to feed the pleasures and maintain the grandeur of a small ruling minority in the kingdom. At this time commerce was mainly confined to commodities meeting the requirements of the wealthy class. It consisted mainly of silk, coloured clothes, wines, mirrors, beads and such similar items. In short, the goods of distant lands had become a necessity to the ruling class, which from the dizzy heights of its newly acquired power and wealth had become arrogant. They had exchanged the fierceness and simplicity of their national character for pride and vanity.² It was this class, headed by Abba Bagibo, which ruled Limmu-Ennarya in its own interest. The vast majority of the people of Limmu-Ennarya had probably neither the taste for foreign luxury goods, nor the means to acquire them. They were probably content with the necessities of daily life and bartered their goods with those of their neighbour. Even the trade which flourished in Limmu-Ennarya³ was probably not a source of profit for the peasants of that country. In this respect the society of Limmu-Ennarya must not be regarded as harmonious. It was a class society, in which the fruits of the labour of the majority went only to benefit the minority. Even the increase in the long distance trade and the development of a flourishing industry⁴ may not have much raised the standard of living of the majority. Be that as it may, we continue with the rest of the history of Limmu-Ennarya under Abba Bagibo up to 1841.

Abba Bagibo continued with the wars which his father had initiated with much more vigour and success. During the first few years of his reign, the thrust of his campaigns was directed against Gumma. But it soon became apparent that while he, like his father, was able to defeat Gumma time and again, he was not able to reduce that country to a tributary status. It was not long before Abba Bagibo abandoned the idea of making Gumma tributary to Limmu-Ennarya. This was a wise decision, and yet his wisdom after the failure was an admission that the energies which he and his father had expended on Gumma¹ had been wasted. He soon replaced his losses in Gumma by the gains he made against Jimma Badi. The latter were an unorganized group, who were

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1. A. d'Abbadie, *Nouv.Acq.Fran.No.* 21300, folio, 189-91.
 2. A. Cecchi, *Da Zeila ...*, II, p. 153.
 3. *Infra*, pp. 486-8.
 4. C.T. Beke, "On the countries south of Abessinia", *JRGS* XIII, pp. 258-9.
 5. The state of Gumma was formed around 1810.

unable to resist Abba Bagibo's assaults and subsequently Jimma Badi was reduced to the status of a tributary to Limmu-Ennarya. This success assured the safety of the caravan route between Limmu-Ennarya and Kaffa. It seems Abba Bagibo even extended an olive branch to the ruling house of Gumma, but his policy of peaceful co-existence foundered on the solid rock which had come into being by the formation of the state of Jimma Abba Jifar in 1830.¹ The latter state expanded at the considerable expense of Limmu-Ennarya.² Moreover, Jimma Badi, the tributary of Limmu-Ennarya, became part of the new state, thus depriving Limmu-Ennarya from having a common border with Kaffa. What is more, Gumma and Jimma formed an alliance against their common enemy, Limmu-Ennarya. Thus by the middle of the 1830s it became apparent that Abba Bagibo had to cut his losses on the western and southern fronts and to replace those losses somewhere else. This he did on the eastern and northern borders. On both fronts he expanded his territory and influence over the disorganized Agallo, Botor, Badi Folla, the Nonno, and even the Janjero³- the Yamma⁴ of Antoine d'Abbadie.

"... Twice during each year great military expeditions are undertaken which rarely extend beyond eight or ten days. Every soldier carries a small supply of bread and trusts for further subsistence to pillage and plunder. Many bloody battles are annually fought with the surrounding tribes and wide tracts of country thus annexed to the royal possessions. The Agallo, Yello, Betcho, Sudecha, Chora and Nono are all subjects to the Suppera, or king of Enarea, whose sway extends to the Soddo and Maleem Galla, about the sources of the Hawash, which rises in Adda-Berga." (5)

The success on these two fronts were Abba Bagibo's highest military achievement and he reaped the economic benefits that flowed from this success. The caravan route to the famous market of Soddo and the "coffee route" that passed through the market of Agabja to the Muslim land of Wallo came under his jurisdiction.⁶ Thus, besides Baso⁷, which was Limmu-Ennarya's commercial

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1. On the formation of the state of Jimma Abba Jifar see below, pp. 423-5.
 2. C.T. Beke, "On the countries ..." *JRGS*, XIII, p. 258.
 3. W.C. Harris, *The highlands of Aethiopia*, III, p. 54.
 4. A. d'Abbadie, *Nouv.Acq.Fran.No.* 21303, folio, 622-3. *Idem*, *Athenaeum* No. 1041, p. 1057.
 5. W.C. Harris, *ibid.*, pp. 54-5.
 6. M. Abir, *Ethiopia ...*, p. 90; d'Abbadie, *ibid.*, folio, 218; G. Massaja, *I miei trenta cinque anni*, IV, p. 144; Rochet d'Héricourt, *Voyage sur la côte orientale de la Mer Rouge, dans le pays d'Adel et le royaume de Choa*, pp. 223-4.
 7. *Infra*, p. 471.

outlet in Gojjam, Agabja and Soddo¹ now became not only Limmu-Ennarya's commercial outlets, but also the sources of revenue, which may have increased the wealth of the king. At this time Limmu-Ennarya was militarily at its zenith and commercial prosperity at its best. Encouraged by this happy turn of events and intoxicated by the widespread fame of his name, which had almost made him a legendary figure by 1840 in the Ethiopian region, Abba Bagibo aspired to conquer the land of Torban Gudru² in the same year.

The province of Goodroo is the high road between Gondar and Enarea, though there are several others, and is divided into seven districts ... The inhabitants can scarcely be numbered but taking the area at forty by thirty miles, I should calculate them at from 100,000 to 120,000. Of these, the greater portion, being accustomed to trade with Baso, are unwarlike, but those on the frontiers, from their numerous enemies, are brave warriors and have no occupation but battle and scarcely at home but the saddle. (3)

Besides the political and military motives, which might have prompted Abba Bagibo to embark on the conquest of Torban Gudru ("the seven houses of Gudru"), who were probably equal in number⁴ to the population of Limmu-Ennarya, he was attracted by the wealth of the Gudru and encouraged by their division. The Gudru were at this time in the midst of an arduous struggle for the formation of a state. This was almost fifteen years before Gama-Moras formed the little state of the Gudru.⁵ The Gudru war leaders had shown time and again that they had been singularly unsuccessful in forming a common front even in the face of a common danger. The Gudru Abba Dulas had nothing much to look back on except a history of internal struggle and chaos. With their reputation for disunity and anarchy, the Gudru Abba Dulas were not in a position to set the anarchy of their home in order and face the common enemy. However, the greatest stimulus for Abba Bagibo's ambition for the land of the Gudru arose out of its fertility and wealth.

"The salubrity of the climate and fertility of the soil of Goodroo is perhaps scarcely equalled in the many fertile provinces that Galla prowess and Abyssinian feuds and misgovernment have thrown under the sway of pagans or Mohamedans ... The productions of the soil include almost everything that Abyssinia produces on its various elevations - barley, wheat, ... millet, beans, nook ... potato ... are found growing in neighbouring fields, their sheep and cattle are celebrated ... And horses are bred in numbers The highlands are so well cultivated."(6)

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1. See for instance J.L. Krapf, Travels, researches ... , pp. 64-5.
 2. On the formation of the petty state of the Gudru see above, pp. 386-8.
 3. W.C. Ploweden, Travels in Abyssinia and the Galla country, pp. 305-6.
 4. According to Antoine d'Abbadie, Nouv.Acq.Fran.No.21300, folio, 784, the land of Gudru was densely populated and they had ca. 15,000 cavalry and altogether 64,000 warriors.
 5. Supra, p. 388.
 6. W.C. Ploweden, ibid., pp. 306-7.

The experience of fifteen years on the throne had enabled Abba Bagibo to resist becoming excited and being provoked into immediate action by sight of the wealth and the anarchy of the Gudru. His caution was not without reason nor his precaution without effect. He knew that though divided and disunited the Gudru were not an easy nut to be cracked. At the same time, the combined force of Gumma and Jimma were attacking Limmu-Ennarya, and while this was going on Abba Bagibo probably thought that it was dangerous to embark on the conquest of the Gudru. Two factors, namely the maintenance of the safety of his gains on the northern and eastern fronts, and the realization of the rising power of Jimma Abba Jifar, were the object of his fear and anxiety. His strategy for tackling the situation and sharing in the spoils of the Gudru, was to form a grand alliance, with Goshu, the governor of Damot, "Gojjam-proper" and Agaw-medir, from 1823 to 1840.¹ Goshu had his own axe to grind with regard to the Gudru. He wanted to share in the spoils of that land. However, the idea of the alliance originated with Abba Bagibo.

"... Abba Bakibo, desirous of subjugating Gooderoo, and the countries to the north as far as the Nile, sent to propose an alliance with Dedjasmach Goshoo, the ruler of Gojam ... One hundred horns of civet and fifty female slaves which had been sent by the Suppira, were ... accepted, and thirty matchlocks, with the persons versed in the use of the firearms, were forwarded in return." (2)

Captain Harris heard the above story in Shawa, probably from traders from Limmu-Ennarya. This story is substantiated and further elaborated by Abba Bagibo's letter to Dajasmach Goshu in 1840. We are very fortunate to have this letter, not only because it is an important historical document, which has survived out of Abba Bagibo's prolific correspondence with his neighbours, but also because it sheds a new light on Abba Bagibo's view of wealth and how it should be used to strengthen his position and be utilized to the benefit to his country. Moreover, the letter shows the direction which Abba Bagibo's new policy was taking during the second part of his reign. Before presenting the letter itself, it is necessary to mention a few cautionary notes concerning it. It was written in Oromo,³ and then translated into Arabic. Unfortunately only the Arabic version has survived.

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1. See for instance Fantahun Birhane, "Gojjam 1800-1855", B.A. thesis, Haile Sellassie I University, Addis Ababa, 1973, p. 14.
 2. W.C. Harris, The highlands ... , III, p. 55.
 3. Bibliothèque Nationale catalogue des manuscrits Ethiopiens de la collection Antoine d'Abbadie 249, Ethiopien Abbade 249. Traduction littérale faite sur la version Arabe, de la lettre Ilmorma d'Abba Bagibo roi d'Enarea au dejasmach Goschou prince de Gojam, Damot et Agoo. See the preface to the translated version.

But it was written in "an archaic style, which cannot be translated directly as they are couched in the language which was itself common to Arabic!"¹

This letter was given to Arnauld d'Abbadie by Dajazmach Goshu in Gojjam, and the French missionary had in turn sent it to Berbera on 14 January 1841. It was then translated into French, but unfortunately the translation was not made in standard French.² These two inadequacies have rendered some parts of the letter unclear and incomplete, though its general message is clear.

g/ "Louané au Dieu unique : la paix et le salut sur l'envoyé de Dieu Mohammed, après lequel il n'ya plus de prophète. Et ensuite, salut parfait à sa présence le général Gôschou gana fils de Zawidy. Ô toi qui liras cette lettre, dis lui : SOI, Ô mon frère dans les deux demeures, parlant avec ta langue comme (si c'était) la miême, comme les ondes et la mer; or tu m'as envoyé un message, et moi je l'ai pris dedans ma main. Demande moi, ô mon ami la même chose que je te demande, a tu m'ême, ô mon ami, ô fraîcheur de mon oeil. On je suis comme toi: si tu m'aimes, je t'aime, et ne quitte pas à ce mien discours; le pays de Godrou, mais à un voyouir (faisant) route dans le pays de Godrou, traite-le à la moncère du pays de Godrou, comme il (serait) traité dans ton pays et dans mon pays. Et renouvelle ta parole : on aime moi - et accorde - moi (qu'il en soit) entre moi et entre toi comme il en a été (avec) mon père et (comme il en serra entre) nos enfants. Or (voici ce que) je te demande : accorde moi ta fille; je suis riche (en) chevaux excellents mulets excellents vêtements de guerre, peaux de lions terrains considérables. On tout ce qui (est) dans ma main (est) comme à toi, si tu (le) désires dans ton coeur. Et si tu me donnes ta fille, tu auras (à ta disposition) mes teres et tout le reste, si tu désires dans ton coeur de l'argent (je t'en donnerai) tout autant (que tu voudras) quand même (tu compterais) par mille. Et je t'en aurais envoyé si nous eussions eu la sécurité des routes; mais j'ai eu peur (des périls) du chemin. Tiens à ta parole : de demande ton amitié, et si tu dis : 'tout cela est bien venu, certès je veux bien' (Alors) j'aurai trouvé le bonheur par ton moyen....

Sur ce, adieu.

L/ J'écrivain de la lettre, que Dieu le conserve, ebn Emyr Gebrayl, que cette feuille parvienne au te Dejamach Gôschou fils de Zawidy. J'ai envoyé la lettre aux mains de Bôkschy fils de Goromy : orl'individu (nommé) Bôkschy est en route. Je t'aime, ô mon père, comme tu m'aimes: Or les voyageurs entre moi et entre toi, traite (les) comme est traité ton amie dans ton pays.

Sur ce, adieu. (3)

This long letter is interesting for several reasons. Firstly, with the opening formula of the letter, Abba Bagibo declares his Muslim faith, but beyond this he is not obsessed with any religious difference between Goshu and

1. Ethiopien Abbade, 249.

2. Ibid.

3. Manuscripts Ethiopiens de la collection Antoine d'Abbadie, 249, folio, 1-2.

himself. In fact, without the opening sentence, there is nothing that would show us what his faith was. For him, religious faith was secondary and what counted was the friendship between the two. It was in this spirit, without any due regard to the religious difference that he asked for the hand of the daughter of the Christian governor of Gojjam. He may have been liberal in religious matters, but the ruler on the other side of the Abay was not so.¹ Secondly, the style of the letter is more reminiscent of the spoken language, which would mean that it was probably dictated by the king in Oromo to a scribe, who wrote it down using the Arabic script, from which it was then translated into the Arabic language. In the process of translation into Arabic a few words may have been omitted, thus creating some gaps in the text. Thirdly, it is self-evident that only the essentials were committed to writing and the details were left to the ambassadors to explain. For instance, the letter mentions a treaty to be concluded with Goshu, which in fact had yet to be negotiated and agreed upon in Gojjam. Fourthly, Arabic and Oromo were the official languages of correspondence for Abba Bagibo. Notwithstanding letter writing in Oromo, literary output in that language never went beyond a few poems which expressed religious exhortations.

More importantly, the letter contains two messages in order of their importance. The first was the question of the Gudru, which remains elliptical, at least, as it stands in the letter. The gap in the text may have been created by the fact that the issue was too sensitive to be written and therefore, the king left it to his ambassadors to confide it to Goshu, or the scribe may have omitted some words in the process of translation. The letter implies that Abba Bagibo had previously asked Goshu for some joint action against the Gudru, but to no avail. Accordingly, he asked Goshu again to act immediately. He wanted two things with regard to the Gudru : to maintain the safety of the caravan route between Gojjam and Limmu-Ennarya, which had to pass through the Gudru, and also to form an alliance directed against that country.²

The second and equally important message of the letter was Abba Bagibo's request for a marriage alliance. This was a politically motivated marriage, by means of which he wanted to establish a lasting relationship with the governor of Gojjam. Abba Bagibo believed and acted as if marriage was the key

1. Infra, p. 422.

2. e.g. W.C. Harris, The highlands ... , III, p. 55.

to politics, and in fact during the second part of his reign, political marriages became the kernel of his foreign policy, and a powerful weapon in the arsenal of his diplomacy. As it is clear from the letter, Abba Bagibo was willing to pay any price for such a political marriage, and it is no exaggeration to say that he laid out part of his wealth on such marriages.

Another interesting aspect of this letter was the official invitation which Abba Bagibo extended to Dajazmach Goshu to visit his country. From the content of the letter it appears that they had previously exchanged some ideas about the visit and Goshu may have shown an inclination to accept the invitation. Exchange of official state visits was an accepted pattern of the diplomacy of the Gibe states. Such official state visits were common on occasions of royal weddings or funeral ceremonies. Such visits also took place at the start of the Oromo new year, or at the time of the butta celebration, held every eight years, when the Gibe kings met and feasted together, settled their differences and made treaties.¹ Finally, from the last part of the letter, which seems to have been added as an afterthought, it is apparent that Abba Bagibo was engaged in an active correspondence with his neighbours.

Abba Bagibo expected an immediate response from Dajazmach Goshu. But the logic of history has its own course to follow. By 1840, Goshu was engulfed in his own external and internal crises. Firstly he quarrelled with Ras Ali, (the de facto power behind the throne in Gondar) and the latter devastated his territory and forced Goshu into submission. By swearing allegiance to the ras, Goshu maintained himself in power, but at a considerable price to his own prestige and territory. Goshu's son, Birru, was outraged at the terms his father concluded with Ras Ali.

"... The relation between the father and son progressively deteriorated until 1841, when they fought at the battle of Ingatta. Defeated and dispossessed of his territory, matchlocks and horses, Goshu became his son's prisoner. But soon father and son were reconciled : after 1841 we find Goshu ruling over Damot and Birru over "Gojjam-proper". " (2)

Goshu's defeat, first at the hand of Ras Ali, and then at the hand of his own son, not only shattered his prestige, but also cost him the territory of Agaw Midir and "Gojjam-proper". Goshu's loss of territory had an immediate impact on Abba Bagibo's grand design on the Gudru. With regard to that land

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1. The manuscript of Abba Jobir Abba Dula, p. 6.
 2. Fantahun Birhane, "Gojjam 1800-1855", p. 16.

his hope was pinned on the military alliance with Goshu, but the latter abandoned the project and confined all his efforts to devising ways of regaining his old territory. Nevertheless, Abba Bagibo's friendly letter excited his compassion and the generous gift stirred him into action. Thus Goshu sent Abba Bagibo the already-mentioned thirty matchlocks with persons versed in the use of firearms.¹ Compared to what Abba Bagibo expected from Goshu the gift was probably too small, but it was a token of good will which was intended to communicate politely to Abba Bagibo that neither a military alliance nor a marriage connection were feasible; the former on account of Goshu's difficulties, the latter because of the religious difference between them, which was unbridgeable in the eyes of Goshu.² It was Abba Bagibo's grand design on the Gudru, which had lured him to extend the relationship to the higher level of a political marriage, with the intention of converting the wedding ceremony into a Christian-Muslim alliance. Had it happened, it would have been an event of the utmost importance, which might have opened a new era of relationship and set a pattern for the future cooperation of the Amhara and Oromo rulers. The much hoped for alliance foundered on the solid rock of Goshu's political problems. Abba Bagibo realized that his policy concerning the Gudru had failed and failure persuaded him to re-evaluate his entire policy in the region.

1841 was also a year which saw many negative developments on the southern and western borders of Limmu-Ennarya.³ Jimma Abba Jifar expanded at considerable expense to Limmu-Ennarya.⁴ In fact Abba Jifar had emerged from the war of 1841 with military strength greater than that of Limmu-Ennarya,⁵ and political prestige equal to that of that state. This was a turning-point in the short history of the Gibe region, which brought to a close the phase of Abba Bagibo's military offensives. His military drive had failed on two fronts despite previous successes on the northern and eastern borders. In other words, by 1841 Abba Bagibo's ambition to expand his territory, which started in 1825, came to an abrupt end on two fronts and was reversed on the other two. Over that period of sixteen years, he had seen moments of success which almost brought him close to realizing his deepest ambition. At that moment he stood,

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1. W.C. Harris, The highlands ... , III, p. 55.
 2. Goshu himself was of Oromo origin and he won decisive battles in his rise to power with Oromo cavalry. He spoke Oromo language and also indulged in secret correspondence with Arnauld d'Abbadie in the same language. See for instance, Fantahun Birhane, "Gojjam 1800-1855", pp. 6, 12, and also the appendix No. 1 document no. 4.
 3. A. d'Abbadie, Nouv.Acq.Fran.No. 21303, folio, 231.
 4. C.T. Beke, "On the countries ... ", JRGS XIII, pp. 259-60.
 5. Ibid.

it seemed, on the threshold of the great historical opportunity of uniting not only the Gibe region, but also the surrounding Oromo tribes, in what is today the provinces of Wallaga and Illu Abba Bora.¹ Furthermore, his ambition and influence even extended across the Gibe river into the region which today constitutes a significant part of Shawa province.² However, that opportunity was missed fundamentally because Abba Bagibo failed to understand what the Christian princes to the north had come to understand much earlier. This was the question of the acquisition of firearms. While the Christian rulers (including those of Oromo origin) made the acquisition of firearms their top priority and the object of their raids on their neighbours, Abba Bagibo failed not only to invest his wealth in acquiring an arsenal of modern weapons, but also failed even to appreciate their value seriously. Be that as it may, the rise of Jimma Abba Jifar forced Abba Bagibo to adopt a pragmatic and realistic policy.

At this juncture, before going on to describe the second part of the reign of Abba Bagibo, it is important to discuss briefly the history of the state of Abba Jifar. This digression is unavoidable and essential, because for the next three decades the history of the Gibe region was dominated by the struggle between the two states, thus preventing the region from developing into one unified state.

Abba Jifar I, 1830-1855

The sources for the history of the state of Jimma Abba Jifar are adequate, and the following brief history of that state does not do justice perhaps to the amount of information at our disposal.³

The state of Jimma was born out of the struggle between the two clans : the Badi and the Diggo. The nucleus of the state was created by a Diggo man, named Abba Magal,⁴ who was a famous warrior. The Badi group lost in the struggle, partly because of the devastating attacks which Abba Bagibo directed against their land, reducing them to the status of tributaries of Limmu-Ennarya

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1. Antoine d'Abbadie, *Nouv.Acq.Fran.No.* 21300, folio
 2. W.C. Harris, The highlands ..., III, pp. 54-5. See also, J.L. Krapf, Travels, recherches ..., pp. 64-5.
 3. What is intended here is only to give a brief sketch of the history of Jimma, so as to show its relation to the history of Limmu-Ennarya.
 4. Nothing is known about Abba Magal's father. But his mother was either a Hadiya or a Gurage woman. See for instance, A. Cecchi, Da Zeila ..., II, p. 540; H.S. Lewis, A Galla monarchy, pp. 39-41; the manuscript of Abba Jobir Abba Dula, p. 32.

The Diggo group, who were unaffected by Abba Bagibo's assault, took advantage of the Badi's weakness. Abba Magal thus captured from the Badi the land around the great market of Hirmata. However, his grip on the new territory was tenuous. He left the task of consolidation and the building of the kingdom to his son, Sanna (also known as Tulu'hill'). Sanna was a born warrior who had gained considerable experience in the wars of his father. After the death of the latter, Sanna had to dispute the succession to his father's authority with his brother Abba Rago.¹ Sanna showed his military abilities by easily defeating Abba Rago and then sound judgement by imprisoning rather than killing him,² and diplomatic skill in coming to terms with the king of Gumma. Before embarking on his war of conquest, Sanna created a new army. This army was better than any other army in the Gibe region for four reasons. Its discipline and its endurance were better. It effectively employed the element of surprise by attacking suddenly from various unexpected directions. Another reason for its success was its ability to recover quickly, even from a major disaster.³ Finally, Sanna added to his army's tactical efficiency by his own charismatic personality, and he employed a strategy of genius which enabled him to galvanize them into action. Tall, well-built, brave and daring, he infused his men with his intrepid spirit and excited them to action by always being at the forefront of the battle.⁴ Such was the army with which he opened the campaign for building a kingdom. Sanna's military ability was matched by his diplomatic skill, which kept his many enemies divided. At that time, the region of Jimma-Kakka was divided between ten rival Abba Dulas, who fought with each other for supremacy.⁵ Sanna won his first decisive victory over the Abba Dula of the Badi group. Do-os, the leader of the latter group, was reputed to have been a hero.⁶ Sanna not only defeated, but also killed, Do-os, thus eliminating a formidable rival. The victory assured him of undisputed supremacy in the region of Hirmata. He then took over the massera of the defeated Badi leader and made it the seat of his kingdom.⁷ From his power base, in the

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1. The manuscript of Abba Jobir Abba Dula, p. 33.
 2. Ibid.
 3. Infra, pp. 426-8.
 4. The manuscript of Abba Jobir, ibid.
 5. G. Massaja, I miei trenta cinque anni, VI, pp. 5-6.
 6. The manuscript of Abba Jobir, ibid.
 7. Ibid.

region of Hirmata, Sanna slowly expanded the frontiers of his territory until he had defeated all the rival Abba Dulas one after the other, and by 1830 a new kingdom of Jimma-Kakka had been established. It was in the course of his war of conquest that Sanna earned his immortal name of Jifar, after the name of his famous horse. Gradually the name of the founder eclipsed that of Jimma-Kakka. Thus Abba Jifar became both the name of the king and that of the kingdom.

As in the military, so in the political field, Abba Jifar showed "his high intelligence and wisdom."¹ He had created a kingdom, but soon realized that it needed wealth and ideology, which nourished not only the unity of the people, but also consolidated the dynasty's grip on the territory. He wanted wealth from commerce and Islam provided him with the ideology. As we shall see in the next chapter,² he embraced Islam for political and economic motives rather than for religious needs.³

As the first Muslim king of Jimma,⁴ he was referred to as sultan.⁵ He was reported to have invited to the kingdom a number of Muslim teachers and preachers to spread their religion. By inviting the Muslim teachers to freely spread their religion, Sultan Abba Jifar wanted to win the hearts and minds of the Jabarti traders, who had their own axe to grind against Abba Bagibo. His immediate aim was to share in the profit bonanza of the commerce of the Gibe region. His long term aim was to change the centre of commercial exchange from Saqqa to Hirmata. It was splendid economic strategy with which he sought to weaken Limmu-Ennarya, by drying up the source of her prosperity. The ruling class of Limmu-Ennarya, whose wealth was mainly derived from commerce, and who were notoriously addicted to refined foreign luxuries, could by no means dispense with the privilege its merchant class had enjoyed and their king was determined to resist Abba Jifar's threat aimed at the arterial supply of his own luxurious life and his country's prosperity. Thus the economic motive was the underlying factor which generated and sustained the struggle between the two states. The peace agreement of 1842,⁶ failed to reconcile

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1. G. Massaja, I miei trenta cinque anni, VI, p. 6.
 2. Infra, pp.498-9.
 3. G. Massaja, ibid.
 4. The Jimma interview programme, p. 51.
 5. The manuscript of Abba Jobir Abba Dula, p. 33.
 6. Infra, p. 431.

the economic interests of the two states, and by the beginning of 1843, Abba Jifar, taking advantage of Abba Bagibo's embroilment with the Badi Folla,¹ occupied the land between the Gibe region and the famous market of Soddo. This was Abba Jifar's first major step towards opening an independent caravan route to the northern markets. It also enabled him to surround the territory of the rebellious Badi Folla.² What is more, this sudden success brought Abba Jifar to the frontier of Janjero, which was said to have been a tributary to Limmu-Ennarya during the 1830s.³ The king of the latter country, who soon realized that he could not stop Abba Jifar's expansion, turned a blind eye to the loss of territories at the periphery of his country. Abba Bagibo's attitude encouraged Abba Jifar to outstretch his force and burn his fingers. On the 18th September 1843 a delegation from Abba Jifar was in Saqqa negotiating some agreement with Abba Bagibo,⁴ concerning the Janjero. What is fascinating to note here is Abba Bagibo's double dealing and diplomatic skill in manoeuvring the situation. At the very time when Abba Jifar's delegation was in Saqqa, perhaps seeking reassurance that Limmu-Ennarya would not attack Jimma while the latter was at war with the Janjero, there was another delegation from the king of Kullo in Saqqa,⁵ to conclude a secret mutual defence pact directly against Jimma. Abba Bagibo's promise to remain neutral in the conflict between Jimma and Janjero seems to have persuaded Abba Jifar to venture on the conquest of Janjero. Encouraged by Abba Bagibo's neutrality, and intoxicated by the supposed panic of the Janjero, and entirely unsuspecting of a trap, Abba Jifar sent a strong force into Janjero through the gates by which they were never to return. In the trap, the men of Jimma united by danger and animated by despair, fought bravely before they were overwhelmed by numbers and destroyed.

" On 27 September (1843) a messenger from Jimma arrived at Saqqa to inform about the disaster that had come upon the troops of his country, who were going to attack the Janjero or Yamma. The country was defended on the border by ditches and fortifications of palisades. There were six to eight gates of entrance. The Janjero opened them and said to the men of Jimma, that their own forces were in a state of panic and had run away to a certain massera (a fortified house). Full of confidence, the Jimma advanced. A good number of their troops entered into the massera and then the Janjero closed all the gates. Then they jumped on the men inside and started the carnage which went on for a long time. 307 cavalry with red shirts were cut down. The number of soldiers of lesser rank who were killed were so great that ... they could not be counted. Jimma had lost all her brave warriors in this single encounter alone ... The men of Jimma abandoned ten leagues of the country side

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1. Antoine d'Abbadie, Géographie de l'Ethiopie, pp. 79-80.
 2. Idem, Nouv.Acq.Fran.No.21300, folio, 639. See also No. 21303, folio, 639.
 3. W.C. Harris, The highlands ..., III, pp. 56-7.
 4. d'Abbadie, Nouv.Acq.Fran.No. 21303, folio, 289.
 5. Ibid.

having lost (many warriors), At this time Jimma was seeking an agreement with Limmu, Gomma, Gumma and Gera, for revenge and to drive the Janjero from the land. The Gallas estimated the loss of Jimma at ten thousand." (1)

This disaster had overtaken Abba Jifar's troops when under the influence of an exaggerated sense of self-confidence they had underestimated their enemy's determination to resist. But Jimma's loss of ten thousand may have been exaggerated. Even if the loss was real, the fabric of the state, which had been enriched by the experience of thirteen years, could not have been destroyed by the misfortune of a single day. The loss of ten thousand men, if true, might have been replaced quickly in a land numbering 150,000 people.² However, the psychological impact of the victory on Janjero, and the effects of the loss on Jimma went beyond the limits of a single day. The Janjero were jubilant and their pride was elated by the victory, which perhaps surpassed their own expectations. It gave them a self-confidence and an undying spirit of resistance which sustained them in the struggle with Jimma for the next four decades in spite of considerable devastation to themselves.

The news of the disaster must have caused panic and commotion in the capital of Abba Jifar, as it had caused along the borders of Jimma with Janjero.³ Abba Jifar was left with the task of salvaging not only the wrecked morale of his army, but also of building a new force, which would restore the honour of his name and revenge Jimma's humiliation. His appeal for assistance was part of the strategy with which he hoped to revive the courage of his remaining troops, restore the morale of his officials, and replace the loss. The disaster which had fallen upon Jimma and Abba Jifar's appeal did not excite Abba Bagibo into action. On the contrary he remained indifferent, even after he had learned all about the outrages which the Janjero had committed.⁴ Towards the end of October 1843, Abba Jifar was boiling with anger over Abba Bagibo's inaction. But the latter was still unwilling to fix either the time for his action, or even an expression of his readiness to send his troops.⁵ Abba Jifar threatened to break diplomatic relations with Abba Bagibo. The latter, in order to appease the former, decided to have a conference with him

1. Antoine d'Abbadie, *Nouv.Acq.Fran.No.* 21300, folio, 196-7.

2. G. Massaja, *I miei trenta cinque anni*, VI, p. 6.

3. d'Abbadie, *ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Ibid.*

on 14th November 1843. However, the conference was not intended to help Abba Jifar, but to silence his supporters in the court of Abba Bagibo. Abba Bagibo's son, the heir apparent to the throne, was married to a daughter of Abba Jifar.¹ Abba Bagibo's uncle, who was a member of the council of state, was also a good friend of Abba Jifar. These top men in the government of Limmu-Ennarya seem to have urged Abba Bagibo to help Abba Jifar. However, Abba Bagibo remained adamant. The conference was held on neutral territory between the two states, and nothing concrete came out of it. Unable to undertake immediate revenge, Abba Jifar embarked on a massive preparation to go it alone. His fortune was improved by the willingness of the Janjero to fight outside their own dependable fortifications. For this over-confidence the Janjero paid dearly, but they met with resistance more obstinate than they had reason to expect from an enemy they had routed before. Pressed on every side and hotly pursued by an enemy aflame with the desire of revenge and intoxicated by the fortune of the day, the Janjero were soundly beaten. Among the prisoners of war who fell into the hands of Abba Jifar was the king of Janjero. Many of his relatives were sold into slavery by Abba Jifar.² Notwithstanding Janjero's spirit of resistance, the capture of their king marked their submission. However, this apparent submission lasted no more than three years, and as soon as their king made some agreement with Abba Jifar, who set him free, he returned to his land planning to revenge the humiliation and degradation he had suffered in the prison of Abba Jifar.³ Thus the struggle between Janjero and Jimma continued for the next four decades.⁴

Abba Jifar's success against Janjero in 1844 was followed by that of Badi Folla in 1847.⁵ The conquest of Badi Folla was a considerable success for Abba Jifar in two ways. Firstly, it assured him of having an independent caravan route between his country and the northern markets. This was a victory for the commerce of Jimma, but a set-back to that of Limmu-Ennarya. The latter could no longer enjoy their virtual monopoly over the profit bonanza of the trade in the Gibe region. Jimma started sharing some of it. Secondly, the victory brought Abba Jifar's kingdom to the zenith of its expansion during

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1. *Infra*, p. 431.
 2. A. Cecchi, *Da Zeila ...*, II, p. 352.
 3. Antoine d'Abbadie, *Nouv.Acq.Fran.No.* 21300, folio, 797.
 4. Cecchi, *ibid.* See also M. Abir, *Ethiopia ...*, 92.
 5. d'Abbadie, *ibid.* See also M. Abir, *ibid.*

his reign. For the next eight years Abba Jifar fought time and again against Limmu-Ennarya, Gomma, Gumma and Gera, but almost every conflict was concluded by a peace treaty that maintained the status-quo. In 1855, while he was on his way to Janjero, he was suddenly overtaken by death.¹ In the words of Abba Jobir Abba Dula : "... He was the man who reformed the constitution of Jimma and its laws. He increased the size of the kingdom, systematized the administration of the country and built the palace of Jiren, his capital."² After an energetic reign of a quarter of a century, the founder of the new state bequeathed to his successor the inheritance of a new kingdom, a new capital, a new religion and many "administrative and political innovations."³

"... A short dispute over the succession developed between his oldest son, Abba Gommol, the legitimate heir to the throne, and a younger (and more vigorous) son, Abba Rebu. Abba Jifar died in a palace east of Jiren. Abba Rebu was with him at the time, while Abba Gommol was at a palace southwest of Jiren. Abba Rebu was therefore able to gain possession of the gold ring of kingship. With his followers he reached Jiren before his brother and seized the throne. Abba Gommol was then exiled to Kafa." (4)

A young man of powerful physique, handsome and a brave soldier, Abba Rebu was only twenty years of age when he seized power. He has been described by one source as "a lion and a hero"⁵, and by another as "the Galla Napoleon"⁶. There is an element of exaggeration in both comparisons. Nevertheless, Abba Rebu was a brave, strong man, who truly wanted to conquer all the Gibe states one after the other. In fact, he defeated some of them and his exploits frightened and threatened all of them so much that they formed a secret alliance to come to the assistance of each other in the event of his attack.⁷ Abba Rebu's classic error was that he wanted to conquer all of them too soon and too quickly, and by so doing he shortened his life.⁸ Abba Bagibo, with his superior diplomatic skill, not only formed a solid alliance against Abba Rebu's threat, but also turned the elite of his own court against him. At the head of an army the unsuspecting Abba Rebu advanced rapidly towards Gomma, expecting to thrash them in a day.⁹ Even as he was rousing in his men a sense of confidence for an easy victory, he was surprised to discover that he

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1. The manuscript of Abba Jobir Abba Dula, p. 33.
 2. Ibid.
 3. H.S. Lewis, A Galla monarchy, p. 41.
 4. Ibid., p. 42. See also Cecchi, "Da Zeila ...," II, p. 541.
 5. The manuscript of Abba Jobir, ibid.
 6. G. Massaja, Lettere e scritti minori, III, p. 24.
 7. Ibid. See also idem I miei trenta cinque anni, VI, p. 6.
 8. Ibid.
 9. Ibid.

was surrounded and set upon by an enemy whose force was continually being renewed and added to. Instead of facing only the men of Gomma, he was met by the combined forces of the four states. To fight was suicidal and only flight held some hope of survival. He chose to fight, and fought bravely, killing many of his enemies. He was able to withstand the formidable enemy for a day, but fell at the hand of an internal enemy who had decided to buy peace with his life.¹ He was mortally wounded by one of his men and died the following day in 1859. Such was the fate of Abba Rebu in his 25th year.² He had been a prince who had the burning desire to unify the region by means of conquest, but sunk under the weight of the intrigues of the Gibe states.

After the untimely death of Abba Rebu, his infant son was by-passed in favour of an old man named Abba Boka, a brother of Abba Jifar I. Abba Boko (1859-1861) was a man of peace, who was more interested with the spread of Islam³ within Jimma than with the pursuit of conquest against his neighbours. As soon as Abba Boka renounced his predecessor's aggressive policy of conquest, the Gibe kings made peace with him without inflicting any punishment on Jimma. Abba Bagibo cemented his relationship with the new king of Jimma by effecting a marriage alliance. Accordingly, a daughter of Abba Bagibo was given in marriage to Abba Gommol, the son of Abba Boka.⁴ It was out of this marriage that the most famous king of Jimma, Abba Jifar II, was born in 1860.⁵

The reign of Abba Bagibo 1841-1861

The general picture which Abba Bagibo presented during the last twenty years of his reign was one of defender rather than aggressor. Instead of aspiring to continue with the war against the combined force of Gomma and Jimma, he confined his attentions to diplomatic ways of stopping the expansion of an enemy whose strength was on the increase. Thus after 1841 his hot temper and his notoriety as a cruel king was profitably exchanged for that of a patient and wise peace-maker, "the new Solomon of the Galla".⁶ The first major success

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1. According to the Jimma interview programme, pp. 2, 52, Abba Rebu was disliked by the soressa (wealthy men) of Jimma. He not only confiscated the property of those wealthy men who probably opposed his wars against the neighbouring states, but also killed many of them. By so doing he alienated the wealthy men of his country, who may have conspired with his external enemies to get rid of him.
 2. The manuscript of Abba Jobir Abba Dula, p. 33.
 3. *Infra*, p. 499.
 4. A. Cecchi, *Da Zeila ...*, II, p. 240.
 5. Abba Jifar II came to the throne in 1878 and he was the only Gibe king wise enough to submit to Menelik without resistance, thus securing for himself local autonomy which lasted up to 1932.
 6. G. Massaja, *Lettere e scritti minori*, II, p. 371.

of his new policy was the peace agreement reached with his main rival, Abba Jifar I. More than anything else commercial considerations forced Abba Bagibo to come to a peaceful agreement with Abba Jifar. Limmu-Ennarya's commerce with Gojjam through Baso, with Wallo and beyond through Agabja, and with Shawa and Harar through Soddo, increased in volume. This flourishing trade which was a never-failing source of wealth to the Gibe region, did not diffuse its beneficial effects in a way which was commensurate to the military strength and size of the territory of Jimma Abba Jifar. This was for two main reasons. First only a fraction of the profit of the trade in the region went to Jimma. Secondly, Jimma lacked certain vital commodities, such as coffee and musk.¹ Abba Bagibo sought ways and means of maintaining his country's commercial advantages. The peace agreement with Abba Jifar, albeit temporary, bears the mark of the success of commerce and as a result Limmu-Ennarya continued to enjoy the near monopoly of commercial benefit,² in the Gibe region up to 1847.

Abba Jifar, often consulting only his own interests, had between 1830 and 1841 devoted himself to conquest and expansion, and this time he needed to consolidate his gains before embarking on the next phase of his expansion. Thus the desire for peace was probably mutual, and the peace agreement was cemented by the marriage of Abba Bagibo's son to a daughter of Abba Jifar.³ The peace treaty and the wedding festivities which followed it not only brought a collective sigh of relief for the people of the two states, but it may also have created some mental exhilaration, and an atmosphere of euphoria among the rulers, which raised hopes that the era of conflict which had stained the region with much blood was now over and that a new era of unity had at last dawned. But Abba Bagibo knew what he was doing in converting the wedding festival into the hope of a new beginning. Neither for the first nor for the last time⁴ was such hope for unity raised; but never to avail. For Limmu-Ennarya, the peace agreement and the marriage union with Jimma was an event of the utmost importance. In the first place, the marriage of Abba Dula, Limmu-Ennarya's heir to the throne, to the daughter of Abba Jifar⁵ seemed to have provided the basis for the continuity of peace between the two states. Secondly, the peace agreement with Jimma, strengthened the internal unity of

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1. C.T. Beke, "On the countries ... ", JRGS, XIII, p. 260.
 2. M. Abir, Ethiopia ... , p. 91, citing Abbadie, Athenaeum No. 10427, p. 1847.
 3. Beke, ibid.
 4. Infra, p. 443.
 5. Abir, ibid., p. 92.

of the ruling house of Limmu-Ennarya.¹ For Abba Jifar, the peace agreement was only a temporary lull, providing the time necessary for his men to recuperate and for him to replace his losses prior to commencing the next phase of the conflict.

It is important to note here that after 1841, political marriage became an important strategy in the diplomacy of Abba Bagibo. He himself married wives from all the ruling houses of Gibe, as well as from Kaffa. His marriage link with the latter country was unique in a double sense. First, his principal wife, who had the right to wear a golden bracelet, was the sister of the reigning king of Kaffa.² In 1843, Abba Bagibo decided to marry a daughter of the reigning king of Kaffa as his twelfth wife.³ Among the distinguished men who were sent to Kaffa as elders to negotiate that marriage was the French traveller Antoine d'Abbadie.⁴ Abba Bagibo's sons numbered twenty,⁵ married either from the ruling houses of the surrounding countries, or from the soressa (wealthy men) of their own country. The numerous daughters born to his wives and concubines were given in marriage to the wealthy men of the surrounding countries. Thus Abba Bagibo held together his own country through political marriages.⁶ We suspect, too, that all his abba qorros (provincial governors) may have had marriage links with the royal house of Limmu-Ennarya. As with his own country, Abba Bagibo sought to hold together the surrounding countries through political marriage.⁷ However, when all is said, the marriage union between Limmu-Ennarya and Jimma Abba Jifar, did not bring lasting peace between the two states. The economic and political interests that produced conflict between them were too wide and too deep to be closed by marriage alone. The hostility generated by economic and political conflicts went on increasing, ever finding fresh fuel in the intrigues of the Jabarti traders, and the ambition of Abba Jifar to expand the frontiers of his state at the expense of Limmu-Ennarya.

We saw above that Abba Bagibo had prevented the Jabarti traders from going beyond Saqqa. The economic motive behind this decision will be examined in the next chapter,⁸ and here it should suffice to say that the Jabarti traders did not accept the ban on their movement beyond Saqqa. On the contrary, they

1. Supra, p. 413.

2. Supra, p. 401.

3. According to one recently published piece of information, the king had as many as twenty wives. See G. Massaja, Lettere e scritti minori, II, p. 372.

4. See for instance Max Grühl, The Citadel ..., p. 173

5. G. Massaja, ibid.

6. Antoine d'Abbadie, Nouv.Ac.Fran.No. 21300, folio, 740..

7.. Ibid., folio, 654-5.

8. Infra, pp. 475-8.

tried their best to find an alternative route to Kaffa. The formation of the state of Jimma Abba Jifar in 1830 provided them with the unique opportunity they sought. The new state did not impose any restrictions on the Jabarti traders, who without going to Limmu-Ennarya, braved the difficult and dangerous route through the tribes on the eastern periphery of that country, who were only nominally under the control of Abba Bagibo.¹ The Jabarti traders who came to the capital of Abba Jifar were quick to impress upon the king the need to convert his military superiority into commercial benefit. They advised Abba Jifar to free himself from dependence on Limmu-Ennarya's route to the north.² In other words, the Jabarti traders urged Abba Jifar to open an independent route between his country and the northern markets. And his iron determination to do just that was a dagger poised over Limmu-Ennarya's territory on the eastern front. The loss of Limmu-Ennarya's territory was hastened by two interconnected factors - the internal problems of that country and Abba Jifar's expansion.

Firstly, the territory of Badi Folla, which came under the nominal control of Abba Bagibo in the 1830s, had been involved in rebellion around 1842. Badi Folla, which had gained notoriety for the manufacture of eunuchs,³ required in the homes of the great,⁴ was heavily forested, and this enabled the inhabitants to repulse Abba Bagibo's attack.⁵ The inhabitants of Badi Folla, who seem to have trusted more to their notorious practices than to their discipline, and more to their forest cover than to their fighting qualities, dispersed before the cavalry of Abba Bagibo, which proceeded to devastate the low land of Badi Folla, forcing the survivors to desert their land for almost a year.⁶ Abba Bagibo was probably less worried about the loss of poor quality cotton from the lowland of Badi Folla⁷ than about the constant disruption its inhabitants caused to Limmu-Ennarya's caravans en route to the market of Soddo which had to pass through their territory. Unable to restore his authority in Badi Folla, Abba Bagibo turned a blind eye to what was happening in that territory, and by so doing he cut his losses, and admitted its independence from his control.⁸ This was his first major loss, more was soon to follow. The most dramatic

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1. Antoine d'Abbadie, *Nouv.Acq.Fran.No.21300,folio,714*; also No.23851,folio 588-9.
 2. M. Abir, *Ethiopia ...*, p. 91
 3. d'Abbadie, *ibid.*, No. 21300, folio, 639.
 4. C.T. Beke, "On the countries ... " *JRGS*, XIII, p. 260.
 5. d'Abbadie, *ibid.*
 6. *Ibid.*, folio, 186.
 7. *Idem.*, No. 21303, folio, 641.
 8. *Ibid.*, folio, 639.

reversal of Abba Bagibo's gain came from the direction of the market of Soddo. While the Gibe states were fighting among themselves, embroiled in a conflict which would make the possibility of presenting a common front against a common enemy remote, Sahle Sellassie, the king of Shawa, was gathering firearms, which were to bring almost the destruction of the once invincible Tulama cavalry in Shawa.¹ So it was that in the early 1840s, when the clouds had already gathered thick and low over the Oromo of Shawa, that Sahle Sellassie, with an army of between 30,000 and 50,000², armed with a relatively large stock of firearms, suddenly became a real menace to Abba Bagibo's possessions. What is more, Sahle Sellassie's drive to the west and south, deprived Limmu-Ennarya from having either the control or the direct access to the markets of Agabaja and Soddo.

"... Shawan raids to the west and south-west devastated the area and stopped Limmu-Enarea's expansion in this direction. The coffee route to Warra Himenu also fell into Shawan hands when the Christian armies conquered Agabaja. Moreover, as a result of Shawa's southward drive the Galla tribes to the south of Shawa came under its sway and Enarea lost its influence over, and even more important its access to, the important Soddo markets. Consequently Enarea was cut off from the Harar, Zeila and Tajura outlets and became much more dependent on the northern outlet through Gojjam." (3)

Such a sudden reversal of fortunes disrupted commerce and inflicted a severe blow on the commercial prosperity of Limmu-Ennarya, a blow from which that country recovered only after 1848.⁴ Despite the recovery of her commercial prosperity five years later, however, Limmu-Ennarya never regained her political control over the two outlets. Thus her territorial loss remained permanent, not because of Shawa's strength after the death of Sahle Sellassie,⁵ but because of the military weakness of Limmu-Ennarya herself. By 1846 that weakness was too apparent and it soon led to further loss of territory.

1847 proved a difficult year for Abba Bagibo. It seems to have started with the rebellion of the Agallo, and was followed by that of the crown prince. The Agallo, who had been incorporated into Limmu-Ennarya early in the reign of

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1. By 1842, the king of Shawa had already gathered more than 1,000 muskets half of which were in good working order. In addition he had several pieces of cannon which were carefully looked after by the king's armourers, gun makers and smiths. See for instance, The Journal of Isenberg and Krapf, p. 344; M. Abir, Ethiopia ..., p. 176.
 2. J.L. Krapf, Travels and researches, p. 31. See also Rochet d'Héricourt, Voyage sur la côte orientale ..., pp. 285-6.
 3. M. Abir, ibid, pp. 90-1. See also d'Abbadie, Géographie d'Ethiopie, p. 97.
 4. Infra, p. 141.
 5. Sahle Sellassie died in 1847, and his death triggered off a wave of rebellion in Shawa itself.

Abba Bagibo, rebelled in 1847. This was not a sudden rebellion. The discontent which may have been simmering for some time persuaded Abba Bagibo to build a new massera at a strategic place called Tinnqe, from where he may have hoped to control them. The Agallo, agitated by their own desire to free themselves from the control of Abba Bagibo, attracted perhaps by the wealth of the new massera, attacked it, surrounding it and setting it alight. The fire, which consumed one part of the royal residence,¹ also destroyed the attackers themselves. The accidental destruction of this invading party of the Agallo did not put an end to their rebellion, which continued for some time. Peace was eventually restored, when the majority of the Agallo submitted voluntarily to Abba Bagibo. They were allowed to go back to their homes with all the cattle they had looted from Limmu-Ennarya.² Abba Bagibo showed a high degree of political moderation in handling the rebellion of the Agallo. This policy of moderation seems to have been generated by the internal crisis which was afflicting the ruling house of Limmu-Ennarya at this time.

This brings us to what was perhaps the most serious political challenge Abba Bagibo had to face during his long reign. This was the conspiracy aimed at removing him from power. It was engineered by his son, the heir apparent. The conspiracy which had been long circulated in whispers only among the supporters of the crown prince, broke out into the open sometime in 1847. We saw above that Abba Bagibo had been helped by two of his sons in 1825. We have also seen that his first son was eliminated for reasons which remain obscure. As with the first son, so with the second, it is not possible to say whether or not he was one of the two sons who had supported Abba Bagibo in his struggle for power. The one thing which is known with certainty is that the second son was not implicated in the conspiracy of 1835. On the contrary, he seems to have been very close to his father, who trusted him with the gold ring and made him donachaw (the crown prince). By 1841 the donachaw had also been made Abba Dula (the minister of war) and the following year Limmu-Ennarya celebrated his wedding to the daughter of Abba Jifar.³ As heir to the throne, he seems to have enjoyed widespread popularity. As the minister of war, he may have had support among the soldiers. The marriage union with the ruling house

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1. Antoine d'Abbadie, Nouv.Acq.Fran.No. 21300, folio, 797-8.
 2. Ibid.
 3. Supra, p. 431.

of Jimma Abba Jifar may have suggested that he was an important figure who was destined to outshine even the achievements of his illustrious father. It did not take long before this dangerous popularity excited the ambition of the son and aroused the anxieties of the father.¹ The donachaw, who was unaware of his father's suspicions, nevertheless continued with his secret preparations and expanded the circle of the conspirators, which included among others a shaikh² and a famous non-Muslim wealthy Oromo magician.³ The Muslim shaikh may have been agitated into action by the Jabarti traders, who hated Abba Bagibo's ban on their movements beyond Saqqa. What is difficult perhaps to understand, let alone to explain, is the involvement of the wealthy magician in the conspiracy. It is said that this man was highly respected and honoured by the king.⁴ These two men, from two widely differing backgrounds, combined to make Abba Dula the man he was. His thinking was an amalgam of Islamic teaching and exaggerated belief in magical power. Abba Dula's tragedy was that he wanted to be the king too much and too quickly, so he repeated the history of his father's rise to power. He wanted to force his father to abdicate.⁵ He had a considerable share of his father's ambition, but lacked the latter's mental resources. Worse still, he was incapable of conducting the conspiracy with sufficient skill and secrecy. Abba Bagibo, who knew about the preparations of his son, carefully and secretly watched every step of the conspirators.⁶ Matters came to a head with two interconnected mysterious tragedies, in late 1847. "Many people came from Kaffa to offer their condolences to Abba Bagibo who lost two of his wives and one of his sons." The circumstances which had led to these sudden deaths is not clear. However, a recently published piece of material does suggest that at least one of the deaths was caused by a politically motivated killing. "... The crown prince had suffocated to death one of his father's wives in order to immerse the king in deep sorrow."⁸ From the intensity of Abba Bagibo's grief, it seems that the said woman was probably his favourite wife, and the dead son may have also belonged to her. This mysterious death was soon followed by an equally mysterious one. "Abba

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1. G. Massaja, I miei trenta cinque anni, IV, p. 83.
 2. A. Cecchi, Da Zeila ..., II, p. 160.
 3. Massaja, ibid., pp. 82-3.
 4. Ibid.
 5. Massaja, Lettere e scritti minori, vol. II, p. 373.
 6. Massaja, I miei trenta cinque anni,^{IV}p. 84.
 7. Antoine d'Abbadie, Nouv.Acq.Fran.No. 21300, folio, 797-8.
 8. Massaja, Lettere, ibid.

Dula, the successor to the throne lost his wife, the daughter of Abba Jifar, and his only son."¹ If the ungrateful son² was the author of at least one of the deaths, the role of the cunning and crafty king³ cannot be precisely connected with the death of his son's wife and her only son.⁴

Abba Dula, who probably counted on Abba Jifar's support in his struggle for power, immediately went to Jimma after the death of his wife and "asked for the hand of one of the sisters of his wife, who was promised to him."⁵ To complete the tragedy of the court drama of Limmu-Ehmarya, Abba Dula wanted to make his wedding day the occasion for the elimination of his father. The preparation of this latter event became the object of Abba Dula's boundless desire for revenge. On the flimsy pretext of improving the massera at Daga, Abba Dula prepared his trap,⁶ but Abba Bagibo knew all about it through his network of spies. His calculated and relaxed way of letting this develop was distinguished by an appearance of ignorance about the plot, and three strategies to tackle it. Firstly, a readiness to crush the plot, secondly a reward for loyalty towards himself, and thirdly a mercilessness towards the conspirators. The father surprised his unsuspecting son on the morning of the wedding day when he ordered him to come immediately to the main royal residence. For Abba Dula to refuse the order would have been tantamount to a declaration of open rebellion, and to delay in its implementation was to alert the king of what was prepared for him. The crown prince, who lacked his father's political acumen, had neither the time to think, nor the farsightedness to suspect his father's order. At the head of a large section of his soldiers,⁷ he arrived at his father's massera, where he found himself in a trap from which escape was well-nigh impossible. There was an extraordinary tense atmosphere inside the massera which alarmed and infused panic into Abba Dula, which frightened his men. It was a humiliating moment for the Abba Dula, who was neither capable of inspiring his own followers in the face of danger, nor

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1. G. Massaja, Lettere e scritti minori, vol. II, p. 373.
 2. Ibid.
 3. Antoine d'Abbadie, Nouv.Acq.Fran.No. 21300, folio, 797-8.
 4. The sudden death of the wife of Abba Dula and his only son seems to have persuaded the crown prince to plan the elimination of his father.
 5. Abbadie, ibid., folio, 797-8.
 6. A. Cecchi, Da Zeila ..., II, p. 160. The crown prince had a deep hole dug, in which sharp spears were kept, under the place where the king was supposed to sit alone in the evening of the wedding day and the hole was covered with carpets. The spears were erected upright with sharp sides to kill the king. And the hole was to be the king's grave. One of the slaves of the crown prince who dug the hole went and told the king.
 7. Ibid. See also G. Massaja, I miei trenta cinque anni, IV, p. 84, and his Lettere e scritti minori, II, pp. 372-3.

decisive at the critical moment. He wasted the precious little time there was in hesitation and utter confusion. The king stunned the startled soldiers with the exposure of the treachery of his son, and relieved their anxiety by the promise of safety. "... You have to choose between your old king, who had brought you victories and happiness and the ambitious inexperienced and ill-advised son."¹ The troops of Abba Dula seem to have compared the courage of the father with the cowardice of the son, the glory of the father with the ignominy of the son. They probably admired the wisdom of the father and condemned the treachery of the son. Reassured about their situation by the promise of safety and attracted perhaps by the reward of liberty for loyalty, the soldiers expressed their ignorance of the treason and declared their decision to abandon the son for the cause of the father. Abandoned by the majority of his own troops, the crown prince and a few of his staunch supporters were soon overpowered, disarmed and imprisoned. On the very day which was supposed to be his wedding day and the political elimination of his father, Abba Dula was humiliated, tortured and imprisoned at the Gindo. Later he was exiled to Gera,² though drowned in the Dedessa river³ while on the way to his country of exile. Abba Dula's supporters, some of whom were even accompanied by their relations, were fed to the crocodiles⁴ in the same river. The famous magician, who had nothing to gain but everything to lose by his involvement in the conspiracy, was himself humiliated and tortured at the Gindo before he too was drowned. His large wealth was confiscated and his numerous cattle were distributed among the poor.⁵ It was probably with the confiscated property that Abba Bagido fulfilled his promise of liberality to the deserters. The elimination of the conspirators closed this short chapter of serious crisis that threatened the life of Abba Bagibo.

Though the political wound of this crisis appeared to have been healed, and Abba Bagibo continued to enjoy wide popularity in the Gibe region, its effect was to poison his attitude towards his sons for the next thirteen years. He never trusted any one of them with the golden ring or the title of donachaw. Abba Bulgu, his third son, was different from the unfortunate crown prince in

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1. G. Massaja, I miei trenta cinque anni, IV, p. 84.
 2. Ibid.
 3. Antoine d'Abbadie, Nouv.Acq.Fran.No. 21300, folio, 797-8.
 4. Ibid.
 5. G. Massaja, ibid.

that he was very timid and docile. In spite of this Abba Bulgu was humiliated, insulted and hated by everyone at the court. His father even prohibited him from eating the best quality teff bread.¹ Though Abba Bulgu was an unambitious man, who was dominated by the fear of his father, the latter never trusted him with the golden ring until three days before his death. Nevertheless, the successful end of the sad drama must have caused everyone in Limmu-Emmaraya to breathe a sigh of relief. It was a sad episode devoid of any magnanimity. After indulging his officials with lavish feasts, during which time all sorts of condemnation would probably have been heaped on the unfortunate prince, and while the king would probably have been flattered and praised for his "magnanimity", the king once again showed realism and unique political wisdom. Instead of aspiring to continue with his old policy, he sought to reverse it and repair the damage it had caused. Abba Bagibo took two immediate measures - one political and the other economic - with which he intended to revitalize his administration. The stability, tranquility and prosperity at home, and the relative peace which he maintained abroad for the last twelve years of his reign stemmed from these two measures.

Firstly, he injected fresh vitality into his administration by replacing old personalities by young and vigorous men. We no longer hear of such men as Abba Rebu, his old grandfather, Abba Jobir and his uncle (all members of the council of state). Among the new appointees was Abba Shamal, who became the new Abba Mizan. According to Antonio Cecchi, who had met this official in the same capacity in 1879, Abba Shamal "seems to have been gifted with uncommon intelligence."² The business-minded Abba Shamal was knowledgeable on matters of internal administration, articulate in language, discreet in judgement, decisive in taking action, and impressive in convincing the king. It is said that Abba Bagibo readily listened to the opinion of Abba Shamal and made him his first advisor. He was in his sixties when Cecchi met him in 1879, and over a glass of special wine he boasted to the Italian traveller "... now ... I am old and no more capable to go to war, but I have an intelligent head, and the king who knows this loves me as his father, and asks advice from me on every matter and nobody is listened to as I am."³ Though there

1. A. Cecchi, Da Zeila ... , II, p. 172.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

may be an element of self-aggrandisement in this statement, it does not alter the fact that he was a very capable right hand man for Abba Bagibo. In fact, it was the same official who protected Abba Bulgu, the third son of Abba Bagibo, from the wrath and suspicion of his father by vouching for the loyalty of the son. Abba Bulgu, after succeeding to the throne, rewarded the worthy Abba Shamal by maintaining him in the same office for many years.

Besides appointing new men to the council of state, Abba Bagibo also dismissed some of his provincial governors and replaced them by more energetic ones. "Le lieutenant qui commandait entre Koma et le Ulmaya été remplacé parcequ'il / faisait beaucoup aux pauvres".¹ In short, by appointing energetic and intelligent men to the council of state, and replacing governors, Abba Bagibo tried to overhaul and reinforce his administration, which thereby continued to be amazingly efficient down to his last day. The diplomatic skill of the king and the vigorous abilities of his officers soon restored Limmu-Ennarya's former image. With the advance in age, Abba Bagibo began to lose not only his belligerence of spirit, but also became fat and less agile,² concentrating more on the call for peace than on preparation for war. Ever after he fought only when it was forced upon him and when his vital interests were at stake. For instance, either in late 1847 or early 1848, Limmu-Ennarya and Jimma Abba Jifar went to war for a short time. "... Limmu- et Jimma s'étaient brouillés et le roi de Kullo s'était avancé jusqu'au Gojob pour attaquer Jimma mais se retira sur la nouvelle de la paix que le roi d'Ennarya se hâta de lui envoyer."³ The cause for the dispute between the two states must have been the internal crisis of Limmu-Ennarya, which may have saddened Abba Jifar, on account of the loss of a daughter and son-in-law. It was Abba Jifar who opened hostilities, but Abba Bagibo who made peace. Again in 1848 when the troops of Abba Jifar were badly beaten by the people of Botor,⁴ Abba Bagibo did not try to take advantage of the weakness of his old adversary. In the same year, when Abba Rago was in dispute, concerning the crown of Gera,⁵ with his brothers and cousins, Abba Bagibo supported the former surprisingly on ideological grounds. Abba Rago promised to accept Islam if he could seize

1. Antoine d'Abbadie, *Nouv.Acq.Fran.No.* 21300, folio, 797-8.

2. A. Cecchi, *Da Zeila ...*, II, pp. 157, 160.

3. d'Abbadie, *ibid.*, p. 797.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 799.

5. Gera was the last state to be formed and it was also the last to embrace Islam, and the latter religion was officially established in 1848.

power, and Abba Bagibo fought on his side. The reason behind this decision seems to have been his desire to win the sympathy and support of the Muslim shaikhs and faughas in Saqqa. The new king of Gera fulfilled his promise by embracing Islam,¹ and Abba Bagibo may have enjoyed the admiration of the Muslims in the Gibe region. Again in the same year, when Limmu-Ennarya and Gumma quarrelled, Abba Bagibo averted war by a generous offer of peace, a peace agreement which was cemented by a political marriage. "... La paix a été faite et le roi de Gumma ... venait d'envoyer 200 vaches et 200 pots de miel pour demander la fille du roi de Limmu."² In the same year Abba Bagibo made peace with the Buno; a peace which brought a sigh of relief to the merchants who were travelling to and from Gojjam to Gumma. The merchants were no longer molested by the Ketto (robbers) on the short route via the desert, since they were now escorted by the border guards of Limmu-Ennarya.³ Numerous examples of Abba Bagibo's peaceful gestures during the last part of his reign could be given. But the few mentioned above should suffice to show that he had truly become a man of peace. It was during this period that he earned the reputation of being the arbitrator of peace and war. His European guest of honour in 1859 described his reputation in these glowing terms :

"Though lord of a small state he dominated by his esteem and authority not only the surrounding states, but also that of Kaffa and other Galla countries. His words have so much weight to those princes and tribal leaders, so much so that he was the arbiter for war and peace."(4)

Secondly, it is no exaggeration to say that Abba Bagibo was one of the rare Oromo kings who understood the importance of changing outdated and counter-productive policies. In 1848 the king took a very decisive and farsighted economic measure. This step shows the depth of his understanding of economic matters, and a real concern for the commercial prosperity of his land. We saw earlier that Abba Bagibo banned the Jabarti traders from going beyond Saqqa.⁵ By 1848, he realized that this policy had embittered the Jabarti traders to the extent that they were avoiding his country. Abba Bagibo not only abolished the prohibition on trading beyond Saqqa, but also removed many restrictions

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1. G. Massaja, Lettere e scritti minori, III, pp. 33-4.
 2. Antoine d'Abbadie, Nouv.Acq.Fran.No. 21300, folio, 799.
 3. Ibid. See also his Géographie d'Ethiopie, p. 101.
 4. G. Massaja, In Abissinia, p. 160.
 5. Supra, p. 405.

on trade and traders.¹ He even lifted the monopoly on some important commodities. Only the royal monopoly on gold was maintained.

Abba Bagibo could not and would not have lifted the monopoly on gold, because it was not only a royal monopoly, but also the universal symbol of royal authority in the region. Thus to try to lift that monopoly would have been to undermine his own legitimate authority, by depreciating the value of the precious metal. Beyond that the king reversed his earlier discriminatory policy and replaced it by a "gold for the king and the rest free-for-all" pragmatic policy. He had a breadth of vision which enabled him to perceive the direction in which events were moving. As we shall see below, the change in policy did not fail to produce the desired effect.²

However, by this time Limmu-Ennarya was on her way to decline. Indeed the decline had already begun in 1841. The second part of Abba Bagibo's reign was a period of political splendour rather than military strength, and this did not encourage growth. The decline was hastened and aggravated by the terrible plague which decimated a large section of the population of Limmu-Ennarya in the late 1840s.³ Moreover, the decline continued, but it was over-shadowed by his personality, and the consciousness on the part of all that this small domain was not falling apart bit by bit, as it did under his successor. According to an eye witness, who was in the country towards the end of the reign of Abba Bagibo, Limmu-Ennarya was prosperous, the country was relatively stable internally, respected in the courts of the surrounding countries, and the people led a relatively happy life.⁴

Finally, before we close this long discussion on the reign of Abba Bagibo, it is not out of place to say a few words about his last attempt to unite the Gibe region, not for unity per se, but against a common enemy. By 1858 Tewodros's governor of Shawa, Bazabeh, had expanded his territory up to the Gurageland, and demanded tributes from some Oromo tribes who were under the influence and perhaps political control of Abba Bagibo. The threatened tribes

1. *Infra*, p. 480.

2. *Infra*, p. 479.

3. M. Abir, *Ethiopia ...*, p. 80.

4. G. Massaja, *I miei trenta cinque anni*, VI, p. 15. See also his *In Abissinia*, pp. 283-4.

appealed to Abba Bagibo for help. Moreover, Tewodros's threat to the Gibe region itself acted as a catalyst for a common action. It was reported that Abba Bagibo regarded the payment of tribute to Tewodros as a confirmation of slavery and called on all the Oromo of the Gibe region to unite and face the common enemy. It is not possible to say whether all the Oromo kings participated in the extraordinary gathering held in Limmu-Ennarya, at which it was decided that :

... all the Galla will unite as one man and they will repay Tewodros's threat with their spears and cavalry at any time, at any place, and on any front. And that their ... common resolution and common shout should reach the ears of Tewodros and the Amharas. (1)

Massaja, the author of the idea of unity against Tewodros, and the man who drafted the letter to that end, claims that this resolution sufficed to stop Tewodros from pursuing his ambitious plan against the Gibe region. Massaja may have overstated Abba Bagibo's determination to unite the Oromo against the common enemy. However, what is not in doubt is that Abba Bagibo's inspiring leadership stirred the spirit of resistance among the Oromo in the region.²

The year 1861 was noted in the Gibe region for two phenomena : the first was the extraordinary rains of that year, the raging thunder and lightning which frightened the people. By accident, the lightning fell either on the houses of the king or near them, killing many people.³ The sudden illness of the king which followed this event may have been interpreted by the Muslim fanatics as Allah's anger against Abba Bagibo's religious laxity. It probably provided them with ideological justification for whipping up fanaticism, never seen before in Limmu-Ennarya.⁴ The second was the death of Abba Bagibo, which happened after a reign of thirty-six years,⁵ when he had reached the mature age of fifty-nine. When Abba Bagibo was suddenly taken ill he realized that the end was coming, and called together all his sons and the three members of the council of state, and gave his gold ring to Abba Bulgu, saying "... Here is the successor after my death."⁶ By so doing he averted a possible power

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1. G. Massaja, I miei trenta cinque anni, VI, p. 17.
 2. Ibid.
 3. G. Massaja, Lettere e scritti minori, II, p. 381.
 4. Infra, p. 495.
 5. According to The short history of the Macha, written in Amharic in the second half of the 19th C., Abba Bagibo is reported to have ruled for forty-two years. See for instance, "Storie e brevi testi amarici" per I. Guidi, in Mitteilungen des seminars für orientalische sprachen an der königlichen Friedrich, Wilhelms Universität zu Berlin, vol. X (1907), p. 181.
 6. G. Massaja, I miei ..., ibid, p. 14.

struggle. He died at midday on 24th September 1861, after a short illness of five days.

... His death was a great misfortune not only for the Catholic mission but also for the kingdom of Enmarya, for all Galla principalities of the south, who gained in him skilled counselor and a very valid protector. Even European science ... lost a true and sincere friend, because he opened the road for the first explorer Antoine d'Abbadie ... up to Kaffa. In fact it can be said in part that he was the founder of the Catholic mission of Enmarya, of Gera, and of Kaffa, and without his favour I should never have been able to put my feet in the latter kingdom. (1)

No other Oromo king had had longer or closer relations with the Christian princes to the north than Abba Bagibo. He had come to power in the days of Sahle Sellassie of Shawa and died in the days of Tewodros. He had known the leaders of all the surrounding states with whom he had fought and made peace and with whom he had arranged political marriages. He symbolized the hope for unity and that hope died with him.

"Abba Bagibo's inspiring leadership prevented Tewodros from pursuing his design in the Gibe region in 1858. However, after his death, the absence of the mind that led and directed them, the Galla unity was broken. Instead of preparing to form one front against the enemy, the various kingdoms began to fight among themselves ... Their disunity not only undermined their strength, but also invited and facilitated the coming of the invaders who devastated their land." (2)

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1. G. Massaja, In Abissinia, p. 283.
 2. Idem, I Miei trenta cinque anni, vol. VI, p. 17.

Chapter Seven

The economic foundation and the ideological orientation of the Gibe states: agriculture, commerce and the spread of Islam.

The most characteristic feature of the Gibe states was the dominating role of agriculture. However, trade was also promoted: the Gibe states were created by and in the interests of the landowning class and trade benefited the rulers. The profession of trading was raised to a status hitherto unknown in the region, and this provided adventurous traders with the opportunity not only to amass wealth, but also to become prominent politically.¹ As a result, a dynamic indigenous trading class emerged to dominate the commercial scene in the Gibe region. Moreover, trading influences were accompanied by deeper penetration by Islam: as elsewhere in Africa, Islam followed in the footsteps of trade.

In the previous chapter we saw how the settlement of the Oromo in the Gibe region had a profound impact on their way of life. The Oromo not only changed their political institutions, their ideology and their mode of production to meet the demands of the new conditions: they also in turn transformed the economy of the Gibe region through their labour on the land and their activities in trade and exchange. In this chapter, we shall attempt to demonstrate that agriculture was the material foundation of the Gibe states, to describe the progress and success of trade, and to examine the spread of Islam in the region.

Just as it is today, so also in the past,² the Gibe region was a very fertile part of Ethiopia, a great agricultural centre and a land of plenty. A European traveller at the beginning of the twentieth century described the fertility of the region in these terms:

There are few regions in Africa which are richer than the western and south-western portions of Abyssinia - generally known as the Galla country. Its picturesque mountain masses are well wooded and the valleys are regular gardens. The climate is ideal, water for irrigation plentiful, and the soil so fertile that it will produce anything with the minimum of labour. Two crops a year can be grown without cultivation. All that is necessary is to sow the seeds anyhow; the land does the rest. (3)

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1. Infra, pp. 481-2.
 2. For history, see Almeida, in Some Records of Ethiopia, pp. 149-152.
 3. A.H.S. Landor, Across widest Africa: an account of the country and the people of eastern, central and western Africa, as seen during a twelve months journey from Djibouti to Cape Verde. (London: 1907), pp. 120-1.

Tasawo Merga, a modern historian, went even further, describing the region as 'Africa's paradise'.¹ Although this may be an exaggeration, one thing remains certain : the Gibe region was, and still is, very fertile, offering with the variety of its natural characteristics, great possibilities for Oromo agricultural activity.

From the Gibe river to the Gojeb, from the Omo to the Didessa, there was a succession of valleys and plains of amazing fertility. Interspersed were areas not quite so productive: hot tracts infested with malaria and tsetse fly, and beautiful chains of mountains and numerous hills. Abundant forests enveloped the whole region. Great rivers - the Gibe, the Gojeb, the Baro and the Didessa - and numerous smaller streams² rolled swollen by the torrential rains from the middle of June to the end of October,³ providing vast opportunities for irrigation. Below we briefly describe the potentialities and the actual agricultural resources of each state. What follows is largely based on the works of A. Cecchi, who visited all the Gibe states and gathered invaluable information about their agricultural economy.

In Limmu-Ennarya especially, the plains and valleys were blessed with soil that gave a variety of possibilities for agriculture. Many small rivers cascaded down from the mountains and flowed across the plains to empty into the Omo, the Gibe or the Didessa. The many plains and valleys were not only endowed with almost inexhaustible pasturage but also yielded plentiful cereal crops produced by the labour of the industrious people. In the north-east, the series of hills which separate the Botor from Limmu-Ennarya provided a contrasting panorama. Even the rocky land in this area was covered with forest. The plain at the foot of the chain was fertile in soil, rich in water, and abundantly cultivated with teff and sorghum.⁴ Every kind of grain grew in the central part of Limmu-Ennarya. In the north, in the valley of the Gibe, in addition to cultivated land, pasture, forests and rich coffee, trees took up a considerable area. In the west, the forests in the valleys of the Didessa provided a home for a variety of game. It was also an ideal environment for coffee, which grew there naturally. In the south, sorghum competed with teff, while the Sadacha forest boasted an abundance of game.⁵

1. Tasawo Merga, "Senna Umatta Oromo : jalqaba jarra kudda jahafti hama dumiti jarra kudda sagalefanti", p. 136.

2. Ibid.

3. A. Cecchi, Da Zeila alle Frontiere del Caffa, vol. II, p. 162.

4. Ibid., p. 146.

5. Max Grühl, The citadel of Ethiopia : the empire of the divine p. 127.

In the east, on the confines of the mountains overlooking the Gibe Ennarya, barley, wheat and other highland crops were grown. Even hilltops and mountainsides yielded abundant produce in this part of the country. In short, the land of Limmu-Ennarya produced cereals - teff, sorghum, maize, barley, wheat, finger millet - and oil seeds, a variety of beans, peas and lentils, and vegetables, including onions and garlic. In the lowlands, coffee, cotton and fruit trees were grown.¹ Root crops, such as ensete, potatoes and sweet potatoes were also cultivated. Thus, the economy of Limmu-Ennarya was based on agriculture, and agriculture was the basis of most of the relationships of the people.

According to Cecchi, the tableland of Gumma, with its cultivated fields interspersed with wooded pasture, was rich in animal population.² Gumma's abundant grass and well-watered land supported a large number of cows, oxen, sheep, goats, mules and horses. Gumma was subjected to constant inroads from her pastoral neighbours, the Arjo in the north, and the Nonno in the west, and therefore did not develop a rich agriculture along these two boundaries. Here Gumma's population practised pastoralism. The economic consequence was that the area of land under cultivation in Gumma was smaller than in Jimma Abba Jifar and Limmu-Ennarya. However, the central and southern parts of Gumma were intensely cultivated and were very rich in sorghum, wheat, barley and cotton, but lacked coffee. Thus, the economy of Gumma was based on agriculture and also, to a limited extent, on pastoralism.

Gomma, the smallest of all the Gibe states, was agriculturally a very rich land. According to Cecchi, the wide undulating valley which formed the main part of Gomma produced abundant teff, maize, sorghum, finger millet, cotton, oil seeds, peppers, varieties of beans and peas, coffee, lemons and vegetables, but it lacked barley and wheat.³ Grain and coffee were the chief agricultural wealth. No feast was complete without coffee, and no religious ceremony was performed without libations of coffee. As the most thoroughly Islamized state in the Gibe region, coffee was already taking the place of blood in ceremonies.⁴ Surrounded by relatively big sister states on all its borders, enclosed by a circle of mountains and blessed with numerous streams, the people of Gomma devoted themselves to farming, earning a reputation for

1. A. Cecchi, Da Zeila ... , II, p. 541.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., pp. 238-9.

4. Ibid.

a high degree of civilization.¹ The meadows at the bottoms of the fertile valleys and the uncultivated slopes supported a large cattle population but, as in Limmu-Ennarya, the milieu was overwhelmingly agricultural.

The country where agriculture reached the highest state of development was Jimma Abba Jifar. Our main source, Cecchi, names Jimma as the richest of the Gibe states. He attributes its advanced agriculture to the presence of Jabarti traders who were supposed to have transmitted their agricultural skill to the Oromo.² The long contact with Jabarti traders may have influenced the development of agriculture in Jimma, but to credit the Jabarti traders with the whole progress of agriculture does not tally with the known facts. In the first place, there was a larger number of Jabarti traders in Limmu-Ennarya than in Jimma right up to the time when, in the 1870s, Jimma eclipsed Limmu-Ennarya. Cecchi arrived in the Gibe region in the late 1870s, at the very time when the sun of Limmu-Ennarya was setting, and the star of Jimma was rising. A large number of Jabarti traders had recently left the declining state and gone to prosper in Jimma. His conclusion can be said merely to reflect the unfolding drama of the time. It was not in the 1870s that agriculture developed in Jimma, but in the 1770s and earlier. According to Abba Jobir, a traditional Oromo historian, the forests presented a formidable obstacle to the Oromo when they arrived in the Gibe region. However, they soon started massive clearance, preparing the way for extensive farming.³ This land clearance took place towards the end of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth centuries. This would imply that agricultural development preceded the settlement of Jabarti traders in Jimma in the 1830s⁴ perhaps by more than a century.

Secondly, and more importantly, Jimma Abba Jifar had the largest population in the Gibe region, estimated at 150,000 in the late 1850s.⁵ In 1936, the population estimate for Jimma was 300,000.⁶ It would seem that Cecchi's estimate of 30,000 to 35,000 in 1879⁷ grossly underestimated the size of

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1. Cecchi, Da Zeila ..., II, pp. 238-9.
 2. Ibid., pp. 537-8.
 3. The manuscript of Abba Jobir Abba Dula, p. 13.
 4. Supra, p. 425.
 5. G. Massaja, I miei trenta cinque anni, vol. VI, p. 6.
 6. Consociazione Turistica Italiana : guida dell'Africa orientale Italiana, (Milan : 1938), p. 528.
 7. Cecchi, Da Zeila ..., II, p. 540.

Jimma's population. The relatively large population may have contributed to the advancement of agriculture in Jimma. The inhabitants had the reputation of being intelligent and hardworking : they were "... possessed of sufficient culture to have made its capital and its land an example of prosperity for all Africa to admire and imitate."¹ In Jimma, the fertility of the soil, combined with the intelligent activity of its inhabitants, made the land of Abba Jifar a country of much greater agricultural wealth than Limmu-Emmarya. The highland were very rich in wheat and barley, while in the valleys there grew maize, teff, sorghum, finger millet, cotton, coffee, lentils and a variety of forest plants, vegetables and spices, including several species of Amomum.²

Around the edges of the fields and in the gardens surrounding their houses, the people of Jimma grow many more plants. Among the many garden crops are (potato) ... sweet potato, a number of varieties of beans and peas, a form of yam, a few leafy plants, and gourds. The primary garden crop is ensete. ... This plant is not as important in Jimma as it is in most of the countries of southwest Ethiopia (Gurage, Sidamo, Gimira for instance), where it is the staple, but it does fulfil a need during the rainy season and at other periods when few grains are available. (3)

In short, from one end of Jimma to the other, the country was " ... full of well-cultivated fields, interspersed with wooded pasture and hills with fertile valleys."⁴ Thus, even more than Limmu-Emmarya, Jimma was a predominantly agriculture land, and agriculture constituted the backbone of the economy.⁵

Finally we come to the land of Gera, another state with flourishing agriculture. Cecchi described Gera as "a basin surrounded by softly notched hills with gentle slopes."⁶ The many beautiful streams cascaded down from the mountains and flowed across the valleys to empty themselves in the Naso river.⁷ The valleys yielded abundant teff, maize, sorghum, ensete, finger millet and several varieties of beans and peas. Wheat and barley were

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1. Max Gröhl, The Citadel of Ethiopia ... , p. 166.
 2. Cecchi, Da Zeila ... , pp. 537-8.
 3. H.S. Lewis, A Galla Monarchy, p. 52.
 4. G.W.B. Huntingford, in Some Records of Ethiopia, preface, p. lxxix.
 5. Cecchi, ibid.
 6. Cecchi, Da Zeila ... , II, p. 263.
 7. Ibid., p. 264.

cultivated on the highlands at an altitude of 2300 metres and above. Teff, barley and wheat were sown in July and harvested in late November. Unlike Jimma, Gomma, Gumma and Limmu-Ennarya, where maize was sown in February and harvested in July, in Gera it was sown in April and harvested in August.¹ The forests of Gera competed with those of Limmu-Ennarya in abundance of coffee. It was also the land that boasted the greatest riches in spices.² The seven varieties of spices that grew there both sweetened the air and attracted and nourished swarms of bees. Gera was, and still is, the rich land of honey.³ Bee-hives were hung on trees all over the land, and caves and hollow tree trunks also yielded their share of honey. There were eight qualities of honey in Gera.⁴ Of these, Ebichaa, named after the plant from which the bees extracted the nectar, was the most famous of all honeys in the Gibe region. With its excellent flavour, it was known as royal honey, and indeed the famous dadi (mead) was exclusively made from Ebichaa. All over the Gibe region the kings and queens and great dignitaries drank the dadi made from this honey. It is not surprising, therefore, that the flavoursome and prestigious Ebichaa was a royal monopoly. Although honey was plentiful throughout the Gibe region, it was Gera honey which enjoyed the reputation of greatest excellence.⁵

From all that has been written above, it is clear that the economy of the Gibe region was predominantly agricultural. From the valleys of Limmu-Ennarya and Jimma to the mountains of Gomma, from the plains of Gera to the lowlands of Gumma, the land gave forth cereals (wheat, barley, teff, sorghum, maize, finger millet), root crops (potato, sweet potato, yam, ensete) and many varieties of beans, peas and lentils, oils seeds (nug, or Guizota abyssinica), fruit trees, vegetables, coffee (the main cash crop), cotton, chat and spices. Blessed with fertile soil that needed little irrigation,⁶ the Oromo of the Gibe region were engaged in intensive farming, and their relatively developed agriculture produced a large surplus which provided a basis for all the people of the region.

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1. Cecchi, Da Zeila ..., II, p. 278.
 2. Ibid., pp. 280-1. The seven varieties of spices were : Ginger, Ogghio, Sunco, Abessud, Chefa, Dembla, Marga-orga.
 3. The Jimma Interview programme, p. 27.
 4. Cecchi, ibid., II, pp. 281-2. These were : Buto (whitish), Bila (red), Gumaria (dark), Ebichaa (dark), Dommisa (white and pure), Maccannisa (red-whitish), Qeto (red), Tufa (pale reddish).
 5. Ibid. See also, A.H.S. Landor, Across widest Africa, p. 189. The Jimma interview programme, pp. 4, 27, 52-3.
 6. Landor, ibid., pp. 120-1.

Agricultural practice in the Gibe region was very similar to, if not identical with, that of the Christian land to the north. The plough used in the Gibe region, however, was somewhat primitive.¹ As in Shawa, a pair of oxen were used as draught animals and the drawn plough was supplemented by three or four men working with hoes.² The plough was the most vital of farm implements in the Gibe region, playing much the same role in the agricultural economy as it did in Shawa:

... Within the complex of ecological and technological factors, the plough had a central role by working the land better, reducing the amount of human labour needed in agriculture, and freeing individuals for other productive or non-productive activities. The plough also had implications for two very important institutions within the local communities, the household and land tenure; the force needed in ploughing is the ultimate determinant of the strict division of labour between the sexes, and the great capacity of the plough necessitated well-defined rules of land tenure. (3)

This brings us to the difficult question of the land-holding system in the Gibe region : difficult because so little was written about it either before or after the formation of the Gibe states. As we saw in the last chapter, the struggle which led to the formation of the Gibe states was over the question of land. It was a struggle which brought about a radical change in the land-holding system of the area. Before agriculture became the dominant mode of production for the Oromo in the region the land and all its resources belonged to the clan as a whole, and conflict over land was settled by the clan assembly, the chafe. The landholding system probably differed little from that practised by other Macha groups in a similar ecological environment across the Didessa river in Wollaga. A recent study of land-holding in Wallaga touches upon the essential features of the system :

... Those who migrated with their cattle into the new territory defeated the original inhabitants, the Gonka, and claimed large areas for themselves and their descendants. They became 'fathers of the land', abba lafa, or 'possessors of land', abba kabie. The Kabie (Qabie) possession, should be confirmed by the ruling gada class at the Caffé (chafe) or gada center, and after such a 'registration' no other family could claim that land. Those who in this way took land became founders of localized patrilineages which became associated with certain areas of land. Land was plentiful, and the first immigrants came to be associated with large tracts of land for agriculture and grazing. The country in western Wallega consists of undulating hills with deep valleys in between. The settlements are concentrated on the upper parts of the hills, and each hill is thus

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1. A. Cecchi, Da Zeila ... , II, p. 164.
 2. Ibid.
 3. Svein Ege, "Chiefs and peasants in the socio-political structure of the Kingdom of Shawa about 1840," p. 53.

associated with a certain lineage or sub-lineage. It was usually easy to demarcate the borders between lineage groups and their territory with the help of valleys, creeks and other natural features ... Every man in the lineage had a right to get a piece of land to build his house on and to get land for agriculture and pasture. Land to which a man could claim such rights was called his Masi. The term refers to the portion of land which is actually under cultivation in the fallow cycle, but it is also used to denote any land a man or his father or grandfather has cultivated previously and to which he could thus claim rights of usufruct. (1)

Two points are worth mentioning here. Firstly, the conquered people, the Gabbaro,² were not driven off their land as appears to be implied at the beginning of this long quotation. The Gabbaro were left on their land and were adopted by, and eventually assimilated into, Oromo clans. Even after the Oromo conquest, the Gabbaro continued to enjoy ownership of their farms,³ while their right to the collectively owned clan land was perhaps as good as that of the pastoral conquerors. Since land was plentiful and men few at the time,⁴ conflict over ownership was limited. Another reason for leaving the Gabbaro on the land was because they were engaged in farming and the pastoral conquerors needed their agricultural produce. Secondly, as we saw in a previous chapter,⁵ there was a slow but continuous flow of Oromo immigration following the major wave of the sixteenth century. The latecomers were given access to and settled on the land owned by an abba lafa as qubsisa on condition that they provided labour for the original possessor of the land. What the qubsisa ("late settler") bought with his labour "... was the right for him and his descendants to use land and a guarantee that this right would be respected."⁶ This is perhaps a good indication that land was passing from the realm of collective ownership and becoming privately owned.

In the Gibe region, the transition from collective ownership to private ownership was a bloody episode in the drama of the struggle between the war leaders. Many examples could be given from all over the Gibe region,⁷ but perhaps the most vivid is that recorded by Massaja in his account of the struggle between the war leaders of Lagamara and Challa. The land and

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1. Jan Hultin, "Man and land in Wollega, Ethiopia", working papers of the Department of Social Anthropology, University of Gothenburg, 1977, pp. 1-3.
 2. On the Gabbaro see Chapter Five, p. 350.
 3. Supra, p. 350.
 4. Supra, p. 372.
 5. Supra, p. 372.
 6. Jan Hultin, "Man and land in Wollega", p. 12.
 7. e.g. H.S. Lewis, A Galla Monarchy, pp. 49-50.

wealth of their neighbours excited wild ambition in the war leaders of each land, for they had already seen that the acquisition of land and wealth was the surest path of supremacy. The following drama was played before the eyes of the first Italian bishop of Oromoland in the late 1850s. The people of Lagamara and Challa went to war over an incident involving a woman who abandoned an Abba Dula of Lagamara for an Abba Dula of Challa. The real motive for the war went far deeper. It was a question of the political and economic ambitions of the three Abba Dulas of Lagamara and their followers. In the battle following the incident, the Abba Dula of Lagamara routed those of Challa, who fled to safety in neighbouring states. Their followers escaped into the forest but were soon forced by hunger and exposure to return to their land. With tears in their eyes,¹ the unfortunate peasants of Challa begged the victorious Abba Dula for mercy. This was granted but at a terrible price. The three Abba Dulas divided the land of Challa among themselves and only allowed the vanquished to return to their homes on conditions of submission and subservience to the victors.

... The houses and the surrounding farms were given back to the former owners. ... (However) when the unfortunate people of Challa returned to their houses and farms, they became the tenants of the abba dula in whose district their property was located. (2)

Two conclusions can be drawn from this episode. Firstly, the free peasants of Challa became tenants on their own land merely through the misfortune that befell them on a single day. The victorious Abba Dula looted their victims but did not dispossess them from their homes and farms. To do so would have been against tradition as well as unproductive. It was against tradition because among the sedentary agricultural Oromo, masi (cultivated land) was an inalienable right.³ The position of masi among the agriculturalists was perhaps similar to that of the cow among the pastoralists. The cow was the most important animal for pastoral Oromo. Even when neighbouring tribes raided and looted each other, cows were returned to their owners.⁴ The reason for this is not far to seek. A cow not only provided milk, which sustained life, but also gave birth to another life.

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1. G. Massaja, I miei trenta cinque anni, IV, 68-9.
 2. Ibid.
 3. Jan Hultin, "Man and land ...", p. 8. The author conducted extensive field work among the Oromo peasants in Wallaga in the 1970s.
 4. Tasawo Merga, "Senna Umatta Oromo" ... p. 14.

It was the concept of fertility, deeply embedded in the psychology of the pastoral Oromo, which led to the belief that there existed a special relationship between a cow and her owner. A cow was considered to be a part of the owner's family : if she fell sick, the owner cared for her just as he would for another member of the family.¹ It was perhaps the same concept of fertility which the agricultural Oromo attributed to their masi - it produced food year after year - and led to the creation of a special relationship between a man and his land.

... There was, and to some extent still is, a belief that there exists a special relation between the first land occupier (and his lineal descendants) and his land. The Oromo made a distinction between intra-tribal war or feuds, *lola*, and inter-tribal warfare or war with non-Oromo, *dula*. In the feuds, *lola*, it was impossible for the winning side to take land from the defeated; there was a recognition of some sort of mystical bond between man and land and that this could not be changed even by force. In wars with non-Oromo, *dula*, such a bond was not considered and the territory of the conquered group could be appropriated by the Oromo. (2)

The second point to be noted is that, although a victorious group did not expropriate the *masi* of a vanquished group, the victors took over the uncultivated land of the defeated.³ According to Massaja, the victorious Abba Dula of Lagamara took all the uncultivated land of Challa and divided it among their followers.⁴ It was in this fashion that the war leaders and their followers became the owners of extensive land in the Gibe region.⁵ When a successful war leader made himself king, even forests became his property. Besides reducing the peasants of Challa to tenants on their own land and taking over all the uncultivated land, the three Abba Dulas of Lagamara made the public pastures of Challa into the common property of both the people of Lagamara and the people of Challa.⁶

What has been said thus far covers the land-holding system in the Gibe region. To recapitulate, in the first half of the nineteenth century, pastures were still common property. The major part of the land was owned by the king and his followers. Free peasants owned their small plots of

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1. A. Cecchi, Da Zeila ... , II, p. 132.
 2. Jan Hultin, "Man and land ... ", p. 8.
 3. *Supra*, p. 395.
 4. G. Massaja, I miei trenta cinque anni, IV, p. 68.
 5. *Supra*, p. 388.
 6. G. Massaja, ibid.

land. The gubisisa (late-comers) also owned their plots of land but provided labour and services for the abba lafa. Those free peasants who were reduced to the status of tenants on their land as a result of war retained their masi but provided labour and service for the leader under whose jurisdiction they lived.

The landholding system in Jimma can be considered a prototype¹ for the system as it existed in all the Gibe states. The greater part of the land, both cultivated and uncultivated, and also the forests, belonged to the king. Next came the aristocracy, mainly composed of the Diggo group, who formed the dynasty, and others who collaborated with them.²

As the Diggo began their expansion, they expropriated newly conquered lands for the use of their leaders. When the conquest was over, the Diggo, as a group, owned more land in more places than any other group. Not all private lands belonging to others were confiscated, however, and leaders of important non-Diggo families, successful warriors, and followers and favorites of the kings were given large land holdings in return for services. Land holdings were not frozen at one point in time, nor were they obtainable only through service to the king. A man's skill and luck in farming might force him to sell his Kabiyye (Qabie) or enable him to buy more land. Merchants who made money in trade or craftsmen who got money from the sale of their handiwork could buy and own land. Although a foreigner had to get the king's permission to use or buy land, there was no social bar to purchase by outsiders. (3)

However, it was the existence of the numerous royal estates that gave the agricultural economy of the Gibe region its special character. These were to be found from one end of the region to the other. Every royal massera (residence) had its own estate which helped to provision the numerous massera personnel. The royal estates were devoted to the production of cereal crops, root crops and cash crops and to animal husbandry. Coffee reigned supreme among the cash crops. Coffee production was much more developed in Limmu-Ennarya than in any other state. The forests in the valleys of the Didessa and the Gibe were almost a natural nursery for the production of coffee. It was the royal coffee that spread the fame and prestige of Limmu-Ennarya :

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1. The landholding system in all the Gibe states was very similar, if not identical.
 2. Tasawo Merga, "Senna Umatta Oromo ... ", p. 140.
 3. H.S. Lewis, A Galla Monarchy, p. 50. The author conducted extensive field work in Jimma in the late 1950s.

Enarea is principally celebrated for its extensive woods of coffee, the chief locality of which is the valley of the Gibbi ... These woods are described as containing trees, the trunks of which are from two to three feet in diameter (1) - a size far exceeding anything of the kind elsewhere. They are the property of the king and they are watched by his slaves. (2)

Coffee also held pride of place in the forests of Gera. These forests competed with those of Limmu-Enarya in abundance of coffee, and the kings of both countries encouraged their people to intensify the cultivation of coffee.³ Along with Kaffa, Limmu-Enarya and Gera were famous in the northern Ethiopian region for the good quality of their coffee, which required the minimum of cultivation.⁴ The kings of Jimma, Gomma and Gumma, where coffee did not grow naturally, made it a part of their government policy not only to encourage their peasants to plant coffee, but also to involve themselves in coffee production on their extensive plantations.⁵ In this way, for example, Jimma, which lacked coffee in the early 1840s,⁶ became a great coffee country, far surpassing Gera, by the second half of the nineteenth century. Similarly, the land of Gomma had no coffee around the middle of the nineteenth century but a few decades later it had become the greatest coffee producing area in the entire Gibe region,⁷ if not in the whole of south-western Ethiopia.

Although coffee dominated the royal estates everywhere, cotton, oil seeds, chat and spices were not neglected. Bee farming was also an important aspect of the royal estates. Honey was lavishly consumed in the royal masseras in the same way as coffee.⁸ Coffee seeds fried in clarified butter and mixed with pure honey was a delicacy. Chat chewed and washed down with coffee sweetened by honey was an excellent stimulant that brought about mental exhilaration. Honey was used both for eating and for making the famous dadi (mead). Bee farming also provided the wax used in lighting the royal massera.⁹ While most of the produce of the royal estates was for consumption at the masseras

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1. C.T. Beke gathered in his information in Gojjam, from traders who went to and came from Limmu-Enarya. His informants may have exaggerated about the size of the trunks of coffee trees of that country.
 2. C.T. Beke, "On the countries ... ", JRGS, XIII, p. 257.
 3. A. Cecchi, Da Zeila ... , II, p. 164.
 4. M. Abir, Ethiopia : the era of the princes, p. 86. Here the author's reference is to the situation that existed in the Gibe region in the 1840s & 50s.
 5. The Jimma interview programme, pp. 13, 53.
 6. C.T. Beke, ibid., p. 260. See also Antoine d'Abbadie, Nouv.Acq.Fran.No. 21300, folio, 673.
 7. G.W.B. Huntingford in Some Records of Ethiopia, preface p. lxxxix.
 8. L. Traversi, "Escursione nel Gimma", Bolletino della societa Geografica Italiana, VI, XIII (1888), p. 914. Jimma interview programme, pp.4, 27,52-3.
 9. A. Cecchi, Ibid., p. 206.

some, such as coffee and musk, were also sold on a large scale. Finally, civet cat farms were also maintained on the royal estates. Civet cats were captured in the forests of Limmu-Ennarya and Kaffa. The female civet cats were set free and the male, which produced the musk, kept in well-guarded cages. According to A. Cecchi, they were fed with excellent raw or half-cooked meat, mixed with butter and flour of teff boiled in broth of meat.¹ This food Cecchi wrote "... watered the mouth of the guardian slaves who lived on miserable ration of grain".² The cages were regularly cleaned, warmed and guarded. The cats were milked daily, each giving 20 to 25 grammes. The civet cat farms were expensive to maintain, but for the kings, who owned both cattle and slaves, it was a very profitable business.³

The work on the royal estates was done by three groups of people : tenants (qubisisa), free peasants and slaves. The qubisisa who lived on the king's land had to provide corvée labour "twice a week, every Monday and Friday".⁴ The free peasants of the Gibe region had also to provide labour for the king whenever he demanded it of them.⁵ Thus the free peasants might have to work on the royal estate in their times of sowing and harvesting. The major part of the work on the royal estates, however, was done by the king's slaves.⁶

This brings us to the question of slavery in the Gibe region. Slavery was as rampant in the Gibe region as it was in Kaffa to the south and in the Christian area to the north.⁷ As in Kaffa in the south and Shawa in the north-east, there was a large slave population in the Gibe region in the middle of the nineteenth century. In the late 1870s, Cecchi estimated that about one third of the population of the area was composed of slaves of both sexes.⁸

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1. A. Cecchi, Da Zeila ... , II, p. 515.
 2. Ibid.
 3. e.g. M. Abir, Ethiopia ... , p. 86. " ... A wakia of musk (about thirty-two grammes) was sold in Enarea for one-fifth of a thaler, fetched over a thaler in Massaw and two thalers in Cairo". According to Antoine d'Abbadie, Nouv.Acq.Fran.No. 21300, folio, 572, "Even during the rainy season, when commercial activities were at their lowest in the Gibe region, up to 4,000 wakia of musk was sold in Saqqa, the capital of Limmu-Ennarya."
 4. Tasawo Merga, "Senna Umatta Oromo", pp. 140-1. See also, Jimma Interview programme , p. 24.
 5. A. Cecchi, ibid., p. 166.
 6. Ibid., p. 277.
 7. For a general description of slavery in the Ethiopian region, see R. Pankhurst, Economic History of Ethiopia 1800-1935, (Addis Ababa, 1968) pp.73-93.
 8. A. Cecchi, ibid., p. 289.

Tasawo Merga went even further, claiming that in Jimma the slaves outnumbered the free population of that state.¹ He said much the same about the rest of the Gibe region, but he does not base his claim on evidence. His argument rests on this assertion :

... The slave population in Jimma was probably larger than the free population of that state. Abba Jifar II alone owned ten thousand slaves. The wealthy men of Jimma owned a thousand or more each. Even peasants who only had a small plot of land may have owned one or two slaves. (2)

The above conclusion is untenable on two counts. First, while it is true that Abba Jifar was notorious both for trade in, and ownership of, many thousands of slaves³ and that the wealthy and some rich peasants owned slaves, the small peasant with a small plot of land certainly did not have any slaves. We shall go into this further later in the discussion; here, suffice it to say that it is incorrect to say that everyone, from king to poor peasant, owned slaves in Jimma. What is certain, however, is that among the nobility "slaves were the most sought after commodity in the Gibe region".⁴ They were exchanged for horses, mules, guns, beautiful clothes, paid as a price for medicine and given as gifts.⁵ The nobility owned slaves as they owned cattle. Slaves were to be found in the royal residences, in the army, in the residences of wealthy men and in their fields. The wealthy land-owners used their slaves for cultivating their lands, "while those who were short of slaves distributed their land to tenants, who cultivated it in their master's name and interest."⁶ Thus, though slaves were highly desirable, they were an expensive commodity, quite beyond the means of the poor peasant. The second point is that the Gibe region was an important centre from which slaves were sent to Gojam, Gondar, Massawa and the Red Sea, as well as to Shawa, Harar and beyond. This export of slaves militated against any large increase of the settled slave population in the Gibe region. Thus it would seem that Tasawo's assertion remains a mere assertion.⁷

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1. Tasawo Merga, "Senna Umatta Oromo", pp. 140-1.
 2. Ibid.
 3. The Jimma interview programme, p. 35.
 4. A. Cecchi, Da Zeila ... , II, pp. 291-2.
 5. Ibid.
 6. Ibid., p. 277.
 7. Tasawo Merga seems to have been greatly influenced by F. Engels's book, The origin of the family, private property and the state.

Tasawo stands on firmer ground, however, when he states that slaves were massively oppressed in the Gibe region. Slavery and oppression appear to have been as much a part of the history of the Gibe region as they were in Kaffa to the south and the Christian state to the north. To gloss over this oppression by designating it as a benign form of domestic slavery¹ is both to ignore the data and to mask the magnitude of the oppression. Cecchi had the opportunity to observe the oppression of slaves in the Gibe region at very close range and what he has to say amply supports Tasawo's statement. He gives horrifying examples of what some slaves were subjected to.² Where they differ is that Tasawo ignores the diversity of conditions among slaves and presents the case as if they were all equally oppressed :

... The slaves had neither the right to take to court their masters if they were unjustly treated nor to own property. ... The slaves were considered not as human beings but as talking animals. These oppressed slaves, however, formed the major work force that cultivated the estates of the kings, the nobles and wealthy men. In other words, the slaves were the pillar of the economy of the region. (3)

Where Tasawo makes slaves talking animals, Cecchi maintains that a slave was a human being who had no legal personality. Where Tasawo claims that a slave could not take his master to court if he was unjustly treated, Cecchi maintains that although a slave could be badly treated, if he was killed his owner could be punished. Where Tasawo claims that a slave owned no property of his own, Cecchi maintains that a slave retained control of property he had acquired, although on his death it was inherited by his master.⁴ Cecchi's most positive contribution to our understanding of the institution of slavery in the area, however, is his presentation of the existence of diversity in the condition of the slaves themselves :⁵

The slaves who have the favour of the queen or the king are raised to some position of authority at the court. There are slaves of pleasure and luxury, and there are also slaves who are destined to teach the Quran. ... There are slaves whose duty is to introduce guests to the royal house and to maintain discipline by whipping other slaves. The eunuchs watched over the wives of the king, guarded the gates of the royal massera, and performed many other functions. All court personnel is composed of slaves who sometimes number three thousand. (6)

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1. See, for instance, R. Pankhurst, Economic History ... , pp. 73-93.
 2. A. Cecchi, Da Zeila ... , II, p. 276.
 3. Tasawo Merga, "Senna Umatta Oromo", pp. 140-1.
 4. A. Cecchi, ibid., pp. 273-4, 292-3. See also Jimma interviews, pp. 5, 8, 35, 53.
 5. A. Cecchi, ibid., p. 292.
 6. Ibid. Here Cecchi was referring to the condition of the slaves in the royal court of Gera, but it can be taken as representative of the general condition of slaves in the Gibe region. This is because he said more-or-less the same thing about the condition of slaves in Gomma, Gumma, Jimma and Limmu-Ennarya. See for instance, pp. 271-2, 276-7, 292-3.

Though some slaves enjoyed a position of authority at the royal residence,¹ and others gained prestige and honour by valour in war, the fact remains that the vast majority of slaves were grossly oppressed. A slave had no legal personality of his own. His person, his labour and his property were at the disposal of his owner. This can be plainly seen in cases of homicide involving a free man and a slave or two slaves :

A free man who killed a slave had to pay five head of cattle or had to give another slave of the same value to the owner. ... A slave who killed a free man was tied by the owner in front of his own door, where the relatives of the deceased killed him in a revolting manner. If a slave who killed a free man had escaped, the owner and his family had to hide so that the relatives of the deceased could not take revenge upon them. When a slave killed another slave, the owner of the killer had to pay five head of cattle or give a slave of the same value to the owner of the deceased. (2)

With regional variation and diversity in the condition of slaves, the universality of the oppression of slavery would seem to be an established fact. The myth of a benign domestic slavery in the Ethiopian region conceals much more misery and oppression than hitherto acknowledged. A comparison of the above quotation with what Marc Bloch has to say on the historical contrast between slavery and serfdom helps to make this plain :

... The servus was the object of a master who disposed arbitrarily of his person, his work and his property. ... The servus was not truly a part of the mass of free men, he was like a foreigner deprived of all rights. Should he be killed or wounded the master received the compensation. Should he commit a crime against his own master, the latter was allowed to judge and penalize as he saw fit. Should he injure a third party, the master again took up the responsibility. The latter could sometimes even rid himself of that burden by handing over the guilty person or occasionally even by fleeing. (3)

There were many sources of slaves in the Gibe region. The first and most important source was warfare against neighbouring peoples and the subsequent plunder of the disorganized losers.⁴ Here it is important to make one clear distinction. Prisoners of war taken in a conflict between Oromo states

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1. According to the Jimma interview programme, p. 35, the royal slaves seem to have lived better lives than some poor peasants.
 2. A. Cecchi, Da Zeila ... , II, pp. 273-4.
 3. Marc Bloch, Slavery and Serfdom in the Middle Ages. Trans. by William R. Beer, (London : 1975), p. 35.
 4. Antoine d'Abbadie, "Les causes actuelles de l'esclavage en Ethiopie", Extrait de la Revue des questions scientifiques, 1877, p. 410.

were not sold as slaves.¹ They were returned to their country of origin as a part of the peace agreement.² Sometimes important prisoners of war were kept in the capital of the state that captured them as a guarantee for the good neighbourliness of their country of origin.³ But this was the exception rather than the rule. Since almost every conflict among the Oromo states was concluded by a peace agreement, the prisoners of war from these states were neither sold nor reduced to domestic slavery. However, prisoners of war from among the surrounding stateless Oromo suffered the same fate as non-Oromo prisoners of war. A victorious king had the power to make the vanquished people his slaves :

... In this case the entire population are considered as the slaves of the king, in which case he had the right to transfer part of these people to another territory, or he could make them his own slaves on his own estates. (4)

Warfare was accompanied and followed by famine and poverty, which forced the victims to volunteer to become slaves in order to escape from their wretched condition. This was more common among the stateless tribal groups :

... The worst thing is that these chiefs are jealous of each other, greedy for power and pleasure ... keeping the country in a permanent civil war. Because of this, the poor people ... continuously pass from one master to the other depending on the fortune of the day. In addition to this, often terrible punishment is inflicted on them by the fact that a party that lost could appeal to its neighbour for military assistance. When 'foreign' soldiers enter a country nothing is spared, families, villages, agriculture, cattle and everything disappears in a few days. (5)

Under these circumstances it was not uncommon for a father to sell his children for food. Because of man-made disaster and general insecurity, men and women also had to "volunteer to become slaves".⁶ These unfortunate men and women volunteered to be the slaves of kings and wealthy men, where they had security for their person, protection from hunger and exemption from taxation.

The neighbouring state of Kaffa was a reservoir of slaves for the Gibe region. According to the reports of Catholic missionaries who lived in

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1. The Jimma interview programme, p. 53.
 2. Ibid., p. 34.
 3. A. Cecchi, Da Zeila ... , II, p. 321.
 4. E. Cerulli, Etiopia Occidentale, II, p. 77.
 5. G. Massaja, I miei trenta cinque anni, VI, p. 151.
 6. Antoine d'Abbadie, Nouv.Acq.Fran.No. 21300, folio, 227-8.

Kaffa between 1859 to 1861 it was in that country more than anywhere else that the poor volunteered to be slaves.¹ The reason for this is not far to seek. Taxation was heavy in Kaffa. "The great devour the small,"² was the phrase by which the Catholic missionaries expressed the wretched condition of the poor peasant in that country. It is not surprising, then, that the king of Kaffa received tribute in slaves from his subjects.³ The slaves of Kaffa were brought to the Gibe region by slave traders, who also gave slaves as gifts to the kings of the Gibe states. The Gibe kings themselves reduced to slavery thieves who stole royal cattle, enslaving their family and relatives along with them.⁴ The fact that slaves were an important item of bridewealth in royal marriages led to large numbers of slaves exchanging masters.⁵

Finally, there was the politically inspired slavery which was imposed on the families of political offenders. This form of slavery was distinguished from others : it was known as Hari ("sweep away" or "throw away"). The political offender himself was eliminated either by drowning or being left to rot to death in the Gindo (state prison).⁶ His property was confiscated and his wife and family declared Hari ("those to be swept away"). Then they were sold publicly to the slave traders, and the proceedings of the sale went to the treasury of the king.⁷ This inhuman method of destroying political opponents without trace was practised widely in Janjero and Kaffa as well.⁸ In the Gibe states it was a common practice in their early history at a time when the new rulers had a number of political opponents. The horror of those old cruelties was long remembered in the Gibe region. Magnified and

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1. Antoine d'Abbadie, Nouv.Acq.Fran.No. 21300, folio, 235.
 2. G. Massaja, Lettere e scritti minori, II, p. 360.
 3. A. Cecchi, Da Zeila ..., II, p. 517.
 4. Ibid., pp. 423-4.
 5. Ibid., p. 292.
 6. On the Gindo, see above, p. 411.
 7. Antoine d'Abbadie, Ibid., folio, 218-9, 710. See also his "Causes actuelles de l'esclavage ...", Extrait de la revue des questions scientifiques, (1877), pp. 413-4.
 8. Antoine d'Abbadie, ibid., folio 267-8. See also, G. Massaja, Ibid.

embroidered with the passing of time, many a nasty tale was told of things committed by those early kings. One of these, Oncho, the founder of the state of Gumma, was even accused of desiring to eat human flesh. Even in 1842 the king of Gumma was known as the most cruel of all the Gibe kings :

... The inhabitants of Gumma were more than those of any other country doomed to slavery, as their sovereign, who has a character of extreme severity, is in the habit of selling whole families for offences - sometimes of the most trifling nature - committed even by a single individual. (2)

Following the consolidation of each ruling house, and above all the adoption of Islam as the official religion of the rulers, the practice of hari was gradually abandoned. Antoine d'Abbadie, who gathered the traditions about hari in Limmu-Emmarya, recorded the following in Saqqa in 1843 :

Le Hari ou balayage, c'est-à-dire, confiscation naguère pratiquée en Limmu, Jimma, (Gumma, Gomma, Gera) a été abolie depuis que le Galla pour l'empêcher ont adopté ou fait semblant d'adopter l'Islamisme. Pendant qu'il existait on confiscaiit pour le moindre amende. (3)

The adoption of Islam not only undermined the hari institution but also seems to have facilitated the process of manumission on the same scale. According to d'Abbadie, Muslims freed their slaves when they were satisfied with their performance. The freed slaves usually fell within the age bracket of 36 to 55.⁴ Two other ways by which slaves gained their freedom were by being adopted into the family of the owner and by obtaining enough money to purchase liberty.⁵ Such methods were exceptional. Slavery remained a common feature of the Gibe states, and slave labour constituted the principal work force on the royal estates.

Slaves of both sexes worked on the royal estates. In Limmu-Emmarya women were actively involved in the coffee harvest. They picked ripe coffee berries and carried them to the royal store, as the men did.⁶ It was slaves also who guarded the royal coffee in Limmu-Emmarya. But in Gera the tasks

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1. E. Cerulli, Folk Literature of the Galla, p. 154.
 2. C.T. Beke, "On the countries ... ", JRGS, XIII, p. 259.
 3. Antoine d'Abbadie, Nouv.Acq.Fran.No. 21300, folio, 218-9, 710. See also his "Causes de l'esclavage...", Extrait de la revue des questions scientifiques, pp. 414-5; C.T. Beke, Ibid., p. 259.
 4. d'Abbadie, ibid., p. 233.
 5. Ibid., p. 225.
 6. C.T. Beke, ibid., pp. 257-8.

of guarding, picking and carrying the coffee to the royal treasury were performed by the free population.¹ This difference in the type of labour employed was due to the number of slaves available at the two courts. In Limmu-Ennarya, the royal court owned a far greater number of slaves than the mere three thousand at the court of Gera.² Generally speaking, the women slaves performed the numerous household duties in the massera. They also fetched water, carried wood and even helped the men with the weeding in the fields. The men tilled the royal estates, manured the soil and harvested the crops. The production on the royal estates was immense, and it was this which gave the agricultural economy of the Gibe region its special character. The royal estates formed an economic pillar of the monarch. Consequently the tax burden on the peasants was not too high in the Gibe region.³ According to the information gathered from the region, the busi (tribute) to the king was paid both in kind and in amole (salt money)⁴. Wealthy men paid five amoles, while peasants paid either one or two amoles, depending on their economic status.⁵

After agriculture, the second major economic activity in the Gibe states was cattle-raising (stock-breeding).⁶ An additional source of wealth and part of the cultural heritage, cattle-rearing was very widely practised. Among the agricultural Oromo it was not as developed as it was among the pastoralists, however. There were individual pastoralists who owned as many as 7,000 head of cattle.⁷ In the Gibe region, some rich peasants owned 400 to 500 head while wealthy dignitaries often possessed 2,000 to 3,000 head of cattle.⁸ The kings owned a large number of animals. The meadows which dotted the fertile valleys, the untilled plains, the hillsides and the forest glades were covered with abundant grass that supported a large number of oxen, cows, goats, sheep, horses and mules. The fattened oxen of Limmu-Ennarya, the beautiful cows of Gera, the goats of Gumma, the sheep of Gomma and the

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1. G. Massaja, In Abissinia, p. 184.
 2. A. Cecchi, Da Zeila ..., II, p. 292.
 3. The Jimma interview programme, p. 24.
 4. Ibid., p. 10. According to the same source, pp. 1-2, tax was also paid in Maria Theresa thaler.
 5. Ibid., pp. 2, 10, 21.
 6. A. Cecchi, ibid., p. 282.
 7. Antoine d'Abbadie, Nouv.Acq.Fran. No. 21300, folio, 797.
 8. A. Cecchi, ibid., p. 283.

cattle and fowl of Jimma were especially celebrated.¹ Oxen for ploughing, cows for milk, and goats and sheep for meat constituted the wealth of a peasant.² There were two types of oxen : those used for ploughing and those fattened for sale, tribute or gifts to the king, known as natafo. Domestic animals were plentiful and very cheap. Even the best natafo was sold for two or three thalers.³ It was by head of cattle, the number of slaves and the size of the cultivated land that the wealth of the great dignitaries was reckoned at the time.

Right to the end of our period, internal stability was the essential and effective factor for the prosperity of the Gibe region. On the military strength and political ability of the king depended the internal stability and hence the economic well-being of the people. Military defeats and natural disasters, on the other hand, caused great difficulties for the people. Not even Abba Jifar I could avert a military disaster in 1843 in Jimma,⁴ nor could Abba Bagibo mitigate the effects of the great plague of 1849.⁵ But Jimma and Limmu-Emmarya successfully weathered those storms and soon recovered an even greater vigour and vitality. Such recovery was made possible by two conditions which existed in the Gibe states but were lacking among the surrounding Oromo tribes : unity of the people and central authority. Thus, while the cattle of their stateless neighbours was looted and their agriculture destroyed, under the feet of raiding war leaders, the Gibe states enjoyed amazing prosperity.

While the full effect of this prosperity did not reach beyond the land-owning class, the poor peasants in the Gibe region probably enjoyed a higher standard of living than any peasants in the Ethiopian region. The abundance of cereal crops, supplemented by root crops, guaranteed their safety from famine. Cattle provided them with milk. The light burden of taxation and the possibility of earning more and buying land also contributed to the better standard of living of the ordinary peasant. Though modest, the level of the living standard of the Gibe peasant had some impact on the increase in industrial production, growth in trade and change in ideology.⁶

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1. The Jimma interview programme, pp. 2, 27, 52-3.
 2. A. Cecchi, Da Zeila ... , II, pp. 282-3.
 3. Ibid.
 4. Supra, pp. 426-7.
 5. Supra, p. 442.
 6. The rest of the chapter will be devoted to a discussion of these three themes and their influence on the social and cultural life of the Oromo in the Gibe region.

Antoino Cecchi, who travelled all over the Gibe states, and was also a prisoner in 1880 at the royal court of Gera, described and expressed his admiration for the stage reached by industry in the area.¹ Of course, when compared with agriculture and cattle-rearing, industry had only a small place in the economic life of the people. Here we use the word industry in its meaning of the transformation of raw materials into useful objects that met the needs of the peasants and provided luxuries for the wealthy class.² Industry outside the massera was materially inferior to that inside, which catered for the needs of the royal court. As we saw in the previous chapter,³ the royal masseras were the busiest industrial centres in every state. In as much as the artisans and craftsmen of the local industry paid their tribute in kind to the king, the massera industry was supplemented by the local industry. But the massera industry was somewhat superior in that it was better-equipped and had a more skilled workforce, which included Jabarti and Arab traders.⁴ Precious metals - gold and silver - were only used in the massera industry.

The artisans and craftsmen of the local industry were collectively known as Ogessa (skilled ones). To the category of ogessa belonged the blacksmiths, tumtu, the carpenters and the tanners, fagi, the potters, fuga,⁵ "the beehive makers and bee keepers, gagurtu, and the hunters and foragers, watta."⁶ These artisans and craftsmen, whose skill and products were so vital to the agricultural economy of the Gibe region, were distinguished in three ways from the society among whom they lived.

Firstly, all artisans and craftsmen belonged to a low social caste known as Hiru ("those shared-out"). The term describes the historical evolution of this minority low-status group among the Oromo of the region. At a time when pastoralism was predominant, there was only a limited need for the products of the ogessa. However, once the Oromo embarked on agriculture on a large scale, the demand for ogessa products rapidly increased. Since the ogessa were in short supply, the Oromo clans "shared them out". But these "shared-

1. A. Cecchi, Da Zeila ..., II, p. 287.

2. *Infra*, pp. 467-8.

3. *Supra*, p. 412.

4. Cecchi, *ibid*, p. 289.

5. Mekuria Bulcha, "Land ownership and social class formation among the Macha", p. 28.

6. H.S. Lewis, A Galla Monarchy, p. 53. See also the Jimma interview programme, p. 2.

out" skilled minorities were not adopted and assimilated into the Oromo clans, for reasons to be explained.¹ Secondly, the artisans and craftsmen did not have the Qabie right, the right to the communal ownership of land. The reason for this was that, while they lived under the protection of each clan, they were not part of any one clan. The Qabie right was for those who were part of the clan. Because they were not entitled to Qabie, the artisans and craftsmen were given land by the clan leaders, the wealthy Soressa and the kings.² Thirdly, the artisans and craftsmen were feared and stigmatized because they were thought to possess fantastic super-natural powers which enabled them to harm others. Their members were thought of "as ritually impure, were hyenas, bearers of the evil eye, and eaters of impure meat."³ They were not allowed to give testimony in court. Younger children were hidden from their eyes, while older folks dreaded eating in their presence. Though many of them were of Oromo origin, they were endogamous groups, who remained outside the main stream of Oromo society.

The industry of the Gibe region depended on the skill and labour of the very people who were feared and stigmatized by the majority. This attitude had negative consequences. It did not allow the majority of the people to aspire to the acquisition of craft skills. These skills were proscribed and remained within the confines of the minority belonging to a low social caste. Nevertheless, within these confines, Cecchi thought that "the industry had reached a certain degree of civilization."⁴

The technology of iron-mining was very similar to that in Shawa. Local mining was sufficient for the needs of the industry.⁵ The blacksmiths made spears, knives, axes, hoes, sickles and ploughshares from locally mined iron.⁶ Work was also done with copper. Weaving was perhaps the most flourishing industry. Four types of coloured cloth were produced and exported to the surrounding areas.⁷ Tanners produced good quality leather goods, chief

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1. Our information on the artisans and craftsmen in the Gibe region mainly comes from the Oromo data which was gathered in the area.
 2. The Jimma interview programme, p. 2. See also Tasawo Merga, "Senna Umatta Oromo", pp. 140-1.
 3. H.S. Lewis, A Galla Monarchy, p. 53.
 4. A. Cecchi, Da Zeila ..., II, pp. 287-8.
 5. According to the Jimma interview programme, p. 54, "All land where iron was mined belonged either to the king or his provincial governors, or wealthy dignitaries."
 6. Cecchi, ibid., p. 287-8. See also the Jimma interview programme, ibid.
 7. Ibid.

among which were leather clothes. Hides were plentiful and leather dress was worn exclusively by the slaves¹, who may have formed one third of the population of the region.² The rest of the population wore cotton clothes of local manufacture, supplemented by the clothes imported from the surrounding lands, while the wealthy wore expensive³ imported clothes from America, Egypt, Europe and India.⁴ As we saw in Chapter Two,⁵ leather had previously been used as the national dress of the Oromo, but by the nineteenth century even the most pauperized class in the Gibe region avoided leather dress, despising it and stigmatizing it as "the dress of slaves".⁶ Tanners also made strong shields and good alonga (whips) from buffalo hide. Coffee cups were made from buffalo horns. Quality saddles and beautiful wooden containers for milk and butter were also produced.⁷ Within narrow technological limits the building industry also made some progress. The royal masseras were the product of that industry,⁸ as were the few bridges thrown across some rivers.⁹ Pottery was the exclusive domain of women. Crockery of every dimension and shape was produced with such precision and elegance that they "appeared to have been made by well-qualified artists."¹⁰

Industrial products of the Gibe region were exported in almost every direction and were highly sought after even among the Christians to the north.¹¹ However, most of the industrial products of the region were made for the local and neighbouring markets. The artisans and craftsmen exchanged their products for the agricultural produce of the peasants in the market places, and also paid them as tax to the kings and as land rent to their landlords. The scale of industrial production was greatly limited by the low level of technology used, coupled with the socio-political environment which militated against its growth. Thus, though active, the output of the industry of the Gibe region was small in size, its capacity for expansion negligible and consequently its impact on the social structure very insignificant. The society of the Gibe region remained overwhelmingly that of a community of mixed farmers.

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1. Female slaves wore only leather dress, while male slaves wore either leather dress or cheap quality locally manufactured cotton clothes.
 2. A. Cecchi, Da Zeila ... , II, p. 289.
 3. Infra, p. 484.
 4. Infra, p. 486.
 5. Supra, p. 82.
 6. A. Cecchi, ibid.
 7. Ibid., pp. 289-290. See also Antoine d'Abbadie, The Athenaeum : No. 1042, (1847) pp. 1077-8
 8. Supra, p. 406.
 9. G. Massaja, In Abissinia, p. 188.
 10. A. Cecchi, Da Zeila ... , II, 290-1.
 11. C.T. Beke, "On the countries ... ", JRGS, XIII, pp. 258-9.

The trade of the Gibe region was famous from early times. By the sixteenth century, the region was the main economic centre since it lay on the main route from the gold-producing southwestern region to the central, northern and eastern parts of the Ethiopian region, the areas of gold consumption. Moreover, the Gibe region was itself a gold-producer. It became one of the wealthiest trading centres of the Horn of Africa, famous for its slaves, ivory and musk. Even before the days when Imam Ahmad sought to add to his triumphs the conquest of the Gibe region, the products of the area constituted a vital part of the export items for the international trade of the Christian kingdom. Of all the products of the region, the most coveted was gold. It was the lure of gold that urged the conquering Muslim leaders to cross the Gibe river, and it was gold that saved Ennarya from the devouring sword of the Muslims.¹ The Muslim historian of the time described the Gibe region as a highly prosperous area, blessed with abundance of gold,² and the evidence of trade proves the correctness of his observation. Once the Jihad had run its course and a weakened Christian authority had been restored to the region, it was trade with Ennarya and gold tribute from Ennarya that became the mainstay of the Christian kingdom. Gold tribute from Ennarya reached its zenith during the reign of Sarsa Dengel, who is said to have once received "five thousand Oqueas of gold".³ This large figure speaks eloquently for the abundance of gold in Ennarya. Some gold was mined in Ennarya itself, while a large part was brought to that country by traders from the surrounding gold-producing areas. By the first quarter of the seventeenth century, Ennarya's trade with the Christian kingdom benefitted both countries, while the amicable relationship between the Christian leaders and the governor of Ennarya had reached an all-time record.⁴ By this time also, the inhabitants of Ennarya had made considerable cultural progress, whose dazzling impression we can still glimpse in the writings of the Portuguese historian, Almeida: "The natives of Narea are the best⁵ in the whole of Ethiopia, as all the Abyssinians admit."⁶ Almeida's information on the products and trade of Ennarya are among the most important data for the

1. Supra, p. 305.

2. Arab Faqih, Futuh-al-Habasha, Arabic text, p. 309.

3. Almeida, in Some Records of Ethiopia, p. 85.

4. Supra, p. 360.

5. The Ennaryans were very industrious people and their land enjoyed flourishing trade and agricultural prosperity.

6. Almeida, ibid., p. 149.

history of the Gibe region during the first half of the seventeenth century. Its chief importance lies in the fact that the author rightly attributes the advanced material culture of the inhabitants of Ennarya to their industry, to the fertility of their land, and above all to their prosperous trade. The amazing prosperity of Ennarya created a special relationship between the Christian rulers and the ruling house of Ennarya. As an educated foreigner having access to the court of Susenyos (1607-1632), Almeida was probably expressing the estimation in which the Christian court held the rulers of Ennarya and its people.

We saw in the previous chapter that the Oromo conquest and settlement in the Gibe region did not stop trade altogether.¹ It is true, trade was disrupted for a while; but as soon as relative safety was restored, long-distance caravan trade was resumed. This was facilitated by a number of factors. The caravans that passed through the Oromo territory benefitted the Oromo themselves, who were slowly but surely pulled into the trade of the region. The commercial interests of the Oromo leaders and that of the northern Muslim traders, the Jabarti, coincided: so long as the Jabarti gave gifts to the Oromo leaders, they were provided with hospitality and safety along the caravan routes.² Protected by Oromo leaders, for the benefit of the traders and themselves, the caravan routes to and from the Gibe region once again became the principal arteries along which gold, slaves, ivory, musk and spices were funnelled to the outside world. By the second half of the eighteenth century, new desires and increasing ardour for commercial enterprise enabled the Gibe region to boast of a new commercial revival which brought about the birth of a new social order by the beginning of the next century.

It was in Limmu-Ennarya that this revival first consolidated itself with the formation of a state. The new state promoted trade and protected the interests of the traders. Our discussion of trade in the Gibe region concentrates mainly on Limmu-Ennarya (though other states are also covered) mainly because its capital, Saqqa, was the greatest emporium in the region

1. Supra, p. 381.

2. The Jimma interview programme, pp. 8, 33.

up to the 1850s.¹ In the second half of the nineteenth century, when Jimma politically eclipsed Limmu-Ennarya, Hirmata, Jimma's famous market town, also eclipsed Saqqa's commercial importance. By then the Thursday market of Hirmata was "the greatest in all southern Abyssinia".² That development had its own momentum, but it is beyond the scope of our discussion here. Limmu-Ennarya was already the major commercial centre during the reign of Abba Gomol (1802-1825).³ It became even more eminent during the reign of his successor Abba Bagibo (1825-1861). Abba Gomol is remembered for having encouraged Muslim Jabarti traders to settle in his capital, Sappa, where they intermarried with the Oromo women, thus increasing the size of Muslim population in the capital.⁴ An English traveller of the early nineteenth century who lived in Tigrai between 1810 and 1819, was struck by the flow of trade which sprang from Limmu-Ennarya and the surrounding region.⁵ By the second quarter of the same century, the trade of Limmu-Ennarya and the surrounding region had become so important and vital, even to the Christians in the north, that the gold, slaves, ivory, musk and spices of the Gibe region were the most sought-after items exported from Massawa. Another English traveller, Beke, who stayed at the entrepôt of Baso in Gojjam in 1842, was very impressed by the trade of the area. He made it abundantly clear that the market of Baso was the most important commercial place in northern Ethiopia, where the traders from the Red Sea coast met their counterparts from the Gibe region and beyond.⁶ In fact, it was the Gibe trade which made Baso so famous, where imported foreign goods were exchanged against the products of south-western Ethiopia. Beke adds that the distinguishing feature of the market of Baso was the trade in the produce of Limmu-Ennarya, and the surrounding countries, which was brought by Oromo traders and exchanged against European manufactures.⁷ Baso was Limmu-Ennarya's commercial outlet in southern Gojjam. All roads led to Baso, but Baso and northern Ethiopia depended on the trade with Limmu-Ennarya in more than one sense :

... Baso ... is the grand focus of the trade with Enarea and the countries to the south and west, and in fact the sole source of the foreign trade of Abessinia; ... the gold, ivory, coffee,

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1. C.T. Beke, "On the countries ... ", JRGS, XIII, p. 259.
 2. Max Grühl, The Citadel ... , p. 146.
 3. *Supra*, pp. 395-400.
 4. The Jimma interview programme, p. 55.
 5. N. Pearce, Life and Adventures in Abyssinia, Introduction by Dr. R. Pankhurst, (London : 1980), Vol. II, pp. 8-9.
 6. C.T. Beke, Letters on the commerce and politics of Abessinia and other parts of Eastern Africa. (London : 1852), p. 15.
 7. Ibid., p. 16.

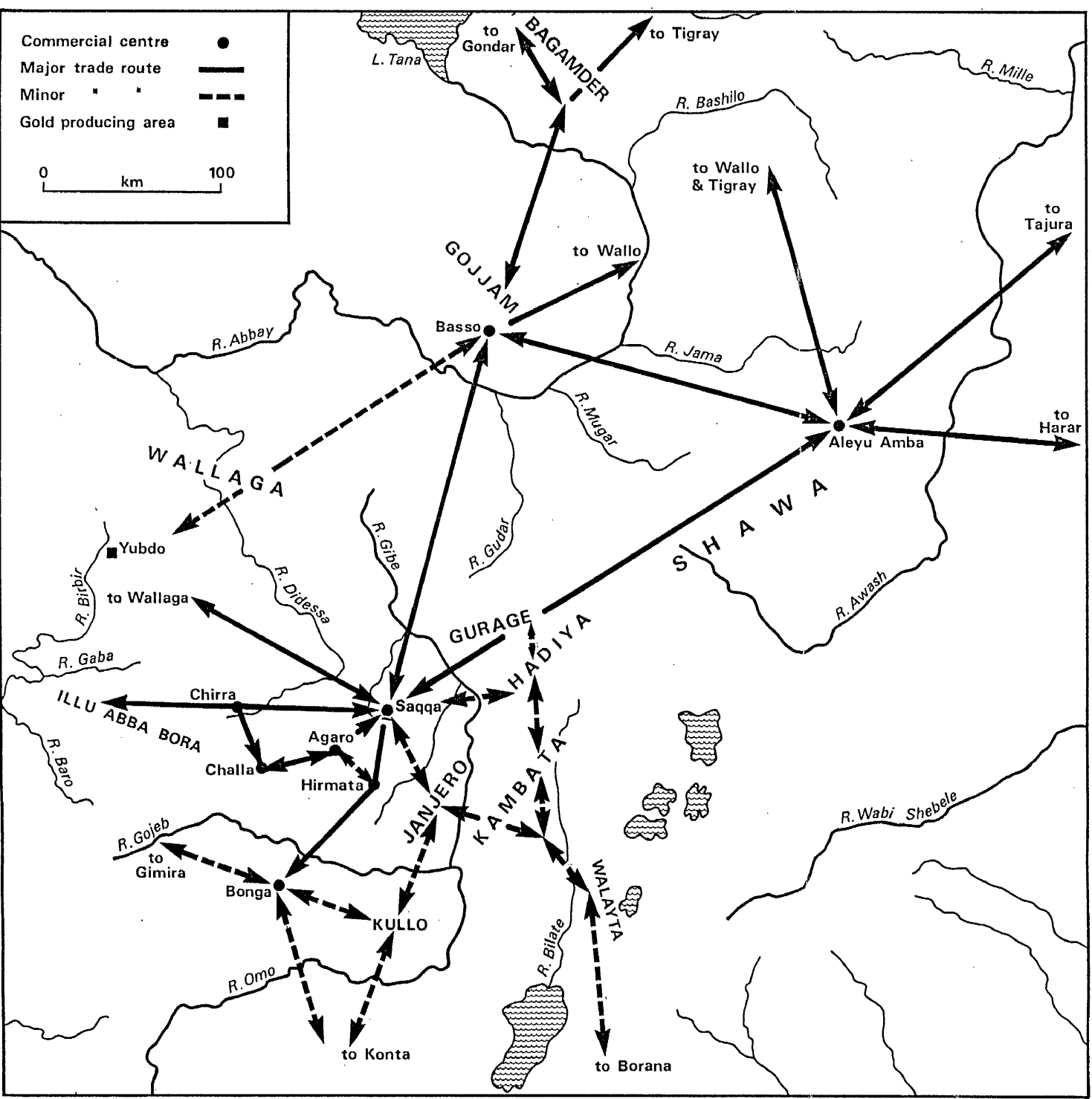
spices and civet which, independently of slaves, may be said to form the only articles given in return for the manufactures of Europe, which find their way into Africa by this road. (1)

How did Limmu-Ennarya come to play such a dominating and decisive role in the trade of the Ethiopian region in the first half of the nineteenth century? As our discussion on the political history of Limmu-Ennarya has shown in the previous chapter, there is no simple answer to this question. Success in trade depended on the military strength of the kingdom, the political wisdom and diplomatic skills of its rulers, and above all, sound commercial policies, all of which were discussed in the previous chapter.² Below, we discuss four factors which, taken together, attempt to answer the above question. These factors are: the strategic position of Limmu-Ennarya in the trade of the Gibe region; the emergence of a dynamic Oromo merchant class; the Afkala; the organization of trade; and the abundance of trading goods in the region.

The Gibe region, as we have seen, was very fertile and productive. Over this region ran many caravan routes, large and small, which connected Kaffa and the southern region with Gojjam and beyond, and Wallaga and the western region with Shawa and Harar. Owing to the unique advantage conferred upon it by its geography,³ Limmu-Ennarya constituted the nexus of these routes. All trade routes in the region, whatever their direction, led to Saqqa, the capital. One major route went from Saqqa to Bonga, the capital of Kaffa. Kaffa, the legendary land of coffee,⁴ the reservoir for slaves, the famous land of ivory, civet and spices,⁵ fed the trade of Limmu-Ennarya with a great variety of goods. From Bonga, a number of small routes branched off in different directions, all facilitating the flow of goods into Bonga, whence the fast-moving Afkala merchants⁶ brought them to Saqqa.

A number of routes ran from Saqqa to Jimma, Gera, Gomma and Gumma, along which the various products of these countries were brought to the

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1. C.T. Beke, Letters on the commerce ... , p. 15.
 2. *Supra*, pp. 416-7.
 3. C.T. Beke, "On the countries ... ", JRGS XIII, p. 260.
 4. Max Grühl, The Citadel ... , pp. 171-3.
 5. A. Cecchi, Da Zeila ... , II, pp. 507-19.
 6. On the Afkala merchants, see below, pp. 475-9.



Map 9. MAJOR AND MINOR ROUTES WHICH LINKED THE GIBE REGION WITH SURROUNDING LANDS IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY.

commercial capital of the Gibe region.¹ Other caravan routes from Saqqa went to Janjero with its slaves and ivory and to Kullo, which, in addition to slaves and ivory provided Saqqa with mules and cotton.² There were routes to Walayta, bringing precious skins, and to Gurage, Hadiya, Gimira, Kambata, Meji, Konta, Tambaro, Gamo and Gardo.³ Another major route led to Wallaga, whence came most of the gold and where the Gibe merchants met with the Arab merchants from the Sennar.⁴ Slaves and ivory were brought to Saqqa along the route from Illu Abba Bora.

The most important of all routes leading out of Saqqa was that which went to Baso, along which traders came from Gojjam, Gondar, Wollo and Tigray.⁵ This was the main artery for the commercial activities of the Gibe region in general and Limmu-Ennarya in particular. Most of Limmu-Ennarya's exports and imported foreign goods travelled along this route. If Baso was Limmu-Ennarya's major commercial outlet, the prosperity of Baso entirely depended on its trade with Limmu-Ennarya. "A very considerable portion of the revenue of the province of Gojjam is levied at Baso in the form of duties or market dues."⁶ Still another caravan route ran from Saqqa across the Gibe into the Tulama land and on to Aleyu Amba, "the great central market"⁷ of Shawa. There it joined another major caravan route that went through the semi-desert of Awash, along the plains of Charchar to Harar and beyond. Along the route to Aleyu Amba went the portion of Limmu-Ennarya's trade goods which were exported to Shawa⁸ and exchanged against foreign goods imported by Harari, Somali and Afar traders. Thus all the caravan routes between the northern and the southern, the eastern and the western parts of the Ethiopian region led to Saqqa. With its strategic position within the Gibe region itself, Saqqa soon became not only the converging point for the Jabarti traders from the north, but also a springboard for Oromo traders journeying in all directions.

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1. Antoine d'Abbadie, *Nouv.Acq.Fran.* No. 21300, folio, 357.
 2. Ibid.
 3. Tasawo Merga, "Senna Umatta Oromo", p. 143. See also the Jimma interview programme, p. 33.
 4. Antoine d'Abbadie, ibid., folio, 314, 349.
 5. Tasawo Merga, ibid., pp. 143-4.
 6. C.T. Beke, Letters on the commerce ..., p. 21.
 7. Svein Ege, "Chiefs and peasants ...", p. 49.
 8. C.T. Beke, "On the countries ...", JRGS, XIII, p. 259.

The whirlwind of trading activities in the Gibe region gave birth to an aggressive and dynamic Oromo merchant class, the Afkala. The Afkala were traders who marched like gero ("young soldiers") and travelled as many as twenty miles a day.¹ According to Antoine d'Abbadie, the Afkala travelled fast and with surprising energy. In a week they went from Saqqa to Baso, a distance of about 150 miles.² It took them four days to reach Bonga from Saqqa and three days to Wallaga.³ When we ask ourselves why the Afkala travelled so fast, putting both themselves and their pack animals at risk, we come to the conclusion that it was their method of beating the stiff competition they faced from the Jabarti traders, who were richer than they were. The Afkala possessed little capital⁴, while that of the Jabarti was relatively large. The Afkala had to travel fast in order to survive and they hoped by so doing to win success. Survive they did, but success was a scarce commodity. Although it took the Jabarti traders three to four weeks and sometimes even longer⁵, to cover the distance between Baso and Saqqa, this was because a Jabarti caravan was like a moving market, for they bought and sold wherever they went. They had large caravans with quantities of goods. The Afkala caravans were small⁶ and had few goods. Because they travelled fast, they bought in haste, often at a high price, and then sold, too, at a low price.

... la plainte continuelle chez les marchands d'Anarya est que les Afkala ont détruit leurs profits en donnant des prix trop élevés ... Ils ne se contentent pas d'un voyage par an mais vont et viennent sans cesse car l'activité des Gallas les fait ressembler en cela aux Européens. Il s'ensuit que puis qu'ils vendent vite ils peuvent se contenter d'un profit moindre. (7)

The Jabarti traders travelled between the Gibe and the northern region once or twice a year. They limited their trading activities to eight months of the year, from November to June, their travel to and from the Gibe region ceasing completely during the long rains.⁸ The Afkala traders, however, engaged in trade all the year round in the Gibe region itself, and travelled to the surrounding countries even during the long rains, as long as the rivers

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1. Antoine d'Abbadie, Nouv.Acq.Fran.No. 21303, folio, 360.
 2. Ibid., folio, 254.
 3. Ibid., folio, 360, 363.
 4. M. Abir, "Southern Ethiopia", in Pre-colonial African trade : Essays on trade in central and Eastern Africa, eds. Richard Gray and David Birmingham, (London : 1970), p. 127.
 5. Antoine d'Abbadie, The Athenaeum, No. 1041 (1847),^{pp.1056-8.} According to this source caravan travelling sometimes took more than eight weeks.
 6. The Jimma interview programme, pp. 52-3.
 7. Antoine d'Abbadie, ibid., No. 21300, folio, 386.
 8. C.T. Beke, Letters on the commerce, pp. 24-5.

such as the Gojeb, Omo, Gibe, Didessa and Abay were passable. However, at the end of the day their profit was not perhaps commensurate with their industrious trading activities.

After proceeding by trial and error for perhaps a decade or two, the Afkala concentrated on finding a political solution to their problem. They seem to have appealed to Abba Gomol, the first king of Limmu-Ehmarya, to prohibit the Jabarti traders from going to Kaffa. The issue was crucial, the choice of Kaffa giving economic meaning to the Afkala request. It was from Kaffa that the largest number of slaves, sometimes as many as 8,000 in a year, were exported.¹ From Kaffa also came the best ivory, musk and spices as well as a large quantity of coffee.² The Afkala traders wanted Abba Gomol to prevent the Jabarti traders from going beyond Limmu-Ehmarya, thus removing competition and preserving the lucrative trade with Kaffa for themselves. Overwhelmed by internal crises,³ however, Abba Gomol lacked the political will for decisive action. On the contrary, he seems to have granted the Jabarti traders permission to go to Kaffa. This policy was dramatically reversed by his successor, who forbade⁴ the Jabarti traders to go beyond Saqqa, the new capital. We have already suggested that in 1825 the newly emerging merchant class of Limmu-Ehmarya may have supported the overthrow of Abba Gomol by Abba Bagibo.⁵ This was because the latter represented the interest of the Afkala, while the former favoured a "free-for-all" commercial policy. Be that as it may, we do not know exactly when Abba Bagibo first implemented the policy of prohibiting the Jabarti traders from going beyond Saqqa, but it is known with certainty that in the 1830s the new policy was in operation and the Jabarti traders were affected by it.⁶

In the early nineteenth century ... Abba Bagibo, fully conscious of the advantages of the trade, accorded the merchants every protection provided that they traded exclusively in his territory, but if they sought to visit other lands, they could count on his hostility. Caravans from Kaffa and the north were likewise liable to be pillaged if they tried to trade direct without meeting at Enarya. (7)

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1. Martial de Salviac, Les Galla, p. 314. See also the Jimma interview programme, p. 56.
 2. A. Cecchi, Da Zeila, II, pp. 507-19.
 3. *Supra*, p. 403.
 4. The Journal of Isenburg and Krapf, p. 14.
 5. *Supra*, p. 402.
 6. The Journal of Isenburg and Krapf, p. 14.
 7. R. Pankhurst, Economic History of Ethiopia, 1800-1935., p. 445.

While the Jabarti traders from the north and the Sidama traders from the south were restricted and forced to trade only in Limmu-Ennarya, the local Afkala traders were free to trade up in the north and down in the south. This gave them wide advantages and a monopoly of the trade beyond the Gojeb. The Jabarti traders found the luxury goods from beyond the Gojeb already gathered in Saqqa. The Jabarti traders were angered by the ban since their profit was affected by the monopoly of the Afkala over the Kaffa trade. From 1830 onwards, the energy and subtlety of the Jabarti traders was called into action against the monopoly of the Afkala. As we saw in the previous chapter,¹ the Jabarti traders influenced the rival king, Abba Jifar of Jimma, to adopt a "free for all" commercial policy against Abba Bagibo's restrictive one. At first, Abba Jifar's pragmatic policy did not succeed since Jimma herself was dependent on the caravan route that passed through Limmu-Ennarya. Abba Bagibo's policy became obsolete and unproductive only in the 1840s for reasons to be discussed shortly.²

Until 1847, Abba Bagibo's restrictive policy contributed to the growth of his capital, his own prosperity and that of the Afkala. Saqqa became the major emporium in the region. Here the products of Kaffa and all the surrounding countries were collected, to be funnelled mainly to Baso, Limmu-Ennarya's commercial outlet in Gojjam.³ A smaller proportion⁴ of these goods also found their way to the kingdom of Shawa and beyond. The transit trade that entered and left Limmu-Ennarya supplied its beneficial effects to the king in the form of gifts and customs duties.

Abba Bagibo owed his great wealth partly to the benefits of trade and partly to his extensive estates and the tribute and taxes paid by the peasants.⁵ He dominated the political scene of the Gibe region up to 1861, not only through his sophisticated policy of "divide and rule"⁶, reinforced by political marriages and generous gifts, but also as a result of the fact that his capital was the headquarters for commercial exchange. In Saqqa, the Jabarti

1. Supra, p. 433.

2. Infra, p. 478.

3. C.T. Beke, Letters on commerce, pp. 15-6.

4. Idem, "On the countries ...", JRGS, XIII, p. 259.

5. M. Abir, Ethiopia ..., p. 85. See also the Jimma interview programme, pp. 10, 57-8.

6. G. Massaja, Lettere e scritti minori, II, p. 372.

traders from the north, the Afkala traders from the Gibe region and other traders from Gurage, Hadiya, Kullo, Konta, Kaffa, Janjero, Gomo, Gardo, Tombaro, Walayeta, Wallage, Illu Abba Bora and many other places met¹ and rubbed shoulders while engaged in buying and selling. Saqqa's population included Muslim traders from the north (both Oromo and non-Oromo), Arabs, Hararis,² a few Christian traders from Gojjam, Gondar and Tigrai, together with mercenaries from the latter,³ and traders from the surrounding kingdoms. It already had that cosmopolitan atmosphere which later characterized Hirmata (near Jiren), the capital of Jimma Abba Jifar.⁴

However, by 1847 Abba Bagibo's restrictive policy had become counter-productive, mainly because of the military weakness of Limmu-Ennarya.⁵ Not satisfied with prohibiting the Jabarti traders from going beyond Saqqa, Abba Bagibo had imposed other kinds of restrictions⁶ on the traders, which added to the bitterness they felt. Abba Bagibo may have justified his actions on the grounds that he wanted to protect the interests of the Afkala,⁷ whose small capital could not compete with that of the Jabarti. The Afkala apparently tolerated the presence of the Jabarti traders in Saqqa, but wanted to preserve for themselves the commerce beyond the Gojeb, which supplied the best quality ivory, musk, spices and slaves to the ever-expanding market of Saqqa. They probably regarded this as their prerogative, and one which Abba Bagibo jealously guarded for them. Upon this trade the Afkala prospered, as did Saqqa, while the Jabarti traders were deprived of this source of luxury products. The Afkala traders enjoyed other advantages over the Jabarti traders :

... Their most important asset was that they belonged to the country and had relatives or other connections in the surrounding areas. They could travel swiftly from one place to another and reach the remote markets. While travelling they stayed with their kinsmen and were protected by them. ... In fact the limited scale of their commerce enabled the Afkala to terminate their affairs quickly in each market and, when they exhausted their stock of goods, to travel quickly to one of the main commercial centres of the south or to the

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1. Tasawo Merga, "Senna Umatta Oromo", pp. 143-4. See also Antoine d'Abbadie *Nouv.Acq.Fran.* No. 21300, folio, 205.
 2. d'Abbadie, *ibid.*, No. 21303, folio, 287, 317, 357.
 3. *Ibid.*, folio, 219, 393. See also his No. 21300, folio, 797-800. C.T. Beke, "On the countries ...", *JRGS*, XIII, pp. 257-9.
 4. Max Grühl, *The Citadel ...*, p. 146.
 5. *Infra*, p. 480.
 6. d'Abbadie, *ibid.*, No. 21300, folio, 589.
 7. M. Abir, "Southern Ethiopia" in *Pre-colonial African trade*, p. 127.

markets on the verges of the Amhara areas. Whereas Jabarti merchants could only undertake one trip to the south-western markets each season, or if they brought a large quantity of goods, might take even two or three seasons to dispose of their merchandise, the Afkala could travel several times a year to the northern markets and back. (1)

The Jabarti traders did not accept the Afkala monopoly without resistance. In fact, even in the 1830s their energy and subtlety in finding an alternative route to Kaffa became apparent. The formation of the state of Jimma Abba Jifar provided them with the opportunity they sought. The new state did not impose any restrictions on the Jabarti traders. The plentiful profits from trade in Kaffa excited and animated them and they soon flocked to the capital of Abba Jifar. As already indicated, the Jabarti traders were quick to impress upon the king the necessity of converting his military superiority into commercial benefit.² Encouraged by their advice, and motivated with the prospect of success, Abba Jifar devoted some years to the conquest of the land between the Great Gibe and his own country. In this region, he conquered Janjero, Botor and Badi Folla.³ Thus by 1847, Abba Jifar had not only expanded the frontiers of his state at the expense of his neighbours but also freed his country from dependence on Limmu-Ennarya's route to the northern markets. An independent route between Jimma and the northern markets rendered Abba Bagibo's ban on movements beyond Saqqa meaningless. It also diverted the flow of trade from Limmu-Ennarya's territory. Gradually the centre of exchange shifted from Saqqa to Hirmata in Jimma. However, for the next fourteen years Saqqa remained the centre of commercial exchange in the Gibe region for two main reasons. Firstly, as we saw in the previous chapter,⁴ Abba Bagibo overhauled and reinforced the efficiency of his administration by injecting fresh blood into it in 1847. Among the new top appointees was one Abba Shamal, a very capable and energetic trader: he was appointed Abba Mizan, the official responsible for all business affairs. The diplomatic skill of the king and the vigorous ability of his new Abba Mizan soon restored the confidence of the Jabarti traders. Secondly, and even more importantly, Abba Bagibo carried out a very decisive and far-sighted economic measure in 1848. This step shows his perspicacity in economic matters and his concern for the commercial prosperity of his land.

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1. M. Abir, "Southern Ethiopia" in Pre-colonial African trade, p. 127. See also d'Abbadie, Nouv.Acq.Fran.No. 21300, folio 357-358, and his The Athenaeum, No. 1105, (1848), pp. 1329-331.
 2. Supra, p. 433.
 3. M. Abir, Ethiopia ..., p. 91.
 4. Supra, p. 440.

We saw above that Abba Bagibo not only banned the Jabarti traders from going beyond Saqqa but also imposed a number of irritating restrictions upon them. After Abba Jifar opened an independent caravan route to the north, Limmu-Ennarya's commercial prosperity rapidly dwindled. The king realized that it was not in his power to stop Abba Jifar from undermining his country's monopoly of commercial profit. He knew perfectly well that his own policy had embittered the traders to such an extent that they were avoiding his country. He knew well, too, that he could attract the Jabarti traders back by following a generous policy and treating them well. Thus he not only abolished the prohibition on trading beyond Saqqa,¹ but he went much further to win their hearts and minds. Antoine d'Abbadie received the following valuable information in northern Ethiopia from one Ibassa, an Oromo Jabarti trader, who was delighted with Abba Bagibo's change of policy.

Abba Bagibo est devenu charmant : il a permis de commercer en toute liberté en drap rouge, talari, etc., et il ne reste de prohibition que pour l'or. Il a même permis à ses esclaves d'offrir leurs faveurs aux marchands parce que ceux-ci allaient dans Guma et Jimma pour y chercher des amantes. (2)

If the change of policy came a little too late, it none-the-less produced the desired effect. For the first time, we find both the king and his slaves ready to help traders in every way. This was remarkable. Prompted by the desire to attract the Jabarti traders, he acknowledged his past mistakes, reversed his former policy and declared that he was the friend and protector of traders. This liberal policy did not fail to impress the Jabarti traders, who came flocking back to Limmu-Ennarya. Ibassa himself was an excited one of these, whom the new measure delighted.

As a result of the change of policy, commerce flourished in Limmu-Ennarya and Saqqa remained the seat of wealth and luxury.³ This situation lasted up to 1861. By then Limmu-Ennarya was militarily a spent force. Only very skilful leadership at the centre could maintain that country's commercial pre-eminence : through ingenious diplomacy supported by secret military alliances, political marriages and lavish gifts for the ruling families of the neighbouring states, Abba Bagibo was able to continue. His successor, Abba Bulgu, did not have his supreme diplomatic skill, and his mistakes hastened the commercial ruin of his country.

1. M. Abir, Ethiopia ... , p. 92.

2. Antoine d'Abbadie, Nouv.Acq.Fran.No. 21300, folio, 799-800.

3. G. Massaja, Lettere e scritti minori, vol. II, p. 372.

It was not long before the star of Ennarya began to be eclipsed and that flourishing and powerful kingdom returned to the early miserable condition. The merchants, angered by unbearable vexations, abandoned the route to that country. (1)

The reasons for the rapid disintegration of the prosperous trade of Limmu-Ennarya are beyond the scope of this chapter. During the period that concerns us, Limmu-Ennarya enjoyed unparalleled commercial superiority in the region; this is our main concern here.

In Limmu-Ennarya, as in all the Gibe states, trading was a highly organized business in which government played a key role. The whole business of trade was under the jurisdiction of an important official named Abba Mizan, (the father of the balance). This official was a member of the Council of State and one of the most powerful men in the kingdom. According to Tasawo Merga, the criteria for appointment to the office of Abba Mizan were a thorough knowledge of business matters, strength of character, organizational capacity and the ability to handle traders and deal with their problems.² Consequently, the king appointed an Abba Mizan only from among successful and able traders. While all other important government offices were filled by the landed aristocracy, the office of Abba Mizan was filled by a meticulous and capable trader, whether he had landed property or not.³ Knowledge of business and business matters was all that counted. Even successful foreign traders, the Jabarti, were appointed by some Gibe kings to this important office.⁴ This shows the significance which Gibe kings attached to matters of trade : so important that only a capable and successful trader was entrusted with the responsibility of the office of the Abba Mizan. An Abba Mizan had many functions, which could be effectively executed only by a mature and experienced trader who had travelled widely and was broadly acquainted with the workings of government and its relation to business matters.

This official had the combined functions of treasurer and minister for foreign affairs. He supervised the king's treasury, accounts, store houses, private domains and royal workshops. He was responsible for relations with foreigners and foreign merchants and he supervised the markets and merchant villages. (5)

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1. G. Massaja, In Abissinia, pp. 283-4.
 2. Tasawo Merga, "Senna Umatta Merga", p. 144.
 3. Ibid.
 4. E. Cerulli, Etiopia Occidentale, II, pp. 78-9.
 5. M. Abir, Ethiopia ... , p. 83., citing A. Cecchi, Da Zeila ... II, pp. 256, 259, 412-3, 527.

As the foreign minister, the Abba Mizan received and presented foreign visitors and dignitaries to the king. He was, in effect, "the right hand of the king".¹ He was also the "right hand" of the traders, for he looked after their interests. There were two groups of officials who functioned under the authority of the Abba Mizan, maintaining law and order in the market places and collecting customs dues at the entrance gates. They were the Abba Gaba (father of the market) and the Abba Kella (father of the entrance gate). The Abba Gabas were appointed either by the king or by the Abba Mizan himself. These "fathers of the markets" were responsible for collecting market dues and for maintaining law and order in the market places. They were also responsible for assigning places to the traders to set up their stalls or lay out their goods on the ground.² "... or for assigning different sections of the market to different products, and expanding or contracting these sections as the needs demanded."³ On a market day, the Abba Gaba combined the role of police officer, judge and governor.

The Abba Gaba sat in the market on a raised platform, surrounded by a few armed men. It was his job to see that stealing was punished, fights were stopped, and that disputes arising in the market were judged. If a man found a debtor in the market he would haul him before the Abba Gaba. If two men fought over the possession of an animal or other goods they went to see the Abba Gaba. The Abba Gaba could levy fines, have thieves flogged by his men, and order a man to pay his creditor. When one man accused another they went before a market judge; the loser had to pay a fee to the king. (4)

The Abba Kellas were the second group of officials who were under the authority of the Abba Mizan.⁵ The Abba Kellas were appointed by the king himself,⁶ and they were responsible for guarding the entrance gates day and night.⁷ They counted all incoming and outgoing merchants, inspected their merchandise and collected the customs from them.⁸

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1. A. Cecchi, Da Zeila ..., II, p. 167.
 2. Tasawo Merga, "Senna Umatta Oromo", p. 145.
 3. H.S. Lewis, A Galla Monarchy, p. 95.
 4. Ibid., See also Tasawo Merga, ibid.
 5. The Jimma interview programme, pp. 9, 52.
 6. Tasawo Merga, ibid., p. 145.
 7. The Jimma interview programme, p. 56.
 8. M. Abir, Ethiopia ..., p. 81, citing A. Cecchi, Da Zeila ..., II, p. 228, footnote 1; Antoine d'Abbadie, Nouv.Acq.Fran.No. 21302, folio, 389-90, 411-2. Idem, No. 21303, folio, 112-3. Idem, Géographie de l'Ethiopie, p. 22, (preface). See also H.S. Lewis, A Galla Monarchy, pp. 108-9, Tasawo Merga, ibid.

From the entrance gate to the capital of the kingdom, trade was efficiently organized, hospitality was guaranteed to the foreign traders, who upon arrival in the capital were received by the Abba Mizan. The latter in turn presented the foreign traders to the king, who received them warmly and ordered the Abba Mizan to assign quarters for their pack animals and hostels for the traders themselves.¹ This was done the very day the traders arrived in the capital. All foreign merchants, both the Muslim Jabarti traders from the north, and the Sidama traders from the surrounding lands, were the guests of the king. As such, they were provided with accommodation in the king's hostels. For this purpose, all the Gibe kings built merchant villages known as mandera, sited near their main massera in their capitals. Accordingly, there were merchant villages in Saqqa, in Limmu-Ehnarya, in Hirmata near Jiren in Jimma, in Agaro in Gomma, in Challa in Gera, and in Chirra in Gumma.² Merchants also were provided with food from the king's kitchen for the first night. The next day, important merchants were formally invited to the massera, where they were entertained in the presence of the king. He questioned them at length about security along the caravan routes and about the general situation in the country from which they came. This having been done, the merchants gave their gifts to the king,³ and went back to their hostels. The presents they gave the king were known as harka fudda⁴ ("handshake"). Gift-giving took two forms. The first was the gifts given to the king in return for his hospitality and for providing the traders with accommodation in the merchant villages. The second was known as gumatta, a "special gift", given to the king on special occasions by all important men of the kingdom, including foreign traders.

In the capital of every Gibe state, there were commercial centres of two kinds. The first and smaller one was at the mandera, where all luxury foreign goods were sold to the king and the aristocracy. The second and more important commercial centre was the main market for local trade in the capital. The two different trading centres⁵ in the capital served two different groups

1. Antoine d'Abbadie, *Nouv. Acq. Fran.* No. 21300, folio, 189.

2. Tasawo Merga, "Senna Umatta Oromo!" p. 136. See also d'Abbadie, *ibid.*, No. 21302, folio, 420, 425; G. Massaja, I miei trenta cinque anni, IV, p. 145; M. Abir, Ethiopia ..., p. 84.

3. d'Abbadie, *ibid.*, No. 21300, folio, 189-90.

4. Tasawo Merga, *ibid.*, pp. 143-4.

5. The reason(s) for having separate merchant villages for foreign merchants is not clear from the literature. However, it may have been brought about by two interconnected factors. First, it was intended perhaps to keep a watch over the activities of the foreigners lest, disguising themselves as traders, they were engaged in spying activities. Second, it was to control not only the luxury goods they sold to the king and the aristocracy, but to prevent them from buying luxury goods from the people without the king's permission.

and interests. In the first centre the king himself sold many commodities and bought luxury foreign goods, some of which he then distributed among his top officials.¹ The second centre, the market for local trade, was the meeting place for the multitude, who bought and sold and bartered or exchanged their goods against local or imported goods. This was not a place for diplomatic niceties : here wrongdoers were punished on the spot. In this market there was no limit to prestige goods : both foreign and local products intermingled and changed hands. The mode of exchange here was not primarily through the medium of money - Maria Theresa thaler,² gold, coloured cloth and other primitive money - here, barter was the predominant mode of exchange.³

Several large caravans visited Saqqa annually. Among them, two from Gondar⁴ were noted for their riches. The arrival of a Gondar caravan in Limmu-Ennarya and the commercial prosperity of that country are described by Pankhurst in the following extract :

Ennarya ... enjoyed a considerable trade between Gondar and Kaffa and other lands to the south which supplied slaves and cotton cloth, civet, ivory, gold, coreander, and horses in exchange for salt, copper, horses, cows, coloured clothing, stuffs, guns, and other articles from Gondar market. The arrival of the Gondar caravans was a time of popular rejoicing. When the celebrations were over ... Abba Bagibo would call the leaders of the richest caravans, examine their merchandise, purchase some of it on his own account or accept some as gifts, and then order trade to begin. The articles most prized were blue and red cloth, silks and velvets, copper, sal ammoniac, glass bottles, tobacco, black pepper, salt, iron, gears, trinkets, mirrors, knives, scissors and kitchenware. Swords and guns were also in demand. (4)

In addition to the two from Gondar, various other caravans arrived annually from the north - from Baso and some from Shawa - bringing foreign manufactures to the Gibe region, mainly to Limmu-Ennarya. Every caravan from the north brought one item which was highly desired, both in the Gibe region and beyond. This was salt money, the amole.

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1. Antoine d'Abbadie, *Nouv.Acq.Fran.* No. 21300, folio, 189-90.
 2. A. Cecchi, *Da Zeila ...*, II, p. 298.
 3. The two centres of trade in the capitals of the Gibe states, one for elite goods and the other for ordinary goods, had some similarity with the market of Whydah in Dahomey, which was beautifully described by Rosemary Arnold in the article "A port of trade : Whydah on the Guinea Coast", in Trade and Market in the Early Empires : Economics in History and Theory, eds. K. Polanyi, C.M. Arensberg and H.W. Pearson, (Illinois, 1957), pp. 155-185.
 4. R. Pankhurst, Economic History of Ethiopia .. , p. 351.

The amoleh could be considered to have been the official currency all over the highlands from Tigre to Kaffa and from Wollaga to Argoba. In many cases taxes and tribute were paid in amoleh ... It was indispensable to the long-range caravan trade, because the further the merchants penetrated into the interior, the less ready were people to accept thalers, while the amoleh was always welcome. (1)

There were various other types of primitive money used as a medium of exchange in the Ethiopian region² - coloured cloth, iron, beads, bracelets, gold - but the amole was an important medium of exchange in the Gibe region.

The rate of exchange of amoleh for the thaler, at any trading or administrative centre, differed according to its distance from Agame and Enderta. This resulted mainly from the cost of transportation and the unavoidable damage to the fragile amoleh on the road; but also from the heavy taxes laid upon the amoleh merchants by governors and by customs authorities all along the caravan routes. Therefore, while at Ficho up to 120 amoleh were received per thaler, at Sokota in Lasta or Adowa in Tigre, fifty to seventy were given per thaler, in Begemder thirty to forty, in Gojjam and Shawa about twenty and in Enarea ten to twelve. (3)

Though an amole was expensive in the Gibe region, it was widely circulated, eclipsing all other primitive forms of money, even the thaler, which was also used in the region. In fact, for all the Gibe kings and especially for Abba Bagibo, the amole seems to have performed all three functions of money: as a medium of payment, as a measure of wealth and as a store of value. Abba Bagibo had a large amount of amole money, with which he paid for some of the luxury goods he acquired. According to the information gathered from the region, all the Gibe kings received tribute in kind and in amole,⁴ and they all had stores for amole in their treasury, where this brittle wealth was preserved by suspending it above a fire. "Les amoles des trésors de Abba Bagibo sont ... tout noirs; la crainte de voir tomber le sel ... le fait placer au haut de la hutte ou il imbibe la fumée."⁵

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1. M. Abir, Ethiopia ..., pp. 44-46, citing Rochet d'Héricourt, Second Voyage, (Paris, 1846), p. 261. W.C. Harris, The Highlands of Aethiopia, vol. II, p. 170.
 2. R. Pankhurst, Economic History ... p. 445-6. Idem, "Primitive money in Ethiopia, Journal de la société des Africanistes, (1963), pp. 213-47. See also his Introduction to the Economic History of Ethiopia, pp. 260-266.
 3. M. Abir, Ethiopia ..., p. 48, citing P.V.A. Ferret and J.G. Galinier, Voyage en Abyssinie (Paris : 1847), vol. I, p. 453, vol. II, p. 9; W.C. Harris, The Highlands ..., I, pp. 376-7, 379; C. Johnston, Travels in southern Abyssinia, (London : 1844), vol. II, p. 248; C.T. Lefebvre, Voyage en Abyssinie exécuté pendant les années 1839, 1840, 1841, 1842, 1843, (Paris : 1845-51), vol. II, Appendix Mer Rouge, p. 82.
 4. The Jimma interview programme, pp. 10, 21, 58.
 5. Antoine d'Abbadie, Nouv.Acq.Fran. No. 21303, folio, 357.

Some imported luxury goods were sold at the mandera. Other less expensive ones, such as poor quality clothes, varieties of beads, and cheap metalware, were sold at the local market. Although imported luxury goods had the reputation of being a concomitant of social status and prestige, no differential protection circumscribed trade in them; nor, with the exception of gold, were the common people excluded from their possession. However, the unusually high cost of imported elite goods made them to all intents and purposes prestigious possessions enjoyed only by the wealthy class. The reason for this is not far to seek. To begin with, imported luxury goods were bought at a high price even in Massawa. By the time they reached Gondar, their price had doubled or tripled.¹ In Limmu-Ennarya their price would have increased still further. Such a large increase in the price of luxury, imported goods was due to the difficulty involved in travelling and, above all, to the many customs posts along the route, at each of which the caravans were taxed. It is said that there were some twenty-eight such customs posts between Massawa and Limmu-Ennarya², which means that these goods had been taxed at least twenty-eight times by the time they arrived in Saqqa. Thus they were very expensive and remained beyond the means of the common people. It was these expensive commodities which were sold at the mandera.

The local market of Saqqa was held on Sundays, in an open field which was large enough to accommodate several thousand people. Among the commodities sold, exchanged or bartered here were³: livestock, including cows, oxen, fattened bulls (Natafo), goats, sheep, horses, mules, donkeys and chickens, eggs, butter, honey, cereal grains, including teff, wheat, barley, sorghum, finger millet and maize, root crops including ensete, potatoes, sweet potatoes, onions and garlic, varieties of beans and peas, oil seeds, ivory, musk, coffee, raw cotton and precious skins. Here also were to be found the products of local industry, such as ploughshares, knives, spears, sickles, wooden goods, leather goods, hides and skins, articles of pottery of various kinds, cotton clothes, saddles and coffee cups. It was this market that met the needs of the common people, a type of market to be found all over the Gibe states.

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1. Antoine d'Abbadie, *Nouv.Acq.Fran.* No. 21301, folio, 116-7.
 2. R. Pankhurst, Economic History of Ethiopia .. , p. 521.
 3. The Jimma interview programme, pp. 52, 56.

As a rule no single market place is used more than one day a week, each one having its own special day. These market days are staggered so that there will be no conflict within a region. The whole countryside is connected by this web of markets and on each day of the week a person in any spot in the country can walk to some market. Similarly, market days along the caravan routes are so coordinated that long-distance merchants can attend different markets on almost every day of their march. (1)

As a result there developed an impressive network of institutionalized trade, within the Gibe region itself, and across the Gojeb to Kaffa and across the Didessa to Wallaga, which enabled the Afkala traders to engage in a brisk trade all the year round.² The well organized web of markets linking the Gibe region with Kaffa not only facilitated the flow of commerce between the two regions but also enabled the intrepid Afkala traders to buy and sell at different places along the route without missing a single market day or wasting unnecessary time.

Merchants going from Jiren to Anderaca in Kafa could stop at the Sunday market in Saka, the Monday market in Sombo, the Tuesday market in Sebe. On their return from Kafa they once again stopped at Sebe on Tuesday, at Ule Wakia on Wednesday, and arrived in Hirmata for the great Thursday market. (3)

Thus, besides the Oromo products of the region and the imported foreign manufactured goods which we have described above, the markets of the Gibe region were fed by the products from Kaffa - coffee, slaves, ivory, musk and spices, from Janjero - slaves, cotton and ivory, from Walayita - precious skins and from Wallaga - slaves, ivory and above all that most precious of commodities, gold.

The caravan routes which criss-crossed the Gibe region and interwove it with the surrounding lands provided the trade of the area with an amazingly coordinated all-the-year-round communications system, facilitating the creation of a series of well-attended markets all over the Gibe states. However, it was Limmu-Ennarya which was at the hub, and which was the nerve centre for the trade of the region. During our period, Saqqa was the major emporium in south-western Ethiopia. Saqqa was both the headquarters of the Afkala traders⁴ and the meeting ground for the Jabarti traders from the north

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1. H.S. Lewis, A Galla Monarchy, p. 55.
 2. For a description of similar markets, see Francisco Benet, "Explosive markets: the Berber Highlands", Trade and Market in the Early Empires, p. 197.
 3. E. Cerulli, Etiopia Occidentale, II, pp. 83-4, translation by H.S. Lewis, ibid., p. 55.
 4. Antoine d'Abbadie, Nouv.Acq.Fran. No. 21303, folio, 287, 360.

the Afkala traders from the area and the Sidama traders from the surrounding regions. Saqqa was also the great commercial entrepôt, the store town for the goods to be sent to Baso in Gojjam, to Gondar, Wollo, Tigray, Massawa and beyond, and to Shawa, Tajura, Harar and Berbera, everywhere feeding the revival of trade in the Red Sea Basin.¹

It is possible that the very revival of the Red Sea trade, and certainly its prosperity, depended to a large extent on the availability of luxury products from the Gibe region. These products, which so enriched the Oromo rulers of the Gibe region, and which easily dominated the export lists of Red Sea trade, were slaves, gold, ivory, musk, spices and coffee, the latter also being consumed by the Muslim population in the northern Ethiopian region.² Both for the Jabarti traders on their return journey from the Gibe region and for the Afkala traders on their frequent trips to Baso, slaves were one of the most important commodities in their caravans. Slaves were assets to the traders. The strong ones carried goods for them. Women were used as concubines. Young girls were well looked after and beautiful ones were often married by the slave dealers.³ One important consideration was that slaves were mobile so "as to be little affected by the difficulties of transport which affected other trade."⁴ The prices of slaves varied, depending on the sex and age of the slaves. Eunuchs were the most expensive, followed by young girls. Young men and old women fetched the lowest price.⁵ The slaves from the Gibe region were generally known as "Gallas", although the majority of them were not actually Oromo.⁶ "When they reach the Red Sea, these 'Gallas' ... pass by the yet more incorrect denomination of 'Abessinians', by which name they are commonly known in Egypt."⁷

Gold was a royal monopoly, and the trade in musk was also dominated by the king and the wealthy class. Gold came mainly from Wallaga, while musk

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1. M. Abir, Ethiopia ... , p. 44.
 2. C.T. Beke, Letters on the commerce ... , p. 27.
 3. Antoine d'Abbadie, Nouv.Acq.Fran. No. 21300, folio, 218.
 4. R. Pankhurst, Economic History of Ethiopia .. , p. 363.
 5. d'Abbadie, ibid., folio, 218 and 236.
 6. C.T. Beke, ibid., p. 23.
 7. Ibid.

came from the Gibe region itself and from Kaffa. Trade in gold and musk was a privilege limited to the wealthy and to certain well-known traders. They had unique value as commodities because they were easy to transport, duty free at Baso¹ and were highly sought after, fetching a high profit. The international trade of Limmu-Ennarya was famous not only for slaves, gold and musk, but also for ivory. The tusks from Limmu-Ennarya were famous for being "large, soft and white".² The trade in ivory was dominated by the kings themselves, in two ways. First, all the Gibe kings received one tusk for every elephant killed in their territory.³ Second, the kings were themselves the biggest tusk merchants.

The trade in precious skins was also dominated by the kings. Two other commodities were also important : spices for international trade and coffee for consumption within the Ethiopian region itself. There was also a huge consumption of coffee inside the Gibe region. Abba Bagibo was the biggest coffee trader. Both the Jabarti traders and the Afkala bought a lot of coffee from him. It is said that in the 1840s the Jabarti traders annually bought about 40,000 kilograms of coffee from Limmu-Ennarya, while the Afkala traders sold about 80,000 kilograms at Baso. Altogether about 160,000⁴ kilograms of coffee was sold at Baso, a large part of it going to Wollo and the northern region. Just as coffee from the Gibe region met the needs of the Muslim population in the northern part of the country, it was the luxury products of the Gibe region which financed the imports of northern Ethiopia.

The slaves, gold, ivory, musk, coffee and other items exported annually from southern and western Ethiopia fetched on the coast twice or three times their original cost. As the central and northern plateau hardly produced any exportable items, it might be said that exports of southern and western Ethiopia paid not only for the imported goods brought to the Galla Sidama countries, but they also financed to a large extent the imports of northern Ethiopia, and contributed greatly to Ethiopia's favourable 'balance of trade' with the outside world. (5)

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1. C.T. Beke, Letters on the commerce ... , p. 21. See also Abbadie, Nouv.Acq.Fran.No. 21300, folio, 388.
 2. M. Abir, Ethiopia ... , pp. 86-7, citing A. Cecchi, Da Zeila ... , II, p. 516. J. Borelli, Ethiopie Meridionale, (Paris : 1890), pp. 344-6, 361.
 3. A. Cecchi, ibid., p. 331. See also the Jimma interview programme, p. 27.
 4. d'Abbadie, ibid, folio, 569.
 5. M. Abir, ibid., p. 88. See also C.T. Beke, ibid., p. 3.

The spread of Islam in the Gibe region

As with the formation of the states, the spread of Islam among the Oromo in the Gibe region was a phenomenon of the nineteenth century. This does not mean, of course, that the Oromo were not exposed to Islamic influence before the nineteenth century. As we have shown earlier, contact between Islam and some Oromo groups spanned six or seven centuries.¹ Perhaps as early as the fourteenth century, and certainly by the fifteenth, the influence of the two universal religions in the Horn of Africa were filtering through contemporaneously into the area of the original home of the Oromo. Of the two religions, it was Islam which left a lasting mark on some aspects of Oromo culture, especially the calendar.² While the previous radiation out of the Muslim principalities under the Christian administration may have kindled a spark of Islam among some sedentary Oromo groups within or on the periphery of the Christian kingdom - a spark which may have burst into flame during the short-lived jihad of Imam Ahmad - the pastoral Oromo on the whole remained in their traditional religion. During their migration, they moved across land where there were Muslim populations, such as the Hadiya, whom they adopted and who were eventually assimilated. In the process of the migration, the assimilated Hadiyas³ and perhaps also some Muslim Oromo lost their Islamic religion, but retained their Muslim names. It was because of this phenomenon that we find Muslim names in the genealogies of the various Oromo groups. In the Gibe region itself, there were a number of groups who counted their genealogies back to the sixteenth century, to the time when they lived in Bali : they took pride in the Muslim names in their genealogy after they had accepted Islam in the nineteenth century.⁴ After the Oromo conquest and settlement in the Gibe region, the Muslim traders continued coming to the area, though less frequently. The commercial interests of the itinerant Muslim traders from the north and of the local clan leaders coincided. As long as the Muslim traders gave gifts, the Oromo leaders protected them and extended hospitality to them. However, at this state in their relations, the Muslim traders did not find the time propitious for both marketing and preaching : the ground was not sufficiently prepared. Falling short of their traditional role as the ideological arm of Islam in the Horn of Africa, they do not seem to have engaged overtly in religious

1. Supra, p. 19.

2. Supra, p. 99.

3. U. Braukämper, "Islamic principalities in southeast Ethiopia between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries", Ethiopianist notes, vol. I, No. 2, pp. 27-8.

4. The Jimma interview programme, p. 33. See also E. Cerulli, Etiopia Occidentale, vol. II, p. 130.

propaganda, perhaps for fear of alienating Gada officials.¹ With the decline of the power of the Gada officials and the rise of war leaders, the Muslim traders were encouraged to settle in the Gibe region itself.² It was in Limmu-Ennarya that they first settled, perhaps in the second half of the eighteenth century. That was the turning-point in the spread of Islam in the Gibe region. It only remained for the first king of Limmu-Ennarya to discover that it was both simpler and more politic to enlist the Muslim traders in his capital, together with their religion, on his side and for his cause.

Before we embark upon a brief description of the conversion of each ruling house and their people to the new religion, it is vital to mention two points which have a bearing on our subsequent presentation of the story. Firstly, Islam spread in the Gibe region in two stages. During the first stage, which lasted up to the 1840s, Islam was the religion of the kings and the nobility in all the Gibe states except Gomma. During the second stage, Islam gradually became the religion of the people, mainly as a result of ardent kings who made it their duty to spread it to the people. In the first half of the nineteenth century, all the Gibe kings (except those of Gomma) were indifferent in matters of religion: European travellers and missionaries admired their tolerance. In the 1860s that tolerant generation was replaced by intolerant zealot leaders, mainly as a response to the threat from the Christians to the north, coupled with their internal difficulties. Since this period is beyond the scope of this study, we only mention some salient points so as to show the fortunes of Islam in the Gibe region.

Secondly, during the first stage of the spread of Islam in the area, all the Gibe states exhibited a dual character. The majority of the common people remained in their traditional religion, the belief in Waqa, the sky god, while the wealthy class became Muslims and championed Islam.³ The nobility's contact with the better informed and more active Muslim merchants not only created a favourable disposition among this class for the spread of Islam, but also demonstrated to the ruling class that the traditional Oromo religion was inadequate.⁴ The Gibe kings quickly realized the advantages to be

1. The Jimma interview programme, p. 35.

2. Ibid., p. 55. See also G. Massaja, In Abissinia, pp. 279, 282-8. Idem, I miei trenta cinque anni, IV, p. 79.

3. Massaja, In Abissinia, p. 279. See also Antoine d'Abbadie, Athenaeum, No. 1042, p. 1077.

4. e.g. Donald E. Crummey, "European religious mission in Ethiopia, 1830-68", p. 361.

derived from acceptance of the new religion. In matters of politics and administration, the Muslim traders came to be consulted while the traditional Oromo priests were ignored. The rivalry between the Oromo priests and the Muslim teachers represented two views of politics and two political systems. The Muslim teachers expounded the necessity of having a permanent central authority, while the Oromo priests probably enumerated the virtues of the Chafe assembly and the dignity and advantage of having a new government every eight years. Marriages of convenience between the Muslim merchants and preachers and of the new nobility sealed the success of Islam and ensured the slow disintegration of the old religion. It seems that for the nobility it was not so much that Islam attracted them more than the traditional religion; it was not Islam which was at stake, but the interests Islam represented.¹

It was easy for the kings to replace non-Muslim by Muslim governors.² However, it was much more difficult for the kings to rid themselves of habits which were rooted deep in the soil of the traditional religion.³ Thus these Muslim kings not only acted as the leaders of the butta ceremony in their respective states, but they also danced together with the people in the ceremony.⁴ Thus, though Muslim, they performed the role of the gada leader in the traditional religion, for the butta ceremony was pivotal to the traditional religious cycle.⁵ This does not mean that there were no changes made to the butta ceremony. Firstly, the themes of the Gerarsa poems recited at this time were altered. Before the formation of the kingdoms, individual heroes, their families and their clans were the principal themes of Gerarsa. Now the kings themselves were the heroes and their respective dynasties the sole theme of Gerarsa. Previously butta was a time of solemn prayer. Now it became a time of marriage for the young men and women.⁶ Butta had been the time when the people met and settled their differences peacefully; now it became the time when the Gibe kings met and settled their disputes peacefully.⁷

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1. G. Massaja, I miei trenta cinque anni, VI, p. 10.
 2. Idem, In Abissinia, p. 284.
 3. Antoine d'Abbadie, Athenaeum, No. 1042, p. 1078.
 4. The manuscript of Abba Jobir Abba Dula, p. 8.
 5. Supra, p. 126.
 6. The manuscript of Abba Jobir, ibid.
 7. Ibid.

The Gibe kings championed and propagated Islam while offering sacrifices to Waga¹, and without stopping the famous pilgrimage to the land of Abba Muda, the spiritual head of the Oromo religion. What is more, the kings not only sent gifts to Abba Muda, by the hand of the Jila (pilgrims), but also regarded the presence of the Jila in their states as conferring a blessing.² In 1846 Antoine d'Abbadie saw the Jila from Limmu-Ennarya, Gumma, Jimma and Gera gathered in Limmu-Ennarya before their departure on the long journey to the land of Abba Muda.³ Only Gomma did not send any pilgrims on this pilgrimage, for alone of all the states at that time, it had been thoroughly Islamized. Below we briefly discuss how Islam spread in each state.

In Limmu-Ennarya, Abba Gomol was not only the founder of a new dynasty, but he also left his name to posterity as the first Muslim Oromo king in the Gibe region.⁴ Like the rest of the Gibe kings after him, Abba Gomol accepted Islam for ideological and political purposes. As already indicated, Islam provided him with a focus of unity⁵ transcending tribal loyalty and helped him to justify his ruthless actions. His acceptance of Islam created conditions in which the hundreds of Muslim merchants and preachers could propagate Islam freely.⁶ Thus, Abba Gomol forged an ideological unity with the many Muslim traders and preachers in his capital, who in turn championed the cause of the king. It is unlikely, however, that his acceptance of Islam had any profound effect on the king's spiritual life. The old religion and Islam operated side by side for a long time, and it was only in the second half of the nineteenth century that the new religion limited the scope of the old.⁷

It was reported in Shawa in 1841 that Abba Gomol was converted to Islam by his uncle, Mukhtar.⁸ This report is important, not for what it tells us, but for what it implies: it gives a Muslim name to the uncle of the king,

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1. Antoine d'Abbadie, Athenaeum, No. 1042, p. 1077.
 2. Idem, Nouv.Acq.Fran. No. 21300, folio, 788-790.
 3. Ibid.
 4. The Jimma interview programme, pp. 26-7.
 5. Supra, p. 399.
 6. The Jimma interview programme, pp. 5, 21.
 7. G. Massaja, In 'Abissinia, p. 284.
 8. W.C. Harris, The Highlands ..., III, pp. 53-55.

This was not an attempt to Islamize the distant members of the dynasty. Perhaps it was a genuine reflection of the fact that the barrier against the use of Muslim names had been broken and that the first stage, the preparatory conditioning for the acceptance of the new religion, had already been passed. According to J.S. Trimingham, "three stages mark the process of conversion : germination, crisis, and gradual reorientation."¹

The first stage is preparatory, the infiltration of elements of Islamic culture into animist life. The second is the conversion, characterized more by the break with the old order than the adoption of the new. The third is the gradual process by which Islam changes the life of the community. (2)

Today, Oromo traditions in the Gibe claim that Abba Gomol was converted by "the miracles of a famous Shaikh" and his descendants.³ The name of this Shaikh was Sayid Nessra Allah, and the traders called him Abba Yo ("our father"), implying that he was holy. The phrase "his descendants" implies two things : firstly that this shaikh was in the Gibe region for a long time and secondly that the actual conversion of Abba Gomol took place at the time of his descendants. Perhaps Nessra Allah was among the first generation of Muslim traders who settled in Limmu-Ennarya. Tradition has it that the shaikh was an Ashrafi⁴ (descendant of the prophet). This should not be taken too literally, however. He was probably of Arab origin with a good Islamic education, which would have raised his prestige among the first generation of traders who settled in Limmu-Ennarya. It was probably these traders who elevated his social status to the point where his Ashrafi ancestry was accepted (either during his life time or in retrospect after his death). Sayid Nessra Allah was a distinguished counsellor and an accomplished teacher. He may have started some form of Islamic education, first for the benefit of the children of the Muslim traders and later on for the children of the nobility. His literacy in Arabic probably impressed the Oromo nobility, who attached unusually great importance to the ability to communicate in writing. For whatever reason, he was and still is universally regarded as a saint and as the first standard bearer of Islam in the Gibe region; thousands of believers visit his shrine every year.⁵

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1. J.S. Trimingham, The Influence of Islam upon Africa, (London, 1980), p. 43.
 2. Ibid. See also his Islam in West Africa, (Oxford, 1959), p. 36.
 3. The Jimma interview programme, pp. 26-7.
 4. The Jimma interviews, pp. 6, 26-7.
 5. Ibid.

Notwithstanding the conversion of the king, and the religious activities of the Muslim traders and preachers, there was no mosque in the country during the reign of Abba Gomol. Even during the reign of his successor there was no mosque in Limmu-Ennarya. In 1841, it was reported in Shawa that there were no mosques in the country : "... prayers are held at the tomb of Bofo (Abba Gomol), the first convert to the faith."¹ In the late 1850s Massaja actually visited the tomb of Abba Gomol, which by then had already taken on the character of a shrine. In 1861 a fanatical new king, who gave himself the title of King of Limmu-Ennarya and "the father of the Muslims"², put a stop to the activities of the Catholic missionaries and expelled them from his country. And yet even he did not build mosques in his territory. When Cecchi visited him in the late 1870s, there was only one mosque and that was in his massera. Nevertheless, by that time, Islam had won the struggle and the entire population of Limmu-Ennarya were Muslims. He writes : "Today, after nearly eighty years, Islam is found at full vigour, being already adopted even by the most pauperized classes."³ The reason for the conspicuous absence of mosques in Limmu-Ennarya and in the Gibe region in general is well put by J.S. Trimingham : "Naturally the mosque of the people was then as it still is under a village tree at some spot hallowed by tradition."⁴

The ruling house of Gomma was the second to accept Islam in the Gibe region. According to Cecchi, and accepted by Trimingham and others, Gomma was the first state to have accepted Islam in the region.⁵ This is true in the sense that Gomma was the first of the Gibe states where the entire population embraced Islam. The ruling house of Limmu-Ennarya, however, accepted Islam before that of Gomma. The ruling dynasty of Gomma, known as Awaliani ("the holy"), claimed descent from Nur Hussein of Bali.⁶ In narrating this tradition, Cecchi seems to have confused it with the story of a Somali shaikh who was the guardian of the tomb of Shaikh Hussein around the beginning of the nineteenth century. According to Cecchi's version, a Somali named Nur Hussein emigrated from Mogadisho in 1780 and settled among the Oromo, where he showed himself to be a worker of marvellous miracles.

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1. W.C. Harris, The Highlands ... , III, p. 54.
 2. G. Massaja, In Abissinia, p. 284.
 3. A. Cecchi, Da Zeila ... , II, p. 160.
 4. J.S. Trimingham, Islam in Ethiopia, p. 201.
 5. A. Cecchi, ibid., p. 239; see also J.S. Trimingham, ibid., p. 200.
 6. A. Cecchi, ibid.

This man, NurHussein, otherwise known as Wariko, was a worker of miracles. He could fly like an eagle, and could change men into animals. He first settled in Kafa, but was forced to flee and took refuge in Gomma, crossing the flooded Gojeb by striking the waters with his staff and dividing them. (1)

There is good reason to believe that the above tradition developed out of the tradition of ShaikhHussein of Bali, whom the Oromo called Nur Hussein. In the first place, these miracles are almost the same as those attributed to ShaikhHussein of Bali by the Rabi-al-Qulub.² Secondly, according to Oromo traditions gathered from the Gibe region, ShaikhHussein of Bali had two sons, named Muhammed Aman, who went to Harar, and Awalani, who came to the Gibe region and settled in Gomma, the Gomma dynasty being descended from him.³ Such a claim is, of course, untenable historically since ShaikhHussein lived in the thirteenth century. The claim was simply made in order to Islamize and exalt the saintly origin of the dynasty. However, there does lie a concrete historical reality behind the tradition connecting a Somali shaikh, NurHussein of Bali, and the Awalani of Gomma. Amir Abd al-Shakur (1783-94), the famous ruler of Harar, is known to have built a mosque on the holy site of ShaikhHussein and to have dedicated it to Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani.⁴ A Somali shaikh was in charge of that mosque, which became the centre of diffusion of the Qadiriya Order to the Gibe region.⁵ In fact, the Somali shaikh himself is reported to have brought the Qadiriya Order to the Gibe region, to Gomma itself. The establishment of the Qadiriya and other orders

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1. A. Cecchi, *Da Zeila ...*, II, p. 239. Translation by Huntingford in Some records of Ethiopia, 1593-1646, preface p. lxxxix.
 2. Anonymous, Rabi-al-Qulub, (Cairo, 1927), pp. 13-23 et passim. This is an Arabic book which deals with the life history and miracles of Shaikh Hussein of Bale.
 3. The Jimma interview programme, pp. 34, 59.
 4. E. Cerulli, Studi Etiopici, I, p. 44; see also Trimmingham, Islam in Ethiopia, p. 240.
 5. The Qadiriya traces its origin to the Baghdad Sufi and jurist Abd al-Qadir al Jilani (470-561 A.H. - 1077/8-1166 A.D.). In Harar the Qadiriya claimed that Abd al-Qadir himself miraculously flew to Harar, where he died and was buried. There is a mosque in his name, and his tomb at Qorobe Limay, in the southwestern part of the city of Harar, is one of the holy places of the city. See E. Wagner, "Eine liste der Heiligen von Harar", Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgen Laandischen Gessellschaft : 123, 2, 1973, p. 274. According to Trimmingham, ibid., p. 234, The order is said to have been brought to Harar by a Sharif Abu Bakr Ibn Abd Allah al-Idarus (or Aydarus) called al-Qutb or Rabbani (the divine axis) who died at Aden in A.H. 909 (A.D. 1503).

in the Gibe region in the nineteenth century was the key to the spread of Islam among the people.¹ These orders established themselves in the countryside, where they opened Quranic schools.² It was in Gomma that the Qadiriya order was first established and where many fugaha (legal scholars) and shaikhs zealously spread Islam. Thus is explained the connection between the tradition of Awalani and Shaikh Hussein of Bali, whom the Oromo call Nur Hussein of Bali. More importantly it explains the rapid spread of Islam in the little state of Gomma. By 1841, according to what Harris has heard in Shawa "... in Goma the Moslem faith is universal".³ The rapid spread of Islam among the people of Gomma had some consequences, both for Gomma itself, and for others in the region. It was in Gomma that the notorious practice of enslaving their own people was first abolished. While the rest of the Gibe kings were still selling their own people, one of the kings of Gomma asked why he did not, is reported to have said, "But if I sell my subjects, whose king do I remain? Perhaps of the monkeys?"⁴

Emulating the example of the Gomma king, all the Gibe kings came to abandon the practice. They also slowly but surely encouraged serious proselytization among their people. Even the most indifferent and tolerant of all the Gibe kings, Abba Bagibo, was compelled to encourage proselytization in his country.⁵ It was also at this time that some aspects of Islamic law, the Sharia, started to influence the lives of the people. In matters of marriage and inheritance, Islamic law slowly but surely began to replace traditional Oromo law.⁶ It is not possible to say how much of the five pillars of Islam - Shahada,⁷ Salat,⁸ Sawm,⁹ Zakat,¹⁰ and Haji,¹¹ - were

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1. The Jimma interview programme, p. 3.
 2. E. Cerulli, Etiopia Occidentale, II, p. 96.
 3. W.C. Harris, The Highlands ..., III, p. 60.
 4. A. Cecchi, Da Zeila ..., II, p. 240. Though the kings of Gomma continued selling their non-Muslim slaves, they decisively ended the practice of selling their own Muslim subjects on various pretexts. This may reflect the strong influence of Islam in that land.
 5. A. d'Abbadie, Nouv.Acq.Fran.No. 21300, folio, 206, states that the spirit of proselytization among the Muslims was strong and that Abba Bagibo encouraged and compensated those Christians who changed their religion.
 6. Ibid., folio, 633-635.
 7. The affirmation that there is only one God and that Muhammad is his last and final messenger.
 8. The five daily prayers, which are the primary and most important obligations for a believer.
 9. Fasting once a year during the month of Ramadan (the ninth month of the lunar year).
 10. The donation of alms to the poor.
 11. The pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina, which is obligatory only for those who can afford it, once in a lifetime.

rigorously upheld by the people at large. Of the five,¹ fasting seems to have been well observed. Zakat was also introduced by the kings.²

Circumcision, which previously took place late in life, was now carried out early on. Even the Muslim calendar started to be used alongside the Oromo oral calendar.³ Islamic education mushroomed. This consisted of learning the Arabic alphabet and the memorization of the Quran. In this Gomma made a considerable achievement. By the late 1870s, "Both the old and the young always memorize the Quran, which is taught by the migrant Muslims."

Abba Jifar, the first king of Jimma, was converted to Islam by Shaikh Abdul Hakim⁵ who is known to have been a trader and preacher who came from Gondar.⁶ Another famous religious leader in Jimma was Abba Arabo.⁷ He seems to have been of an Arab origin. Today both Shaikh Abdul Hakim and Abba Arabo are considered as saints and annually thousands of believers visit their shrines.⁸ However, it was the former who seems to have been the standard bearer in the spread of Islam in Jimma. Abdul Hakim seems to have found the ground prepared for his missionary work in Jimma in 1830. Muslim traders had already cultivated friendly relations with Abba Magal, the father of Abba Jifar, in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. When Abba Jifar created the kingdom, he soon realized⁹ that it needed wealth and an ideology, which would not only nourish the unity of the people but also consolidate the dynasty's grip on the territory. According to Massaja, Abba Jifar embraced Islam for political and economic motives rather than for religious needs.

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1. These five pillars are the core of Ibadat, regulations relating to worship, on which the edifice of Islam rests, and which constitutes one of the three broad classifications of the Sharia. Jihad is sometimes considered to be the sixth pillar of Islam.
 2. *Infra*, p. 499.
 3. A. Cecchi, *Da Zeila ...*, II, p. 291.
 4. *Ibid.*, p. 240.
 5. The Jimma interview programme, p. 27.
 6. H.S. Lewis, *A Galla Monarchy*, pp. 41-2.
 7. Interview with Abba Jobir Abba Dula, Mecca, 3 June 1982.
 8. *Ibid.*; see also, the Jimma interview programme, p. 60.
 9. G. Massaja, *I miei trenta cinque anni*, VI, p. 10.

... Abba Jifar... thought that for reasons of stability and the future of his country, in addition to the material unity, it is essential to have religious unity as well. He chose Islam not only because it was comfortable, but because it favoured the idea of an absolute king. Having embraced Islam, and declared it the religion of the court, he invited to the kingdom a number of Muslim saints (teachers) to preach and spread the new religion. (1)

Despite this, it was only after 1860 that Islam won any considerable ground in Jimma. There were three main reasons for this. Firstly, the first two kings of Jimma were more interested in expanding the frontiers of their state than in spreading Islam among their people. It was only the third king, Abba Boka (1859-61) who devoted his short reign to the cause of Islam, thus earning himself the title of Al-Mahadi, the reformer.² The title is, perhaps, an exaggeration of the achievements of Abba Boka. However, what he did within that short span of time was indeed remarkable.³

... He built many mosques and ordered that mosques be built in each of the sixty provinces. He sent learned Muslims to proselytize and teach in the provinces. Abba Boka instituted the collection of the poor tax (Zaka) and set aside land (Wakfi) near Jiren, to be used by Muslim merchants (Negade) from the north who would settle there, pray at the Jiren mosques for the health of the king and the realm, and teach those who wanted to learn about Islam. (4)

Secondly, in the second half of the nineteenth century, Limmu-Enmarya declined militarily, politically and commercially, and as a result a large number of Muslim traders abandoned Saqqa in favour of Hirmata near Jiren. Jiren became the leading Muslim capital, famous for the learning of its scholars. Rising to importance three decades after Saqqa, Jiren outshone Saqqa, becoming the major centre of Islamic learning in the whole of southwestern Ethiopia.

In this, Jiren was helped by the third factor. As a result of the persecution of the Muslim Oromo in Wollo, first under Tewodros (1855-67) and then under Yohannes, a number of Muslims were forced to flee from Wollo. Some of these refugees seem to have come to Jimma. According to Abba Jobir, "Wollo was the land of Muslim saints, who were the mountain of knowledge."⁵

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1. G. Massaja, I miei trenta cinque anni, VI, p. 10.
 2. The manuscript of Abba Jobir Abba Dula, pp. 33-34.
 3. The mosque of Abba Boka, which is still found in the city of Jimma is said to have been the first to be built in that country. The writer had visited the said mosque several times during his stay in Jimma in 1974/5.
 4. H.S. Lewis, A. Galla Monarchy, p. 43.
 5. The manuscript of Abba Jobir Abba Dula, p. 11.

Certainly there were some learned men among the immigrants to Jimma, who increased the number of Muslim teachers in the capital and gave Jiren added lustre. Shortly after their arrival in the 1880s, Jimma claimed to have sixty madras (schools of higher education).¹ If this claim is true, it is an amazing achievement for Jimma. Perhaps this explains why Jimma became the most famous centre of Islamic learning for all Oromo of Ethiopia. Even today, along with Dawe in Wollo, Jimma is regarded as the best centre of Islamic learning in the Horn of Africa. Despite such enviable and deserved fame, Oromo scholars in Jimma produced only a modest religious literature in their own language.² Inspired by the desire to communicate their spiritual fervour and their love of saints, such as Abd Al-Qadir Al-Jalin and Nur Hussein of Bali, few Oromo scholars produced religious poetry in their own language. Perhaps the difficulty involved in writing Oromo in Arabic orthography³, coupled with the scholars' exaggerated reverence for Arabic as the language of the Quran and the mother tongue of the Prophet,⁴ hindered the flourishing of religious poems in the Oromo language. Be that as it may, Jimma was the most important centre of Islamic learning in the Gibe region.

Gumma was the second state to be formed, the fourth to accept Islam and the first to declare a jihad in the name of that religion. Islam became the religion of the ruling dyansty of Gumma only in the 1830s.⁵ Because of lack of written evidence,⁶ we do not know anything about the spread of Islam and the growth of Islamic education in Gumma. The one thing that is known with certainty is that, from the 1850s onwards, the throne of Gumma was occupied by ardent Muslim rulers who eventually declared a jihad in the name of Islam - although it was also in their own territorial interest. The first jihad was against their non-Muslim Oromo neighbours, but towards the end of the nineteenth century, Firrisa, the heir to the throne of Gumma, immortalized his name by declaring a jihad in the name of Islam and in the interests of the Oromo against the occupying Christian force.⁷

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1. The manuscript of Abba Jobir Abba Dula, p. 11.
 2. E. Cerulli, Etiopia Occidentale, II, p. 95.
 3. Ibid.
 4. e.g. the ms. of Abba Jobir, ibid, p. 40.
 5. C.T. Beke, "On the countries ... ", JRGS, III, pp. 258-9.
 6. According to the oral "Chronicle of the Kingdom of Gumma", E. Cerulli, Folk Literature of the Galla, pp. 148-162, the first Muslim king of that country "abolished the festival of butta."
 7. E. Cerulli, Folk-literature of the Galla of Southern Abyssinia, pp. 35-6.

Gera was the last state to be formed, and the last to accept Islam, in the late 1840s. The death of Abba Rago,¹ around 1848, was followed by a bloody power struggle between Abba Magal on the one hand and his brothers and cousins on the other. Abba Magal was a formidable and cunning individual, who saw his own salvation in an alliance with Abba Bagibo, the king of Limmu-Ennarya. The latter was even more cunning, an expert in submitting his own passions, as well as those of the zealous Muslims at his court, to the interest of his ambition, an ambition which he coloured with the cause of Islam. When Abba Magal appealed to him for military assistance, Abba Bagibo promised to help him on condition that, in the event of victory, Abba Magal would embrace Islam. As soon as Abba Bagibo's support put him on the throne of Gera, Abba Magal fulfilled his promise and embraced Islam. Yet he remained uncircumcised.² This would seem to indicate that his acceptance of Islam did not bring about any profound change in his life. Abba Magal reigned for the next two decades.

The most notorious of the kings of Gera was Abba Magal, a cruel man who was suspicious of everybody. He surrounded his house with thick banana plantations in which he hid and listened to the conversation of people who went there, in case anyone should try to plot against him. Near his house he made two cabins in which he confined his personal enemies shackled to heavy logs; in wet and dry weather alike they lay there half naked and starving in a most pitiable state. (3)

According to Cecchi, Abba Magal became a zealous Muslim towards the end of his life, as a result of a circular letter from the guardian of the tomb of the Prophet in Al-Madina, which was brought to Gera in 1866 by Abba Jobir, the king of Gumma.⁴ Perhaps it was this message which inspired and intoxicated Abba Jubir to embark on the jihad against the non-Muslim Oromo. The circular letter failed to provoke a similar response in Gera, but it may have contributed to the process of proselytization, which was in full swing by 1870. By 1879, when Cecchi was in Gera, the court was thoroughly Islamized, and there were several fugahas and shaikhs who taught and prayed at the tomb of Abba Magal. The reigning queen was noted for buying hundreds of copies of the Quran, which she distributed amongst the nobility.⁵ This

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1. Abba Rago was the first king of Gera, who created that state in the 1830s.
 2. G. Massaja, I miei trenta cinque anni, III, p. 34.
 3. A. Cecchi, Da Zeila ..., II, p. 267. Translation by Huntingford in Some Records of Ethiopia, preface p. lxxxv.
 4. A. Cecchi, ibid., pp. 268-9. See also J.S. Trimmingham, Islam in Ethiopia, p. 202.
 5. A. Cecchi, ibid., pp. 305-6.

is all that can be said about the spread of Islam in Gera, owing to the paucity of our information.

We conclude this note on the spread of Islam in the Gibe region with the following remarks. As we saw above, the spread of Islam was preceded by commerce, and its agents were the Muslim Jabarti traders from the north, mainly from Gondar, the Oromo-speaking Warjeh from Shawa, from Wollo and some from Harar. The Jabarti traders brought to the Gibe region not only imported luxury foreign goods but also a non-purchasable commodity, Islam, which was eventually to change the ideological orientation of the Oromo society in the Gibe region. The Oromo language was the lingua franca of trade at the time, and the majority of the agents of Islamic radiation were Oromo speakers. This may have facilitated the spread of Islam by overcoming the difficult problem of communication. First it was the kings who accepted Islam, and they imposed it on the ruling class.¹ The conversion of the kings and the ruling class ensured the gradual spread of Islam among the people in the region. After 1861, all the thrones of the Gibe states were occupied by zealous Muslim rulers. The existence of rival centres of power may have contributed to the spread of Islam and the growth of Islamic learning, since the kings may have vied² with one another in attracting Muslim preachers and teachers to enhance the lustre of their capitals.

1. E. Cerulli, Etiopia Occidentale, II, p. 94.

2. e.g. The manuscript of Abba Jobir Abba Dula, pp. 34-41. See also the Jimma interview programme, pp. 8, 61.

Select BibliographyA. Unpublished primary sources.

1. The manuscript of Abba Jobir Abba Dula, the last king of Jimma Abba Jifar. This contains recent history, oral traditions, as well as fantastic legends of bygone ages. It is particularly strong on the history of four kings of Jimma Abba Jifar, who reigned between 1830 and 1932.
2. The manuscript of Shaikh Bakri Sapalo, entitled "Kitab irsāl al-sawarikh ita samā al-tawarikh". This sketches an overall panorama of Oromo history from early times to the present. Although it is not free from major limitations on early Oromo history, it contains much useful data on the gada system.
3. Bakre's manuscript. Although this deals with history of the Oromo briefly, its main thrust is the history of the Oromo in Wallaga. It depicts the struggle for power and traces the rise to power of, and the prominence of, the Bakre family in Wallaga.

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10,222	21,301	21,305	22,433	23,851
10,223	21,302	22,430	23,848	23,852
21,299	21,303	22,431	23,849	23,853
21,300	21,304	22,432	23,850	

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Antoine d'Abbadie

Ordre des Frères Mineurs Capucins (MAE)

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1970B Ethiopia

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Interview Materials used in this work

Borrowed Material

I used much oral interview material which was collected by others from the Gibe region and Wallaga. This was of three kinds : 1) the Jimma interview programme, which consists of several hundred pages, and was the product of extensive field work conducted in the Gibe region in 1974 by a team of history students of Addis Ababa University; 2) Interviews with Blatta Dressa Amonte, recorded between 3rd April 1962 and 15th December 1962, in Bishofitu (Debre Zeit), which covers Oromo history, the Gada system and Bakre's rise to power in Wallaga; 3) Oral interviews conducted by A. Triulzi as follows :

- a) Interviews with Qannazmach Abdisa Musa in Nāqāmté on 3rd August 1972;
- b) Interview with Ato Na'a Bassa, in Nāqāmté on 27th January 1972;
- c) Interview with Ato Tāmasgan Gāmada and others in Nāqāmté on 5th February 1972 and d) Interview with Fitwarari Yāmanā G. Eggiabhir, in Nāqāmté on 4th February, 1972.

I am greatly indebted to Alexander Triulzi for his kindness in allowing me to use all this material.

Personal interviews

When I went to Mogadishu to participate in the First International Somali Congress in July 1980, I was lucky enough to interview many Oromo nationals who lived in the Somali capital. In June 1982, when I went to Saudi Arabia, I was able to interview many Oromo nationals there. Of the many people I saw, only the information which I received from the following has been really helpful : Shaikh Muhammed Rashad, age 50, in Mogadishu on 17th July 1980, who has a thorough knowledge of the history of the Harar Oromo; Abba Jobir Abba Dula, age 80, in Mecca on 13th June 1982, who is well versed in Oromo history in general, and the history of the Gibe region in particular; and thirdly Muhammed Abdukarim, age 50, in Jeddah on 17th June 1982, who is well informed on Harar Oromo history and lived in northern Somalia, where he gained much knowledge of the previous presence of the Oromo in that region.