CHAPTER EIGHT

MAJOR EVENTS OF THE 16TH CENTURY ETHIOPIAN REGION AND THE HORN OF AFRICA AND THEIR IMPACTS

GOLDEN WORDS

- **Abba Boku** **“Borana and Barentu”** **- Abba Muda**

“MaddaWalabu **King Gelawdewos** **- Waqa**

“Prester John of the Indies” **-Christopher da Gama** **- Qallu**

- Queen Elleni **-battle of ShimbraQure**

-“The Gada System”

John Bermudez **- battle of WeynaDega** **- Abba Dula**

Bati Dil Wambara **- Ahmad Ibn Ibrahim al- Ghazi** - **LebneDengel**

8.1. Portuguese and Ottoman Turkish Rivalries in the Ethiopian Region and the Horn of Africa

“The legend of the Prester John of the Indies”

™ .The legend of the **Prester John of the Indies** was important for the revival of the foreign relations of Ethiopia with Christian Europe.

™ .The legend was developed by the Christian Europeans during the time of the Crusade in the mid 12th century.

™ . When the European Christians were defeated by the Muslim forces in the Holy Land.

™ .The legend was about the existence of an extremely wealthy and powerful Christian king somewhere in the East.

™ .The objective of creating the legend was to reinforce the religious morale of the European Christians.

™ .It promised that a fabulously rich and strong Christian king known as the ***"Prester John of the Indies was marching from India to the Middle East in support of his fellow Christians and fight against the Muslims. For this he invited the kings of Christian Europe to join in his mission. As a result, the European Christian states hoped to form an alliance with this powerful king against Islam"***.

™ .However, they did not know the where about of the kingdom ruled by the Prester John.

™ . Both confirmed the existence of a strong Christian kingdom in the Horn of Africa, which defeated and conquered the Muslim sultanates of the area.

™ .The Ethiopian pilgrims who visited the Holy Land also spread exaggerated news about the power of the Christian kingdom of their country.

European powers and the Christian kingdom of Ethiopia

™ .As a result, any European who got this information, began to associate the name Prester John with the Christian kingdom of Ethiopia.

™ .Some European powers even sought to establish closer relationship with it.

™ .In fact, the highland Christian kingdom of that time was very strong.

™ .It expanded at the expense of the Muslim states in the southeast.

™ .European monarchs began to communicate with this Christian state through letters.

™ .For instance, in 1400 King Henry IV of England wrote a letter.

™ . To the Christian king addressing him as the Prester John.

™ . In this letter he requested the king to provide a military help.

™ .To liberate the Holy Land from the Muslims.

™ .The Portuguese succeeded to send a delegation to Ethiopia in 1494.

Portuguese and Ottoman Turkish Rivalries in the Ethiopian Region and the Horn of Africa

ξ .The Portuguese expansion of the early sixteenth century in the Indian Ocean.

ξ .It was the result of the voyages of exploration of the preceding century.

ξ .In the Middle Ages, the overland route which connected Europe with the Far East passed through the Middle East.

ξ . This territory fell under the rule of the Ottomans.

ξ .The Muslim rivals of the Portuguese.

- .Who captured the city of Constantinople in 1453.
- .Subsequently, the Turks monopolized the trade.
- .Imposed high taxes on the goods coming from the Far East.
- .The spices were produced only in the Far East.
- .The people of the Far East sold spices to Arab, Indian and Chinese merchants.
- .These merchants shipped the spices to Egypt.
- .where they were sold to Venetian merchants.
- .Finally, the Venetian merchants sold the spices.
- .In the European markets at a high price.
- .The Portuguese dominance in the Red Sea.
- .The Indian Ocean undermined the economic.
- .Political interest of the Ottoman Turks.
- .Thus, the Turks immediately challenged the Portuguese.
- .In 1517, they defeated the Egyptian Mamluks.
- .Extended their power over the whole country.
- .The Turks used Egypt as a base from where.
- .They attacked the Portuguese naval forces in the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean.

8.2. Conflicts between the Sultanate of Adal and the Highland Christian Kingdom

- .During the years of the civil war the sultans lost their power.
- .Actual power was held by Emirs or Imams who completely dominated the sultans.
- .The emirs and imams fought for power.
- .Only few imams held power for long years.
- .Mahfuz was one of the powerful emirs who strengthened the sultanate.
- .Helaunched a series of attacks on the Christian kingdom.
- .From the last decade of the fifteenth century onwards.
- Mahfuz’s attacks continued throughout the reigns of Eskindir (r. 1478-1494).
- And Na’od (r. 1494-1508).
- Finally, he was killed in a battle with the army of LebneDengel (r. 1508-1540) in 1517.

Ahmad Ibn Ibrahim al- Ghazi

- .After the death of Mahfuz, various emirs fought against one another for power.

- .But finally the leadership of the Muslim sultanate of Adal passed.
- .To a powerful imam called Ahmad Ibn Ibrahim al- Ghazi.
- .who was commonly known in Ethiopian Highland Christian tradition as Ahmad Gragn (the left handed).
- .The family background and early life of the Imam are not sufficiently known.
- .According to his chronicler, he was born to a clan called Balaw in Hubat.
- .A place located between Harar and Jijjiga
- .Near the present-day Babile.
- . He served as a cavalry officer of Mahfuz.
- .And also married to his daughter, BatiDilWambara.
- .He was an energetic and a very tactful man.
- .As such, he systematically got rid of his rivals one after the other
- He became the Imam of Adal.
- .Ahmad ibn Ibrahim tried to consolidate his rule in the lowlands.
- .Thus, after much internal fighting's between the Afar, Somali and Harari, Ahmad was able to restore peace in the area.
- . He persuaded the fighting groups to make up their differences
- .Helaunches a war against the highland Christian kingdom.
- .By playing the role of an arbitrator
- .He restored peace in the lowland regions
- .He recruited soldiers from the peoples of the area.
- .He also strengthened his army by instilling the spirit of Jihad into the conflict.

CAUSES OF THE CONFLICT

- .It should be noted that the conflict between the highland Christian kingdom
- .The Muslim sultanate was not over religious issues.
- .This inter-state rivalry was the extension of the earlier conflict.
- . The conflict was between the Solomonic and Walasma rulers.
- . Over the basic economic interest.
- . That is the control of the lucrative Zeila trade routes.
- . The lands through which these routes passed.
- . The Muslims were also fighting to regain the independence.
- .Which they lost to the Christian kingdom earlier.
- .Create a Muslim empire of their own.
- .Therefore, as soon as he consolidated his power in the lowlands.
- .Imam Ahmad began to make preparations for a war against the Christian kingdom.

Course of the Conflicts between the Sultanate of Adal and the

Highland Christian Kingdom

- Ψ .Ahmad opened his campaigns on the Christian kingdom in 1527.
- Ψ .In this year, Ahmad's forces successfully raided Dawaro, Fatagar and Bali.
- Ψ .The tributaries of the Christian kingdom.
- Ψ .Emperor LebneDengel, who defeated and killed Mahfuz in 1517.
- Ψ .And who never expected a serious Muslim threat after Mahfuz's death.
- Ψ .Responded by ordering Degelham, the governor of Bali, to march to Adal.
- Ψ . But Degelham was defeated by the Muslim forces of the Imam in Adal.
- Ψ .In all this he faced no strong resistance from the Christian kingdom.
- Ψ .This strengthened his confidence.
- Ψ .And forced him to launch a conventional war against the Christian kingdom.

The battle of ShimbraQure (March 1529)

- Ψ .Finally, Ahmad fought a major battle with the Christian army.
- Ψ .Led by LebneDengel in March 1529 at a place called ShimbraQure, near Mojjo.
- Ψ .At this battle LebneDengel and his army suffered a crushing defeat.
- Ψ .From which they could not recover.
- Ψ .LebneDengel retreated to the center of the kingdom.
- Ψ .Imam's soldiers were also killed or wounded in the battle.
- Ψ .And consequently the victorious Imam returned to Harar to celebrate his victory.
- Ψ .And reinforces his army for the next campaign.

Aftermath of The battle of ShimbraQure

- Ψ .Whenever the different sultanates in the region had the power.
- Ψ .They used to attack each other to control the trade routes.
- Ψ .They also carried out raids on the borders of the Christian kingdom.
- Ψ .The Imam wanted to change this strategy.
- Ψ .His ambition was to build a big empire in the Horn of Africa.
- Ψ .Therefore, in 1531 he resumed his campaign.
- Ψ .And led the Adal army to Dawaro and Bali.
- Ψ .The two sultanates were easily defeated and were annexed to Adal.
- Ψ .He wanted to force the retreating King LebneDengel to surrender.
- Ψ . As such, from 1531 onwards no part of the kingdom was left untouched.
- Ψ .At the time, the Imam's command centers were DebreBerhan, Wajand Dawaro. From these centers, the commanders of his army moved to the south, southwest and west.
- Ψ .The campaign took a little more than a year.
- Ψ .And was completed in the middle of 1533.

- Ψ .Finally, the sultanate of Adal established its hegemony over the Ethiopian region and a large part of the Horn of Africa.
- Ψ .The territory was divided into provinces which were ruled by governors appointed by Imam Ahmad.
- Ψ .At first, the Imam established his centre in Aksum.
- Ψ .Later on, the centre shifted to Dembiya, near Lake Tana.
- Ψ .From this centre, the Imam ruled the empire until his defeat and death in 1543.
- Ψ .Since the 1529 Battle of ShimbraQure, LebneDengel had lived as a fugitive.
- Ψ .However, he remained optimistic about defeating the Imam one day.
- Ψ .Finally, LebneDengel lost any hope of defeating the Imam by himself.
- Ψ .Therefore, he decided to ask the Portuguese for military assistance.

Portuguese diplomatic mission

- Φ .The Portuguese diplomatic mission to the Christian kingdom stayed in the country for six years, until 1526.
- Φ .When the mission departed for Portugal.
- Φ .One of its members **called John Bermudez** remained in the court of LebneDengel.
- Φ .In 1535 LebneDengel sent Bermudez to Europe with two letters addressed to the Pope of Rome and the King of Portugal.
- Φ . It took Bermudez six years to accomplish his mission.
- Φ .He first went to Europe and submitted the letters to the Pope of Rome in Italy.
- Φ .And to the King of Portugal in Lisbon.
- Φ .Then he took a letter of order from the king of Portugal.
- Φ .To the Portuguese colony of Goa in India.
- Φ According to the order the Viceroy of India in Goa was empowered.
- Φ .To sends a strong military force to the Christian kingdom.

Portuguese Military assistanceto the Christian kingdom

- Φ .In 1541, Bermudez arrived with 400 soldiers led by **Christopher da Gama**.
- Φ .The younger son of famous sailor, Vasco da Gama.
- Φ .LebneDengel did not live to see the arrival of the military assistance.
- Φ .He had died in 1540 in the monastery of **DebreDamo in Tigray**
- Φ .He was succeeded by his son **Gelawdewos (r.1540-1559).**
- Φ .Up to the battle of Agame, the Imam was at his center in Dembiya.
- Φ .He immediately moved to the Simen mountains.

- .He established a new command center in **Deresge.**
- .The Imam first led his army to attack the Portuguese in **Seharti**.
- .With the help of their canon, the Portuguese defeated the Imam's army.
- .The Imam himself was seriously wounded and narrowly escaped capture.
- .The Portuguese pursued the defeated army.
- .Two weeks later they gave another battle.
- .After heavy fighting, the Portuguese again defeated the Adal army.
- .The wounded Imam and his army retreated to the southeast of Lake Ashenge.
- .The Portuguese also moved southwards.
- They camped in Wafla south of the Lake.
- .Where they awaited the coming of King Gelawdewos

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The OttomansMilitary assistance to the Muslim Sultanate

- .The Ottomans responded immediately.
- .By sending **900 infantry** men armed with muskets and canons.
- .As soon as the military assistance arrived the Imam marched against the Portuguese who were still awaiting the king in **Wafla.**
- .In the battle that followed, the Portuguese suffered a crushing defeat.
- .Their wounded commander, **Christopher da Gama**, was captured and killed.
- .The defeated and demoralized Portuguese army retreated to the northwest.
- They met with Gelawdewos towards the end of 1542.
- .Meanwhile, the victorious Imam returned to his former center in Dembiya.
- .He sent back most of the Ottoman troops.
- . By doing so, the Imam committed a fatal mistake.
- .The Portuguese were not completely defeated.
- .They were so furious at the death of their commander which they wanted to avenge.
- .Moreover, the Portuguese presence had raised the morale of the Christian army.
- .Under Gelawdewos.

The battle of WaynaDega(February 1543)

- Immediately, Gelawdewos led the combined forces against the army of the Imam in Dembiya.
- .The decisive battle was fought in February 1543.

- .At a place called WaynaDega, near Lake Tana.
- .In the course of the battle, the Imam was shot by one of the Portuguese soldiers.
- .A little later, the Imam died and his army retreated to Adal.

Results or Consequences Conflicts between the Sultanate of Adal and the Highland Christian Kingdom

- .The battle of WaynaDega brought the dominance of the sultanate of Adal in the Ethiopian region to an end.
- .Ultimately, the war weakened both fighting sides.
- .The war had exhausted both the Christian kingdom the sultanate of Adal.
- .Several churches, monasteries and mosques were looted and burnt to the ground.
- .Invaluable documents deposited in these institutions were also destroyed.
- .It was a loss of several cultural heritages.
- .As a result, there was a severe population reduction in the region.
- .It was a loss of an immense wealth both in human and in material. Above all, the war undermined the power of the Christian kings by destroying the earlier professional soldiers built over the preceding centuries.
- .The military conflict was also responsible in part for population movements in the region.
- .Many people changed their settlement area to avoid the conflict.
- .The war also led to the intermixing of different ethnic and religious groups of the region.
- . For example, the Muslim lowlanders settled amidst the highland Christians.
- .This minimized the religious and ethnic differences in the region.

8.3. Oromo Population Movement

- .The Oromo population movement was one of the great events of the sixteenth century Ethiopia.
- .The Oromo are one of the indigenous and oldest peoples of Ethiopia and the Horn.

® .Different linguistic evidences ascertain that they belong to the Cushitic - speaking group of peoples, who are culturally and linguistically interrelated.

8.3.1. Original Homeland of the Oromo

® . According to the traditions, the original homeland of the Oromo people is the highlands of the present **Bale** and **Sidamo** provinces.
® .This is because almost all of the Oromo clans in Ethiopia attribute their origin:-
® To either one of the following places: **HarroWalabu**, **TulluWalal, TulluQurqur** and **HarroGirja**, all located in the two provinces.
® .Before the sixteenth century, this region had been part of the territory of the medieval sultanate of Bali.
® .But this does not mean that the homeland of the Oromo before the sixteenth century was only the highlands of historical Bali.
® .While the ritual and political centers,
® .More specifically **known as MaddaWalabu**,
® .Of various Oromo clans were located in the highlands,
® .A number of Oromo groups also lived outside these centers.
® .For instance, sedentary Oromo groups existed in the sultanate of Sharka and Dawaro.
® .Some of them also existed in the sultanate of Adal, particularly around the middle course of the Awash River.

8.3.2. Oromo Institutions and Social Organization

® .The Oromo's were organized into two separate confederacies called
i. **Borana** and
ii. **Barentu**.

i.Borana

® The Borana confederacy consisted of the
∇ **.Macha-Tulama**,
∇ **.Guji**and
∇ **.Southern Borana**clans .

ii.Barentu

® .The Barentuconsisted of
∇ **.Karayu**

- .**Ittu**
- .**Marawa**
- .**Akachu**,
- .**Warantisha** and
- .**Humbana**.
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Economy

- .In the highlands of Bali and practiced mixed farming.
- .The lowlands in the immediate south and northwest of the highlands provided an excellent pasture, where young men took cattle for grazing.
- .The Oromo who practiced mixed farming permanently settled in the highlands, while the pastoral groups constantly moved with their cattle in the lowlands.

Religion

- .Before their conversion to Islam or Christianity,
- .the Oromo worshipped their own traditional religion.
- .In this traditional religion, the Oromo believed in one supreme God called**Waqa**,
- .which refers both to the sky and the sky God.
- .They believed that Waqa is the ultimate power in the universe.
- . It is also the source of life and nature.
- .The power of Waqa is manifested through a spirit called **Ayana**.
- .The spiritual leader in the Oromo traditional religion was known as **Qallu**.

The Qallu

- .He was a high priest and believed to be possessed by the Ayana.
- .He served as an intermediary between the Waqa and Oromo people.
- .He was also the guardian of the laws of Waqa.
- .As a result, Qallu was highly respected by the people.
- .He can exercise great influence beyond the spiritual sphere in the economic, political and social life of the people.
- .Young and adult men visited the Qallu to get his blessing.
- .Children were also taken to him for the same purpose.
- .The Qallu was also called **Abba Muda**, i.e., father of anointment.
- .He got this name from the ceremony named muda.

® .This ceremony was celebrated once every eight years in honour of the Qallu.
® .In the ceremony, the Qallu gave his blessing and anointed the gada officials who governed the Oromo for eight years.
® Thus, the muda ceremony was the point at which the gada system and the Qallu institution intersected.

The Gada System

® .The social and political life of the Oromo people was directed by an institution called the **gada system.**
® .Many scholars who studied the Oromo history suggest that the Gada System must have existed along before the 16th century.
® .As the Oromo had an elaborately organized system at the beginning of their movement in the 1520s,
® .The gada system isan arrangement of interacting parts in which overall system is fitted together.

The Gada is:-

- An arrangement of social categories usually called "**Grades'**;
- An arrangement of men into group usually called parties or **"sets";**
- An arrangement of tasks or work to be performed; and
- An arrangement of ideas, principles and rules.

® .Two distinct categories existed in the gada system, which are very important to understand how the system worked.
® .The categories, called the **gada grade** and **gada class**, worked in parallel or side by side.

1.<u>The Five commonly used party (group) names used in the Gada system are:-</u>

1. **Birmaji Robale**
2. **Horata**
3. **Bichile**
4. **Duulo**
5.

® All male Oromo joined the gada system at their birth.
® .Joining the system was marked by membership to one of the five classes.
® .At the same time, the members of the class would enter the first grade.

- .Those who became members of one of the classes would remain for the rest of their lives as members of that class.
- . Rather, they would stay for eight years in one grade.
- .Thenpasses to the next grade, where they again would stay for another eight years.
- .In short, every eight years members of gada class passed from one grade to the next grade until they completed the last eight years of the tenth grade.
- .After completing the eight years of the last grade,
- .The members of the gada class would leave the gada system.

2.The grades or Eight year periods, through which parties/classes or

Age sets" passed are;

Grade	Number of years in The Grade	Age of individuals
Iti-Mako	**0 up to 8**	**8 up to16**
Dabale	**8 up to 16**	**16 up to24**
Folle	**18 up to 24**	**24 up to 32**
Qondala	**24 up to 32**	**32 up to 40**
Luba	**32 up to 40**	**40 up to 48**

- . Five parties operated at one time in a forty-year cycle.
- . Each group/party was assigned by the rules of Gada to take specific responsibilities
- .Engage in certain kinds of a work for collectivity during the eight years that the members held each other.
- .The gada government called **Chaffe (assembly)**
- .Was set up by officials elected from the members of the gada class.
- .Officials were elected on the basis of their ability and merit.

- . Among the officials, the highest authority was vested upon the **abbabokku or abbagada (father of the gada, i.e the spokesman**).
- . Under the abbagada various other officials such as **abba sera or chief of judge**
- .And abbadula, or commander of the army, were elected.
- .These elected officers were simply the representatives of the reigning set.

8.3.3. Cause and Directions of the Oromo Movement

- .The main cause for the movement of the Oromo was population pressure.
- .However, the conflict between the Christian kingdom and the Muslim states seems to have accelerated their free movement in the region.
- .Nevertheless, the centuries-long conflict between the Christian kingdom and the Muslim states reached its climax with the wars of Imam Ahmad in the sixteenth century which weakened the border defense of the Christian kingdom and accelerated the northward movement of the Oromo people.
- . It was mainly a movement in search of grazing land for their cattle and a breathing space for themselves.
- .As a result, between the 1550s and 1580s there was a rapid Oromo population movement into the central, southeastern, western, southern and northern regions of Ethiopia.
- .The Oromo also moved to the present day Kenya and Somalia.
- .At the beginning of the 1560s, the Oromo established their new center in Fatagar, at a place called OdaNabi, in Dukam, about 30 kilometers, southeast of Adis Ababa.
- .From this centre, the Oromo launched periodic campaigns in the western direction against Waj, Bizamo, Damot and Gafat.
- .In the course of these campaigns, the Christian army led by SarseDingil (r.1563 - 1597) scored a victory over the Oromo warriors.
- .As a result, part of the population of Bizamo and Damot fled across the Abbay to southern Gojjam, while others were assimilated by the Oromo settlers.
- .In the southwest, the Oromo met stiff resistance from the medieval state of Enarya.
- .The Oromo attack against this state began in the first decade of the seventeenth century.
- .But the heroic resitance of Enarya continued throughout the century until it was finally defeated by the Limu Oromo in 1710.

® .South of the Gojeb River, the kingdom of Kafa successfully repelled the attack of the Oromo and curbed their expansion to the south of the river.

The direction of the movement

® **The Tulama and Mecha** movement began at about 1522 from HarroWalabu in Sidamo. From this center, the pastoralists took the northward direction and passed through corridor between Lake Abbaya and Mount Walabu

® **The Arsi** who left the highlands of Bale and moved towards the northwest to their present territory around Lake Zway.

® **.The southern Borana** who left their centre in northwestern Bale and moved southwards to their present territory.

® **.The Karrayyu** who lived in the upper course of WabiShebele, from where they moved eastwards to their present territory in the eastern lowland.

® **.The Ittu and Humbana clans** who left the highlands of Bale and moved to their present territory around Harar.

® .**The Guji** had already launched their northward movement earlier.

® .The movement began at about **1522** and subsided around **1604**.

® .The exception was the resistance of Enarya which lasted up to **1710**.

The success of the Oromo population movement

® .There are two important reasons for the success of the Oromo population movement.

i. **First**, the strong nature of Oromo socio-politico-military organization gave them superiority in military tactics.

® Under the Gada system, all male members are trained in various military practices from their early childhood.

® .Because of this, young boys were always eager to become warriors.

ii. **Second**, the civil war which had exhausted the major states of the Horn of Africa also contributed a lot to the success of the Oromo population movement.

® As a result of the conflict, both the highland Christian kingdom and the Muslim sultanates were weakened militarily.

- They could not withstand the Oromo expansion of the second half of the sixteenth century.

8.3.4. Consequences of Oromo Population Movement

- .The movement took various Oromo clans to faraway places in Ethiopia.
- .The Oromo also engaged in war with various states of the period.
- .The consequences of the movement equally affected both Oromo and the states and societies of the period.
- .The Christian kingdom was restricted to the north of River Abbay.
- . In the eastern lowland, the sultanate of Adal was reduced to a city-state surrounded by the wall of Harar.
- .In the southwestern and southern part of the Ethiopian region, the Kingdom of Kafa and Welayita survived mainly because of their heroic resistance and sacrifices.
- .But the others such as Damot, Gafat, Bizamo, Bali, Hadiya, Ifat, Dawaro and Fatagar were highly influenced and some of them were completely destroyed.
- . The communities who accepted the Oromo peacefully were treated kindly.
- .Their property would not be looted.
- .The movement also increased the interaction between the Oromo and the people with whom they came into contact.
- .The result was an exchange of socio-cultural values and institutions.
- .Several ethnic groups in the neighbourhood of the Oromo adopted the gada system.
- .The Oromo also took various socio-cultural elements from the peoples among whom they settled or from their neighbours.
- .The consequence of the population movement on the traditional political system of the Oromo people was particularly severe.
- .Using the income from trade and agriculture, some successful abbadulas or war leaders began to build private armies by which they controlled land, markets and trade routes.
- .They also began to impose their authority first on their clans and then expanded their territories at the expense of their neighbours.
- .Unfortunately, the traditional gada system did not provide for a mechanism of controlling such ambitious war leaders, who remained in power for long period of time and eventually assumed the title of **moti (king**).
- .In addition to these internal factors, there were also external factors which affected the gada system.

- .In this regard, the Oromo borrowed some elements of the political system of kingship from the neighbouring peoples.
- .Consequently, the authority of the gada system was gradually undermined and the political system based on kingship developed among the Oromo of the Gibe basin, where Limmu-Enarya, Jimma, Gera, Goma and Guma were the major states of the region.
- .Similar states also developed in Wallagga: LeeqaaQellem, LeeqaaNaqamtee and Horo-Guduru.