

CHAPTER FIVE

Chapter Five: Politics, Economy and Social Processes from the early 16th to the end of the 18th Centuries

Major developments of the period:

- ✓ Expansion of trade
- ✓ Conflicts between the Christian Kingdom and Muslim Sultanates and foreign interventions
- ✓ Population movements of the Afar, the Somali, the Argoba and the Oromo
- ✓ Religious expansions, interaction of peoples and the resultant integration across ethnic and religious diversities
- ✓ Historical development connected with the Gondarine Period (1636-1769) and *Zemene-Mesafint* (1769-1855) including the Yejju rule (1786-1853)

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5.1. Conflict between the Christian Kingdom and the Sultanate of Adal, 16th century

- ❑ **Root cause of the conflicts/wars:** Competition and struggle for control over the trade routes
- ✓ While mal-administration and exploitation of periphery made military mobilization possible, **religion** provided ideological justification for the wars.
- ✓ Open wars fought between the Christian Kingdom and the Sultanate of Adal that lasted from 1529 to 1543.
- ✓ From the side of the Muslims Imam Ahmed Ibn Ibrahim al-Ghazi or Ahmad 'Gagn'-Ahmad the 'left hand') provided leadership needed in the wars. He was born at Hubet an area located between Dire Dawa and Jigjiga and raised by his devout Muslim kin in one of the oases on the route to Zeila.
- ✓ Imam Ahmad was a rigorous and ardent believer of Islam. He served as soldier under *Garad* Abun of Adal.
- ✓ Following the death of *Garad* Abun, Imam Ahmad started calling for devotion to the teachings of Islam and immediately he took power.

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- ✓ In his leadership he convinced, mobilized and united the pastoral communities of the Afar, the Somali, the Harla, Harari and others to confront the Christian highland kingdom.
- ✓ Soon, Adal fell under Imam Ahmed's army. In 1520 Imam Ahmed became strong militarily. Subsequently, he refused to pay tribute to the Christian Kingdom and fighting started b/n the two parties in 1527. The Imam's army fought fiercely and controlled the territories including Bali, Dawaro, Fatagar, Sidama, Hadiya and Kambata and the Christian Kingdom was at risk.
- ✓ **From the side of the Christian Kingdom**, in 1528 Lebne-Dengel mobilized large forces from his domain and encamped about fifty kilometers east of what is now Addis Ababa. But there were logistic and leadership problems among this group.
- ✓ On the contrary, Imam Ahmed's army managed logistics problems with its small-sized army. The Imam's army had also an excellent leadership characterized by better mobility and flexible tactics with a unified command.

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- ✓ As a result, the larger and well-equipped Christian army was defeated in one of the most decisive engagement at the battle of Shimbira Kure in 1529, near present day Mojo.

Engagement of women during the conflict: Bati Del Wanbara Mahfuz, the wife of Imam Ahmad was engaged in the conflict and there was also the contribution of Seblewongel, the wife of Lebne-Dengel of the Christian highland kingdom during the conflict (in 1542).

Consequences of the battle: 1.Imam Ahmad's force controlled the territories of the Christian Kingdom including Shewa, Amhara, Lasta, and moved as far north as Mereb Melash. Imam Ahmed's empire stretched from Zeila to Massawa on the coast including the Ethiopian interior.

2. The war made Lebne-Dengel to retreat and he finally died in 1540 being fugitive/in exile.

External Support: The Christian highland kingdom obtained support from Portugal. Thus, because of the request made by Lebne-Dengel in 1535, about four hundred Portuguese soldiers, armed with matchlocks arrived in the court of the king in 1541.The army was led by **Christopher da Gama**, the youngest son of Vasco da Gama.

- ✓ Similarly, Imam Ahmed had received Turkish musketeers.

The 1543 engagement (The battle of Woyna-Dega):

- ✓ Since the war b/n the two parties was not concluded, on the part of the Christian kingdom, preparations were made for final confrontation under the leadership of Emperor Gelawdewos (r.1540-1559).
- ✓ Thus, with the advice of his mother-Seble-Wongel, Gelawdewos marched against the forces of Imam Ahmad. Therefore, on February 25, 1543 while Imam Ahmed was encamped near Lake Tana, he was attacked and killed after a fierce fighting at the battle of Woyna-Dega.
- ✓ Gelawdewos, however, was tolerant toward the Muslim communities and he attempted to promote the revival of smooth relations with the Muslim world.
- But Adal under the leadership of Nur Ibn al-Waazir Mujahid was ready to wage war against the Christian state for revenge. In 1559, the forces of Emir Nur confronted Gelawdewos and killed the king himself.

Overall consequence of the Muslim-Christian kingdom conflict:

- 1.Huge human and material cost.
2. Both the Muslim Sultanate and Christian Kingdom were weakened and were unable to stop the Oromo population movement.

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5.2. Foreign Intervention and Religious Controversies

- ✓ The Orthodox church was weakened by the wars against the sultanate of Adal. The destruction of property and deaths of its clergy hampered the operation of the Church and therefore, its service as an ideological arm of the state. Similarly, the war had impacted Islamic religious services among the Muslim communities.
- ✓ The rulers of the Christian Kingdom may have regarded an alliance with Roman Catholicism as a tactic to secure sufficient modern weaponry and training to restore its lost territories.
- ✓ In 1557, several Jesuit missionaries along with their bishop, Andreas de Oviedo, came to Ethiopia to expand Catholicism.
- ✓ The leading members of the Jesuit mission who played key role in efforts to evangelize the country include Joao Bermudez, Andreas de Oviedo, Pedro Paez and Alfonso Mendez.
- ✓ The Jesuits got relative success with Emperor Za-Dengel (r. 1603-4) who was secretly converted into Catholicism.

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- ✓ In 1612, Susenyos was converted into Catholicism and announced it to be state religion later in 1622. He integrated the Oromo with the forces of central government to consolidate his power and then stabilize the country.
- ✓ King Susenyos's reign was full of controversies, rebellions, and repressions and the state came to the verge of falling apart during his time. In a battle in June 1632, large number of peasants lost their lives in one day. Finally, the Emperor abdicated the throne in favor of Fasiledas, who countered the Catholic transformation and restored Orthodox Christianity into a state religion.
- ✓ By fearing another religious conflict, Emperor Fasiledas introduced a new policy called "Close-Door Policy", which isolated the state from all Europeans for about a century and a half.
- ✓ On the contrary, he adopted a policy of close diplomatic relations with the Islamic world and formed an alliance with the neighboring Muslim states.
- ✓ However, the Jesuit intervention triggered doctrinal divisions and controversy within the Ethiopian Orthodox Church that was divided into disputant sects and reached its peak during the *Zemene Mesafint*.

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5.3. Population Movements

- ✓ Historically, it was common in Ethiopia and the Horn to see People's movement from place to place due to different factors such as **push and pull factors** or due to **socio-political conditions** which involved military conflicts, drought and demographic factors.
- ✓ Population movements of the medieval period had extensive effects including the integration and intermingling of peoples across ethnic and religious lines also resulting in intermarriage of peoples, change of abode, original culture and evolution of new identities.

1. Population Movements of the Argoba, Afar, and Somali

Causes: 1. Partly because of the military conflict of the Christian Kingdom and the Sultanate of Adal in the late 15th and the early 16th centuries

2. Demographic pressure

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○ **The Argoba:**

- ✓ The Argoba were major agents of Islamic expansion, trade and Muslim state formation in the Horn.
- ✓ They were dominant group in the sultanate of Ifat and became the center of Muslim resistance. They also became integral part of Muslim resistance during the wars of Imam Ahmed.
- ✓ Since the major caravan trade routes passed through Argoba territory, Argoba became one of the areas of fighting during the time of Imam Ahmad and this fighting forced the Argoba to scatter in different places.

○ **The Afar:**

Cause of their movement: existence of drought in this area before 16th century. The Afar moved towards the east until they reached the middle Awash.

- ✓ Afar was the **center of competition** between the Christian Kingdom and the Muslim sultanates because trade routes linking the ports in the Horn passed through the Afar's territory.
- ✓ The wars pushed the Afar to move in different directions, however, in the 16th century, their ***pastoral economy*** helped them to survive the destructive effects of the wars.

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- **The Somali:** exhibited competition for the control of trade routes during the medieval period.
- **Cause of their movement :** demographic pressure
- ✓ The Somali had given support to Imam Ahmad during the conflict b/n the Christian kingdom and Imam Ahmad.
- ✓ But the Somali returned home following the defeat of Imam Ahmed in 1543, hence, their movement was short lived.

2. Gadaa System and the Oromo Population Movement (1522-1618)

A. The Gadaa System : is important to better understand the Oromo population movement of the 16th century.

Meaning: The Gadaa system was an institution through which the Oromo socially organized themselves, administered their affairs, defended their territories, maintained law and order and managed their economies.

History of the Gadaa system:

- ✓ It was stated that during the early 16th century, the system fully functioned because of which the Oromo were well organized.
- ✓ Besides, the Oromo is said to have practiced the Gadaa system long before their 16th century movement.

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- ✓ The system evolved from the earlier Cushitic age-set social organization.
- ✓ Time computation and recording history was based on the eight-years segment of time. In the system, eight years represented one Gadaa period; 5-gadaa periods or 40 years represented one generation and nine generations represented an era.
- ✓ Gadaa was interrupted and revitalized during various eras because of various internal and external factors. For instance, the Borana-Barentu Gadaa was instituted after interruption for nearly two generations. It was revived in 1450 at Madda Walabu that became the central *Chaffe* (assembly) and seat of the senior *Qallu* until 1900.

Values and how the Gadaa system had worked:

- ✓ The Gadaa system constituted elements of democracy such as periodic succession and power sharing to prevent a one-man rule.
- ✓ Representation of all lineages, clans and confederacies.
- ✓ Means of socialization, education, maintenance of peace and order, and social cohesion.
- ✓ It constituted rules of *arara* (conflict resolution), *guma* (compensation) and *rakoo* (marriage)

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- ✓ The Gadaa system organized the Oromo society into age-grades and generation sets delineating members' social, political, and economic responsibilities.
- ✓ The system provided a socio-political framework that institutionalized relationship between seniors and juniors and egalitarian relations among members of a grade.
- ✓ The Gadaa/*luba* assumed power for eight years. The head of the government was known as *Abba-Gadaa* literally “father of the period” who was assisted by several elected representatives from among the generation set.
- ✓ These included *Abba Bokku* (father of scepter), *Abba Chaffe* (head of the assembly), *Abba-Dula* (war leader), *Abba Sera* (father of law), *Abba Alanga* (judge), *Abba Sa'a* (father of treasury) and other councilors.
- ✓ In the Gadaa system, the senior *Qallu* (*Abba Muda*) played indispensable roles in power transfer and legitimizing the ruling gadaa class.
- ✓ Women maintained their rights by the *Sinqe institution*, which helped them to form sisterhood and solidarity.
- ✓ It has five Gadaa classes (generation sets).

TABLE : THE FIVE GADAA CLASSES

Fathers	Sons
Melba	Harmufa
Mudena	Robale
Kilole	Birmajii
Bifole	Mul'ata
Michille	Dulo

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B. The Oromo Population Movement (1522-1618)

Causes: Natural and manmade factors. **Natural factors** include demographic pressure and subsequent need for land to accommodate the growing human and livestock population.

Manmade factor: The conflict between the Christian Kingdom and Muslim Sultanates from the 13th to the 16th centuries might have pressurized mainly pastoral Oromo groups to leave the lands they inhabited for other areas.

- ✓ In 1522, when the population movement began, the Oromo were already organized under Borana and Barentu confederacies. The Oromo forces took northern direction and passed through a corridor between Mount Walabu and Lake Abbaya.
- ✓ Some took westward and penetrated across the Bilatte River to the southwest. Then they headed northwards to the lakes region of the Rift Valley. In the course of their movement into various regions, different Oromo branches established Gadaa centers. Accordingly, Oda Nabee of Tulama, Oda Roba of Sikko-Mando (Arsi), Oda Bultum of Itu-Humabenna, Oda Bisil of Mecha and Oda Bullug of Jawwi

Consequences of the Oromo population movement:

- ✓ It put an end to the wars between the Christian and Muslim states as well as the southward expansion of the Christian highland kingdom.
- ✓ Resulted in integrations among peoples across ethnic and religious background.
- ✓ The Oromo integrated non-Oromo through two adoption mechanisms: *Guddifacha* and *Moggasa*. *Guddifacha* refers to the adoption of a child by a foster parent. In this system, the child enjoyed equal rights and privileges with a biological child. Likewise, *Moggasa* was a system of adopting non-Oromos and it was the practice of incorporation of individuals or groups to a clan through oath of allegiance with all the rights and obligations that such membership entailed.
- ✓ The adopted groups gained both protection and material benefits. The process contributed to the social cohesions, national integration, and the revival of long-distance trade. The interactions also resulted in an exchange of socio-cultural values and institutions.
- ✓ A number of peoples in the neighborhood of the Oromo adopted Gadaa system and Oromo language. Likewise, the Oromo adopted and adapted cultures and traditions of the people with whom they came into contact

5.4. Peoples and States in Eastern, Central, Southern and Western Regions

1. Peoples and States in the East

Somali:

Economy-pastoralism

Earliest reference: lived south of their present territory at least as early as the 12th century or 13th century.

- ✓ Historically, a council known as *shir* governed the society deciding on issues like resource allocation, marriage, trade and crime supported by the *guurti* (a council of elders, the highest political council).

Afar

Where they were/are living: Northeastern Ethiopia, northern Djibouti and some of them have also inhabited southern part of Eritrea.

- ✓ The Afar had an indigenous governance system known as *Makabanto*, which has some elements of democracy.
- ✓ They were first mentioned by Ibn Said under the name "Danakil". During the 13th century, they occupied the lowland territory near Bab el-Mandeb. Following the collapse of Adal in the 16th century, the Afar established their sultanates like Awsa, Girrifo, Tadjourah, Rahaito and Gobad.

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The Emirate of Harar

- ✓ Was the earliest Muslim center in Ethiopia and the Horn and it was center of Islamic culture and power in the region.
- ✓ Harar became the capital of Walasma of Adal replacing Dakar until 1577 when it was shifted to Awsa due to the pressure from the Oromo. It also became center for Imam Ahmed ibn Ibrahim al Ghazi.
- ✓ During the reign of Emir Nur Mujahid, Harar became a walled city where the sultanate of the Harari developed.
- ✓ Its economic power grew as it controlled trade routes from the Gulf of Aden, ports of Zeila and Berbera. Its authority was established over the surrounding Oromo and Somali through trade, inter-marriage, and expansion of Islamic teachings.
- ✓ Ruled by Egyptian b/n 1875-1885.
- ✓ Its last emir was Amir Abdulahi and it was occupied by force of central government of Ethiopia in 1887.

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2. Peoples and States in Central and South Central Parts

The Kingdom of Shewa

Its founder: a Menz ruler Negasi Kristos (r.1696-1703)

His successors were: Sebestie/Sebastyanos (r.1703-1718), Abuye/ Abiyye (1718-1745), Amaha Iyesus (r.1745-1775), Asfa-Wosen (r.1775-1808) and Negus Sahle-Sellase (r.1813-1847)-the grandfather of Emperor Menilek II.

- ✓ During Sahle-Sellase, several travelers visited Shewa and he even signed “treaty of friendship and commerce” with the British in 1841.

Economy: agriculture, trade and craft.

Gurage

Location: Southern Ethiopia.

Groups/Clans of Gurage include: Inor, Chaha and the Kistane group.

Staple crop: *enset*

Name of their traditional system of governance: *Yajoka Qicha and the Gordanna Sera*.

Kambata : Four groups formed state of Kambata, c.1550-1570. These groups were the Kambata of Mount Hambericho, and the Dubamo, Donga and Tembaro who trace their homeland from Sidama highlands.

- ✓ Kambata was annexed/controlled by Emperor Yeshak (r.1413-30).
- ✓ Enset farming was common among them.

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Name of their traditional administrative institution: *Hambericho* Council

Hadiya: Its origin goes back to the 13th century and it was mentioned in the *Kebre-Negest* (Glory of the Kings).

It consisted of a number of Muslim population and Amde-Tsion controlled Hadiya in 1332 after he defeated of its ruler Amano.

Its rulers rebelled against king Zara-Yaqob (r.1434-68) but attempted was made by Zara-Yacob to stabilize the situation by marrying Queen Eleni from Hadiya.

3. Peoples and States in the South

Sidama

Location: Southern Ethiopia

Economy: agriculture producing *enset*, and coffee(cash crop)

Their indigenous system of governance was led by the *Mote* (king) and had the council of elders called Songo.

- ✓ The cultural and ritual leader in Sidama society was the *Woma*.
- ✓ Sidama society was divided into generation-sets called Luwa which had five grades (which are Darara, Fullassa, Hirbora, Wawassa and Mogissa)
- ✓ The social constitution which governs the Sidama people social life was called *Sera*.

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4. Peoples and States in Southwestern Part

Wolayta in southwestern Ethiopia

- ✓ Origin of the Wolayta kingdom was in the 13th century.
- ✓ At the top of the social and political hierarchy there was the Kawo (king), assisted by a council of advisors.
- ✓ From the 13th to the late 19th centuries, two successive dynasties ruled Wolayta: the Wolayta-Malla and the Tigre. Founded in the 13th century by Motalami, the Wolayta-Malla seems to have ruled until the end of the 15th century. It was then superseded by the Tigre dynasty. Wolayta's dominant food crop was *enset*.

Kafa

Its kingdom's origin: 14th century. The ruling Minjo dynasty and the medieval kingdom of Ennarya had close contact. The Oromo expansion might have forced the ruling house of Ennarya to flee south of the Gojeb which as a result brought Christianity and the royal title *Tato* to Kafa.

Trade: Kafa had a prosperous commercial relation with the Oromo states of the Gibe region. Major trade items such as musk, coffee, slaves, Ivory, gold, honey-wax, and civet were exported.

At the apex of the administration of the kingdom was the *Tato* with his major political center at Bonga. The *Tato* was assisted by a council of seven advisors called *Mikrecho*.

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5. Peoples and States in the West

Berta and Gumuz

- ✓ The Berta people inhabit the present day Beni-Shangul Regional National State. The earliest record of Berta settlement in this region dates back to the 16th century.
- ✓ Both Berta and Gumuz in terms of language classification belong to the Nilo-Saharan linguistic group.
- ✓ Islamic influence had been strong on the Berta and other Nilotes because of their trade and social contacts with the northern Sudan.

5.6 The Gondarine Period and Zemene-Mesafint

1. The Gondarine Period

- ✓ **Beginning of this period:** It started during the period of Emperor Sartsa-Dengel (camped at Enfranz in 1571) with a shift of political center to Gondar.
- ✓ Gondar was founded in 1636 when Fasiledas established his political seat there.
- ✓ Gondar achieved its glory during the reigns of its first three successive emperors: Fasiledas (r.1632-1667), Yohannes I (r.1667-1682) and Iyasu I (r.1682- 1706).
- ✓ Among the major reforms during these periods were the restoration of Orthodox Church as state religion.

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- ✓ The Gondarine Period also witnessed increased involvement of the Oromo in politics and the army.
- ✓ From 1728 to 1768, Etege Mentewab together with her brother Ras-Bitwaded Walda Le'ul (1732-1767) dominated the Gondarine court politics.
- ✓ But to counter the growing power of the Wollo Oromo in the royal court, Mentewab sought the alliance of Ras Mika'el Sehul of Tigray who was politically astute and military powerful.
- ✓ **Achievements of the Gondarine Period : Architecture** like castles-of Fasiledes, bridges, residences, bath, library, towers, fortifications and churches were constructed; **painting**-religious paintings put on manuscripts and on wood were plenty; **literature**-e.g. manuscripts, Gospels, the Miracles of Mary, the Lives of Ethiopian Saints/ hagiographies and other were produced; **trade and urbanization**-Gondar **was** a commercial center and connected trade routes of the southern region with Massawa and Metemma in the Ethio-Sudan border. **Medium of exchange** : gold and salt.
- ✓ **Gondar** was residential town for Indians, Greeks and Armenians. It had a population of about 60,000-70,000; It served as political and commercial, and religious centers-for Christians (residence of the Abuna/Ichege), Muslims and Bete-Israel.

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2. The Period of Zemene-Mesafint (1769-1855)

- ✓ Zemene-Mesafint refers to the period when actual position of political power was in the hands of different regional lords.
- ✓ The period lasted from the time Ras Michael Sehul "assassinated" king Iyoas in 1769 to 1855, when Kasa Hailu was crowned as Tewodros I.
- ✓ During that period, Ras Mika'el who was a king maker. He was the most influential and important person. Because of the harsh measures he took against the nobility he was considered as unpopular among them.
- ✓ For this reason lords of Gojjam, Amhara, Lasta and Wollo cooperated and defeated him at the battle of Sarba-Kussa in 1771.
- ✓ Zemene-Mesafint was a period of the rise of regional lords which weakened the power of the central government.
- ✓ The main political regions that Zemene-Mesafint lords ruled were Tigray, Semen, Dembiya, Begemidir, Lasta, Yejjju, Wollo, Gojjam and Shewa. "Yejjju dynasty" was the leading power during the Zemen-Mesafint with the center at Debretabor. Ali Gwangul (Ali I or Ali Talaq) was considered as the founder of "Yejjju dynasty" in 1786.
- ✓ The period of Zemene mesafint was came to an end by Kasa Hailu of Qwara through a series of battles that lasted from 1840s to 1855.

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Major features of *Zemene-Mesafint*

It includes:

- ✓ Absence of effective central government
- ✓ The growing power and influence of the regional warlords
- ✓ The domination of Yeju lords over other lords in northern Ethiopia
- ✓ Rivalry and competition among regional lords to assume the position of king maker
- ✓ Establishment of fragile coalition to advance political interests
- ✓ Ethiopian Orthodox Church was unable to play its traditional role of unifying the state due to doctrinal disputes
- ✓ Revival of foreign contacts that ended the “Closed Door Policy”
- ✓ Developments in literature, arts and architecture