UNIT SEVEN

THE ETHIOPIAN REGION AND THE HORN OF AFRICA UP TO 1529

"Restoration" of the Solomonic dynasty and the Christian highland kingdom

The major rivals of the zagwe dynasty came from the amhara region. In those days the amhara region constituted the present day souther wollo and northern showa. The region was the tributary of zagwa dynasty.

The founder ruling class took away political power from thire predecessors around 1270. The founder of the new dynasty was a local ruler in amhara called Yekuno Amlak. This dynasty called itself 'solomonic". They took this dynastic name to justify their legitmate by claiming that the zagwe rulers were illegitimate. To justify this they resorted to the legend of queen sheba and king Solomon.

The success of yekuno Amlak was not based on his legendary claims. His success had economic and military reasons.

What are the economic and military factors contributed to the success of yekuno Amlak in taking power away from the Zagwe dynasty?

In the trade between the zagwe kingdom and Gulf of Aden Coast, the Christian communities in the Amhara region played the role of middlemen As one of the local rulers in Amhara, Yekune Amlak monopolized the profit of the trade. He maintaed friendly relations with the Christian rulers and traders of zagwe rulers as wollas the muslim traders of showa. This meant that he had a strong economic and political position in the region.

Using the revenue from the trade, Yekuno Amlak built an effective army by which no chalanges the Agaw rule and defeated the last king of Zagwe dynasty called Yetbarok.

At the beginning the "solomonic" dynasty established its center around Tegulet, a district in northern Shewa. But later on the royal court has shifted from region on the eastern foothills of the shewa plateau.

After the death of Yekuno Amlak in 1285, the dynasty began to face internal political instability one of the reasons for this instability was lack of formal ruler s of succession to the throne. As a result, the sons and descendants of Yekuno Amlak began to fight each other over this issue. Particularly, between 1294-99 the problem of successive kings came to power. To solve this problem all male descendants were detained at royal prison at Amba Gishon. The passes and foothills of the mountain were guarded by local warriors.

When Yekuno Amlak (1270-1285) came to power, the territory of Christian kingdom was almost limited to the former possessions of zagwe ruler. This territory was surrounded by different states and people.

- ➔ Various Muslim sultanates existed in the eastern, southern and southern frontiers of the kingdom
- ➔ The falasha lived along the northwestern frontiers.
- ➔ South of Falasha existed a predominantly Agaw spooking kingdom of Gojjam
- ➔ The southern and southwestern frontiers were occupies by different states and peoples.

During the region of Yekuno Amlak, the Kingdom had peaceful relations with all its neighbors. At the time there has been power balance among the states of the Ethiopian region and the horn.

The rise of Amde seyon (1314 – 44), grandson of yekuno Amlak, began to distribute the balance of power in favor of the Christian kingdom. The chiristian kingdom began its territorial expansion against the neighboring states and people Made seyon was the most expansionist king of the medival period. Consequently, conflict and war affected the Ethiopian region and the Horn of Africa up to the end of 1529.

In the early period of solomonic dynasty, the economy of the kingdom mainly depended on Agriculture. Feudalism also began to take shape beginning from the 14^{th}C

Trade took a very important place in the economy after the conquest of the Muslim sultanetes in the southrnparts of the region Zeila had completely overtaken Dahlak as gateway of internal and external trade. Most of the trade items came from the western and southwestern part of the Ethiopian region.

The trade items

-Slaves - cereals

-Ivory -Fruits

- Gold

The desire to monopolize the long distance trade routes of the region led to frequent clashes between the rival states of the region.

The trade routes which criss-crossed the Ethiopian region and the Horn of Africa resulted in the exchange of various social and cultural values among the diverse people of the area

Another development of the period was the further expansion of the Orthodox Church. At the time of the rise of Yekuno Amlak, the church had already been strongly established in Tigray, Wag, Lasta, Agnot and Amhara. Subsequently, the church further expanded into Shewa, Gojjam and region around Lake Tana.

In order to effectively administer the Vast empire which came in to existence, the kings maintained both hereditary Chiefs and appointed officials.

Gult System- is a system in which state officials were given the right collect tribute from the peasantry

-is given to a state official in return for his service to the state.

Rest-is hereditary right to land use by members of families and clan whose ancestors retained the land for a long period of time.

Bale Gult- an official who was given the Gult right by the state and he was responsible:

- ➔ To collect tributes in kind from the peasant under him.
- ➔ To use the curve or free labour of the people under him
- ➔ For the maintenance of law and order in his region
- ➔ Give an administrative justice
- ➔ Raise a regional army from his region and command them during regional or national crisis

The gult system had served two very important purposes in the medieval Christian kingdom.

- ➔ Helped the kingdom to maintain large territorial army
- ➔ Greatly simplified the task of administering the vast Christian kingdom of the period.

During the medival period, the kings ruled from mobile cort (capital). Lake Hayo in wollo, Menz, tegulet, Bulga, Yerer, equala in north shewa served as temporary capitals

Why medieval kings used mobile courts?

- ➔ Lack of provision or supply for the large number of camp following and shortage of fire woods.
- ➔ To control rebellions in different regions of the empire.

Some kings after the middle of the 15thC. tried to stay at one region for many years. For instance, emperor Zera-Yacob (1434-68) found the town of Debre berhan in 1454 and stayed in it for fourteen years.

Questions

Write the answer of the following questions on a separate paper

1. Why did the successors of zagwe call their dynasty solomonic?
2. What factors contributed to the success of Yekuno Amlak in taking power away from the zagwe
3. Explain how the solomonic dynasty was consolidated beginning from the early 14thC.
4. Describe the responsibilities of Bale Gult?
5. What is the difference between Gult right and Rest right?