

THE CROSS AND THE CRESCENT : STATE AND CULTURE IN ETHIOPIAN HISTORY

by
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A recent writer has rightly made the point that in the classical, mediaeval, early modern and recent times, Ethiopia had been associated with two types of image : the conventional and the scholarly. Conventionally, it was considered a remote area - remote both in terms of distance and from geographical knowledge - a land of pious people, a mighty empire, a savage country and a symbol of African independence¹. He could have added at least two other equally important images which have long remained embedded in scholarly literature and popular imagination : an "island of Christianity" and a land of perpetual famine in need of external relief². The scholarly images and assumptions are equally diverse. "Scholars have viewed Ethiopia primarily either as an outpost of Semitic civilization, as an ethnographic museum [Cerulli's 'un museo di popoli'],

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1. Donald N. Levine, *Greater Ethiopia : The Evolution of a Multiethnic Society* (Chicago/London : University of Chicago Press, 1974), pp. 1-14.
2. On the first image, see, among others, in Tadesse Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia 1270-1527* (Oxford : The Clarendon Press, 1972), p. 231. Where Emperor Zar'a Ya'eqob (r. 1434-68) is quoted as saying : "Our country Ethiopia [is surrounded by] pagans and Muslims in the east as well as in the west". As for the second, it is too well-known to require documentation.

or as an underdeveloped country"³. The image of Ethiopia as an outpost of Semitic culture whose central features are that "the Amhara-Tigrean peoples are identified as the 'true Ethiopians or the 'Abyssinians proper' "and that " the core elements of Amhara-Tigrean culture are viewed as deriving from early Semitic influences"⁴ has two flaws : "it neglects the crucial role of non - Semitic elements in Ethiopian culture ... and shares the difficulties of all views which consider cultures with written traditions and world religions to be *generally* superior to non - literate cultures"⁵.

The Complexity and Dynamics of Ethno-Linguistic Formation

The diversity of the peoples and languages of Ethiopia⁶ has long been recognized by scholars. Two "superfamilies" of African languages-Afro-Asiatic and Nilo-Saharan are represented in Ethiopia. The Afro-Asiatic superfamily includes the Semitic, Kushitic and Omotic languages.

Speakers of the Kushitic languages constitute the majority and are subdivided into Northern, Central and Eastern branches. The Bĕjā, who live in the northern part of Eritrea, speak a North Kushitic language while the Agaw, who speak different dialects of central Kushitic , are spread over the central and southern highlands of Eritrea, parts of Tigrāy, Wāg and lāstā, in the Falāshā country west of the Takkazē River, and in the mountainous area of Gojjām to the south and southeast of Lake Tānā. The two subdivisions of Eastern Kushitic are the Burji-Sidāmo and the Lowland Kushitic . The first is spoken in southern Shawā, Arsi, Bāli and parts of the Harar plateau while the second is widespread in the lowlands extending from the north to the interior of the Horn as well as in south and southeast of Lake Chāmo, the general area from where the Kushitic-speaking Oromo started their migrations in the sixteenth century⁷.

The Omotic languages, which were widely spoken in southwestern Ethiopia before the sixteenth century, are now restricted to the area between the southern part of the Blue Nile gorge and the Omo basin.

3. Levine, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

6. This is in sharp contrast to the linguistic situation in Madagascar : "The profound homogeneity of the Malagasy language ... derives from the unity of its underlying Austronesian foundation ..." : B. Domenichini-Ramiamanana, "Madagascar" in M. El Fasi an I. Hrbek (eds), *UNESCO General History of Africa* (Paris : UNESCO ; London : Heinemann Educational Books Ltd. ; Berkeley : University of California Press, 1988), III, p. 684.

7. According to a popular tradition, the Oromo "people migrated from Asia and crossed to Madagascar ; they migrated from there, too, and settled at a harbour near Bobasa [Mombasa] ... from there they came up to Ethiopia ..." : Alāqa Tayyā Gābrā Maryam, *Ya Ityopyā Hezb Tārik* (History of the People of Ethiopia). Grover Hudson and Tekeste Negash (trans.) (Uppsala : Centre for Multiethnic Research, University of Uppsala, 1987), p. 61 (trans.), p. 60 (Amharic text).

The Semitic languages were the vernaculars of the politically and culturally dominant peoples in north and central Ethiopia between the thirteenth and sixteenth century. The Ethio-Semitic languages, which have a long history of development, were not introduced, as was once believed, by immigrants from south Arabia. The separation of ancient Ethio-Semitic from South Arabian and its beginning as a distinct group of languages began much earlier than the Sabaeen migration dated to 700-500 B.C. The separation took place around 2000 B.C. As for the divergence between North and South Ethio-Semitic, it occurred before 300 B.C. while the diversification among the South Ethio-Semitic is dated to between 300 B.C. and A.D. 100⁸. The two branches of Ethio-Semitic are the North and South Ethio-Semitic languages. Ge'ez, which from the fourth century onwards served as a liturgical language of the Church, Tigra and Tigrīññā, spoken in Eritrea and Tigrāy, are North Ethio-Semitic languages. The development of South Ethio-Semitic languages is much more complex. Speakers of one of its branches, the 'Outer' Ethio-Semitic, were the spearhead of the Semitic expansion in central Ethiopia who occupied a wide area between the upper Awāsh and the Blue Nile gorge⁹. The ancestors of the speakers of the modern South Ethio-Semitic left northern Ethiopia more than three centuries before the Christian era. The other branch of South Ethio-Semitic is the 'Transversal' consisting of Amharic, Argobbā, East Gurāgè and Harari¹⁰. On the possible evolution of Amharic, Levine wrote : "During the first millennium A.D. the inhabitants of Amhara were Agaw peoples who developed a distinct South Ethio-Semitic tongue, *amariññā*, quite possibly through a process of pidginization and creolization¹¹."

Arabic was spoken as a religious and commercial language in the principal trading centres both on the east and in the hinterland¹².

In order to explain the distribution of languages and peoples over a wide area of Ethiopia, scholars have suggested a correlation between internal differentiation and migration. As Levine explained, the proto-Ethiopians began to separate by 2000 B.C. into five core-groups : the Northern Cushites, the Central Cushites, the Eastern Cushites, the Semitic speakers who, by the first millennium B.C., had separated into northern and central branches, and the Omotic peoples¹³. He then concluded :

8. Tadesse Tamrat, "Ethiopia, the Red Sea and the Horn" in Roland Oliver (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Africa* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1977), vol. 3, pp. 123-126.

9. T. Tamrat, "The Horn of Africa : The Solomonids in Ethiopia and the states of the Horn of Africa" in D.T. Niane (ed.), *UNESCO General History of Africa* (1984), IV, pp. 425-27.

10. Tadesse, "Ethiopia, the Red Sea ...", p. 128.

11. Levine, p. 72.

12. Tadesse, "The Solomonids ...", p. 427.

13. Levine, pp. 28-29.

*"The present distribution of Ethiopian peoples, languages, and cultures can best be understood as a function of two long-term secular processes : continuing internal differentiation within these five core proto-Ethiopian stocks, and their differential interaction with a series of intruding influences"*¹⁴.

These sources of external influence were the Sudanic peoples from the west, the Semitic peoples from the east, and Mediterranean peoples from the north. The Sudanic peoples spoke languages ancestral to four branches of the Nilo-Saharan family : Berta, Kunāmā, Koman and East Sudanic. They penetrated into Ethiopia in two distinct periods : the third millennium B.C. when they became the ancestors of the Berta, Gumuz, and Koma, and intermixed with Omotic-speakers to form the Ari, Bāskèto, Dimè and the Gimirā-Māji groups. The second wave of Sudanic peoples - the Nilotes - arrived in the first millennium B.C. They were the ancestors of the Nuer and Anyuak and contributed to the "formation of a number of Omotic - and East Cushitic-speaking tribes in the southwest corner of the country"¹⁵.

The Semitic influence penetrated in four phases. The first was in the second half of the first millennium B.C. and is associated with the arrival of groups of South Arabians who were believed to have introduced into Ethiopia "a cultural complex that included the Semitic languages, the art of writing, architectural technology, the practice of irrigation and Sabaean religious and political symbolism". This view has been challenged because there is no basis for suggesting that these cultural traits had developed in South Arabia earlier than in northern Ethiopia, and because the Semitic language was spoken as early as 2000 B.C.¹⁶. This does not, of course, mean that there was no interaction between northern Ethiopia and South Arabia. Indeed some aspects of the Ethio-Sabaean civilization developed by the proto-Ge'ez speakers may have originated in South Arabia.

The second wave of Semitic influence took place during the first few centuries of the Christian era and was carried by the Jews of South Arabia. The Falāshā may have been the outcome of this influence. The third stream of influence was associated with the coming of Syrian missionaries who introduced Christianity. The liturgy, religious music and terminology, and ancient church architecture reflect such influence. The last source of external Semitic influence was Islam which affected the religious complexion of the lowland population as well as those of the plateau.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

15. *Ibid.* pp. 29-30.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 31. On the settlement of South Arabians before the fifth century B.C., see Tadesse, *Church and State*, p. 5.

The third areas which influenced certain aspects of the broader Ethiopian culture were Egypt and the Mediterranean world, although such influence had no impact on ethnic composition and differentiation. Egyptian influences were prominent in the stelae of Aksum, Ethiopian jewelry, musical instruments and boats. The influence of Hellenistic culture was evident in the use of Greek in the royal court of Aksum while Byzantine influence was depicted in the tradition of miniatures in the illuminated manuscripts of the mediaeval period¹⁷.

Levine has come up with a new system of classification of the peoples and languages of Ethiopia that is not based on genetic, regional, linguistic, religious, ecological or social structural principles, but one which employs all these variables. Accordingly, he has identified nine core-groups : North Eritrean (consisting of about a dozen small tribes), the Āgaw (the predominant people in north/central Ethiopia before Aksum), the Amhara-Tigrean group, the Core Islamic peoples (East Kushitic-speaking, the Argobbā and Harari), the Gāllā (the Oromo : the most widely dispersed people in Ethiopia), the Lacustrine group of peoples, the Omotic and Sudanic peoples, and the Caste groups¹⁸.

Tadesse has suggested a relationship between ethno-linguistic separation and distribution, and migration, as a possible way of explaining both the diversity of peoples and the complexity of the process of the evolution of Ethiopian society. The Gāfāt and the northern, western and central Gurāgè, as noted above, were the pioneers of Semitic expansion into Shawā in south-central Ethiopia before the establishment of Christianity in Aksum and its expansion to the south. Speakers of Argobbā, East Gurāgè and Harari who spread to the south and southeast of the area inhabited predominantly by Amharic-speaking communities were the bases for the rise and development of the Muslim communities in Shawā and Ifāt ; and it was to Harar that the exiled rulers of Ifāt later shifted their political centre¹⁹.

The diversity of peoples and languages is balanced by three patterns of unity : interaction among the various peoples ; pan-Ethiopian traits ; and a common response to foreign cultural influence. Interaction was facilitated through trade, warfare, religious activities, migration, intermarriage and exchange of special services²⁰. Elaborating on the common response of Ethiopians to alien cultural influence, Levine wrote : "The response to representatives of Judaism, Christianity and Islam was to adopt their central beliefs and symbols, but to incorporate them in such a way that the resulting belief systems strongly reflected indigenous traditions"²¹.

17. Levine, pp. 31-33.

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 33-39.

19. Tadesse, "The Solomonids ...", p. 427.

20. Levine, pp. 40-68.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 66.

Aksum and its Successor States

Although various inscriptions clearly suggest the existence of a kingdom in northern Ethiopia, the classical writers do not make many references to an organized state in the region until the middle of the second century of the Christian era. Ptolemy was the first writer to mention the Aksumite kingdom²². Through wars of conquest to the south and southwest, Aksum developed into an empire and reached the height of its power in the middle of the fourth century²³. During the reign of Kālèb (d. ca. 535), Aksum militarily intervened in, and occupied, South Arabia to protect the local Christians against persecution²⁴.

Muslim Arab expansion from the seventh century onwards weakened the commercial life of the Aksumite Kingdom since it lost extensive territories on the Red Sea coast. By the second half of the ninth century, Aksum's hold over the Bèjā-inhabited areas in the north and the provinces in the west had also come to an end. This led to political disintegration and the weakening of political institutions. However, the Aksumite state continued to survive throughout the turbulent period of the seventh and eighth centuries²⁵.

Beginning from the middle of the tenth century, the Christian kingdom of Aksum showed signs of decline. Its political centre had by this time shifted southwards to Ku'bar, a place mentioned by al-Ya 'qùbì and later by al-Mas'ūdì. It was located somewhere between southern Tigrè and Angot²⁶.

After the decline and fall of Aksum, a Christian dynasty emerged around 1150 in the Agaw country of Wāg and Lāstā, with its capital at Adafā, near the site of Lālibalā. It has been known as the Zāgwè dynasty. Under the new dynasty, there was a vigorous movement of revival of church, state and culture as reflected in the construction of rock-hewn churches in and around Lālibalā, regular communications with Egypt and the Holy Land, the development of Christian literature as well as territorial expansion into Gojjām and Dāmōt. On the territorial extent of the Zāgwè kingdom Taddesse made the following observation :

"Zagwe control of northern Ethiopia was very firm ; the land between the upper Tekeze, the Bashilo and Lake Tana had been brought under Christian rule as part of Amharaland ; and all the Christian communities as far south as the sources of the rivers Awash and Kesem paid homage to the Zagwe kings in Adefa. Moreover, what

22. Taddesse, *Church and State*, pp. 13, 16.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 32 ; *idem*, "Ethiopia, the Red Sea ...", p. 98.

26. Taddesse, "Ethiopia, the Red Sea ...", pp. 100-1 ; *idem*, *Church and State*, p. 37.

were essentially Agaw, but definitely non-Christian territories of Simien, Dembya and Gojjam had also come under the Zagwe sphere of influence²⁷.

The 'Restoration' of the 'Solomonic' Dynasty

The Zāgwè dynasty was overthrown in 1270 as a result of an anti-Zāgwè movement under the leadership of Yekunno-Amlāk (r. 1270-1285), a member of a chiefly family in Amhara. The centres of the movement were Tigrè and Amhara where there was a long-established belief that..." its [the Zāgwè dynasty's] power had been first acquired through an illegitimate act of usurpation²⁸. The movement was active during the reign of Lālfalā and is embodied in the story narrated in the *Kebrā Nagast* (Glory of Kings) whose central theme is the illegitimacy of the rule of those who were not the descendants of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. The original version of the document was brought to Ethiopia in 1225. The opponents of Zāgwè rule had obtained a copy and had it translated into Ge'ez after the fall of the Zāgwè²⁹. However, as noted by Tadesse, "... what enabled Yekunno-Amlak to depose the Zāgwè was not so much the legitimacy of his claims to restore the Solomonid dynasty of ancient Aksum as his much stronger economic, political and military position"³⁰.

The decline of Zāgwè rule was also brought about by problems of dynastic succession and the success of Yekunno-Amlāk in isolating the Zāgwè by opening and exploiting the trade route leading to Zeila³¹. The significance of the dynastic change effected by Yekunno-Amlāk lies in the fact that "The predominantly Agaw rulers of the Christian Kingdom were deposed, and the throne was once again occupied by a Semitic-speaking monarch. Only in this sense was the advent of Yekunno-Amlāk a *restoration*"³².

In the last quarter of the thirteenth century, the new Christian kingdom in the northern highlands of Ethiopia extended to northern Shawā in the south, the region east of Lake Tānā and upper Blue Nile in the west, and the edge of the escarpment in the east. Other political units included the independent state of the Falāshā located beyond the Takkazè River, Gojjām to the south of Lake Tānā, and Dāmot, south of the Blue Nile gorge. There were also Muslim principalities such as the 'Sultanate of Shawā', Ifāt, Fatajār, Dawāro, Hadyā, Bāli, Adāl and the emirate of Dahlak³³.

27. Tadesse, "Ethiopia, the Red Sea ...", pp. 117-18.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 123; *idem*, *Church and State*, pp. 64 ff.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 124-25; *idem*, *Church and State*, p. 24.

30. Tadesse, "The Solomonids ...", p. 433.

31. *Idem*, "Ethiopia, the Red Sea ...", pp. 130-31.

32. *Idem*, *Church and State*, p. 68.

33. *Idem*, "The Solomonids ...", pp. 423-25, 428.

The period from 1270 to 1430 was one of rapid territorial expansion of the Christian kingdom, especially during the reign of Amda Seyon (r. 1314-44), when Gojjām, Dāmot and Hadyā were conquered. Successful campaigns, particularly in 1332, were also launched against the Muslim sultanate of Ifāt which became a tributary state under the overlordship of the Christian kingdom. Dawāro and Bāli, which had collaborated with Ifāt, were also annexed³⁴. However, it is difficult to accept the view that, as a result of these successful campaigns, these areas were integrated into the Christian kingdom³⁵, especially since it is known that the process of integration within the Christian kingdom itself was not complete even as late as the sixteenth century³⁶. Moreover, the Christian empire was "...not a unitary state ... [but] a loose confederation of a large number of principalities of differing religious, ethnic, and linguistic affiliations... [whose] coherence depended mainly on the supremacy of the central power"³⁷. As Abir also noted : "The Solomonic monarchs based the government of their vast heterogeneous empire on military power and conquest"³⁸.

Further territorial gains were made by the successors of Amda Seyon from 1376 to 1468 especially against the sultanate of Adāl in the Harar plateau, although the military success in this direction was limited³⁹.

The vast and heterogeneous empire created by the Christian kings of mediaeval Ethiopia was administered from mobile camps⁴⁰. The royal courts were the nucleus of an extensive military and administrative structure⁴¹. The functions of the mobile court were similar to those of a fixed capital. There was a high concentration of people - troops, royal guards, retainers and priests - and the court served as a centre of exchange of goods and supplies to which traders and craftsmen came with their goods and products. The provincial governors and officials also came with their tributes. Since the royal camps thus brought together many peoples of diverse origin, they played a significant integrative role much more than permanent settlements. Prisoners of war were recruited in to the army and members of the hereditary aristocracy who accompanied the kings developed loyalty to them. However, since these contacts and interactions did not last long, "...the integrative role of the mobile court was seriously limited". In general, imperial control over the territories was indirect and no centralized system of administration emerged⁴².

34. *Idem*, "Ethiopia, the Red Sea ...", p. 144, *Church and State*, pp. 132-45.

35. *Idem*, "The Solomonids ...", p. 434.

36. See below.

37. Tadesse, "The Solomonids ...", p. 425.

38. Mordechai Abir, *Ethiopia and the Red Sea* (London : Frank Cass, 1980), p. 45.

39. Tadesse, "Ethiopia, the Red Sea ...", p. 156 ; *Church and State*, pp. 145-54.

40. *Idem*, "The Solomonids ...", p. 437.

41. *Idem*, *Church and State*, pp. 103-6.

42. *Idem*, "The Solomonids ...", pp. 437-38.

After the end of the wars with *Imām* Ahmad b. Ibrāhīm (fl. 1506-43), nicknamed Grāñ (the "left-handed"), Emperor Galāwdēwos (r. 1540-59) launched the reconquest of the southern and southeastern provinces which had been overrun by the Muslim forces. Since the task proved to be difficult because of the revival of Adāl under the immediate successor of the *Imām* and the incursions of the Oromo, Galāwdēwos succeeded in reestablishing his control over the regions only temporarily. The emperor then turned his attention to the subjugation of Dāmot and the neighbouring provinces largely motivated by the desire to exploit the rich resources of the areas. However, the incorporation of these regions was disrupted by renewed attacks from Adāl and the Oromo raids⁴³.

Galāwdēwos followed his predecessor's policy of settling garrisons on the frontiers of Adāl in order to defend the kingdom against invasion and to integrate the diverse populations by spreading Christianity. Like his predecessors, "Galāwdēwos believed that the church should become a major integrative force and a tool for bridging the cultural and ethnic diversity of Ethiopia's population"⁴⁴. The presence of the royal camp also checked for a time the Oromo incursions.

The Turkish invasion of the hinterland opposite Massawa (which the Turks had occupied in 1557) was successfully checked by Yeshaq, Galāwdēwos's governor of the maritime province. The Turkish threat continued during the reign of Galāwdēwos's brother and successor, Minās (r. 1559-63) when Yeshaq allied himself with the Turks. Between 1576 and 1579 the Turks, assisted by Yeshaq, attempted to conquer the country but their campaigns ended in disaster⁴⁵.

During the reign of Sarsa Dengel (c. 1563-97), successful campaigns were launched to the southern, western and southwestern provinces such as Dāmot, Enāryā and Hadyā. In the early 1570s the various Oromo groups moved into Amhara and raided Bagēmdēr, Gojjām and northern Shawā. Although Sarsa Dengel led a campaign against the Boranā group in the south in 1572, their migration continued after the departure of the king's army. Failing to take seriously the Oromo raids into central and north Ethiopia, he abandoned the southern and eastern provinces in order to concentrate his efforts on the reorganization of the military system⁴⁶. His dismantling of the traditional military defence facilitated further Oromo raids, "... created new tensions among the nobility and the military ..., [and] eroded the stability of the country ..." ⁴⁷.

43. Abir, *op. cit.*, pp. 121-2.

44. *Ibid.*, pp. 102-3.

45. *Ibid.*, pp. 125-6.

46. *Ibid.*, pp. 149-52.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 154.

Sarsa Dengel had also to deal with Yeshaq's challenge to his authority and with the Turkish and Adālite threats which he successfully overcame⁴⁸. He launched campaigns against the Falāshā of Semèn, Wagarā and Dambiyā who were coerced to convert to Christianity, dispossessed from their land, and persecuted. Similar expeditions were sent to the southwest against the various kingdoms of the Omo-Gibè basin⁴⁹.

Susneyos (r. 1607-1632) led major campaigns to, and encouraged the Tigrean-Amhara colonization of, Dambiyā, Wagarā and Simèn. The motives were the suppression of rebellions, elimination of pretenders to the throne, and the breaking of Falāshā resistance. Aware of the contraction of the territory of the Christian kingdom as a result of the Oromo migration, Susneyos was determined to extend and consolidate his control over the northern provinces and peripheral areas⁵⁰. By 1610 he had firmly established his authority in these areas. However, he chose to reorganize the kingdom and reform society, culture and government "...through a massive conversion to Catholicism and imposed assimilation of Western (Catholic) culture with the help of foreign instructors [Jesuit missionaries]"⁵¹. From 1618 onwards, opposition to Sysneyos's religious policy became violent and widespread. Anti-monarchical and xenophobic elements took advantage of the revolt to reclaim their influence and privileges, and to express their hostility against foreigners⁵².

Fearing Portuguese armed intervention in retaliation for the expulsion of the Jesuits, "Fasiladas [r. 1632-67] attempted to create an anti-Portuguese alliance with the Ottomans and the new Zaydi imams of Yemen". Such a pro-Muslim policy "was also economically motivated and aimed at expanding Ethiopia's foreign trade"⁵³.

Fāsiladas and Yohannes I (r. 1667-82) devoted much of their attention to preserving their control over the provinces west of the Takkazè. An indication and consequence of this was the shift of the centre of political gravity to the Lake Tānā region and the founding of Gondar as a permanent capital during the reign of Fāsiladas which, among other things, accelerated the colonization of the provinces of Wagarā, Dambiyā, Bagēmder and Simèn, and the Amharization of the Agaw. The period of Fāsiladas and Yohannes was, however, one of decline⁵⁴.

48. *Ibid.*, pp. 154-56.

49. *Ibid.*, pp. 158-63.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 203.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 204.

52. *Ibid.*, pp. 212, 214.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 226.

54. *Idem*, "Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa", in Richard Gray (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Africa* (1975), vol. 4, p. 557.

Iyyāsu I (r. 1682-1706), the last important king of the Gondarine period, terminated the religious controversies within the church, reorganized the military system and, like Susneyos before him, recruited loyal Oromo groups into the newly-formed bodyguard regiments. He also encouraged the Amharization and Christianization of the Oromo soldiers. In the early 1680s and early 1690s, Iyyāsu I led campaigns to parts of Shawā overrun by the Oromo as well as to the southwest, and to Tigrè and the coastal provinces in northern Ethiopia⁵⁵.

The period from 1706 to the middle of the eighteenth century was characterized by the progressive decline of the power of the monarchy, the entrenchment of the Oromo feudal lords and army commanders in the royal court at Gondar, the intensification of the religious conflicts, and the enthronement and deposition of kings in rapid succession. Only during the reign of Bakāffā (r. 1721-30) was a serious attempt made to restore the central government's authority in the provinces east of the Takkazè River. From Bakāffā's death in 1730 until 1734, Queen Mentewwāb and her kinsmen from Qwārā held "key positions in the administration and the command of the guards". The assassination of Iyo'as (r. 1755-69) in 1769 on the orders of Mikā'el Sehul, the lord of Tigrè, marked the beginning of the era of the warlords (*Zamana Masāfent*). From the 1780s the Yajju lords became the guardians of the weak emperors residing in Gondar and the governors of Amhara and Bagèmdar. The *Zamana Masāfent* was a period of the complete disintegration of the Ethiopian polity into a number of rival and autonomous provinces and of the triumph of regionalism⁵⁶. The main features of the warlord era have been summarized by Abir :

"The governors of the different provinces were the absolute masters of the lives and property of the population over which they ruled ...

*The armies ... lived off the land. They ravaged not only the territories of their enemies but also the domains of their own masters. Many desperate cultivators left their fields to become soldiers or highwaymen. The provinces west of the Tekeze were depopulated and ruined economically, and the capital, Gondar, was repeatedly looted and burnt"*⁵⁷.

55. *Ibid.*, pp. 558-63.

56. *Ibid.*, pp. 564-73. For a discussion of the political struggle of the period, see also M. Abir, *Ethiopia : The Era of the Princes, The Challenge of Islam and the Re-unification of the Christian Empire (1769-1855)* (London : Longmans, 1968), pp. 27-47, 119-37. For a recent reassessment of the *Zamana Masāfent*, see Shiferaw Bekele, "The State in the *Zamana Masāfent* (1786-1853) : an Essay in Reinterpretation", in Tadesse Beyene, Richard Pankhurst and Shiferaw Bekele (eds), *Kasa and kasa, Papers on the Lives, Times and Images of Tewodros II and Yohannes IV, 1855-1889*, (Addis Ababa : Institute of Ethiopian Studies, 1990), pp. 25-68.

57. Abir, "Ethiopia and the Horn ... ", pp. 573-74.

However, as Rubenson observed, in spite of internal problems and lack of cohesion, Ethiopia of 1800 "was not ... the home of a mere conglomeration of more or less loosely affiliated tribes. The many centuries of settled agricultural life ... [and] the long history of the Ethiopian monarchy and the Christian church... had weakened tribal structures in favour of a more regionally organized society"⁵⁸.

One of the most cherished aims of Tèwodros II (r. 1855-68) was the reunification of Ethiopia. However, he did not succeed in this task because of the stiff opposition of the regional lords to his policy of centralization. From 1855 to 1864 he had to subdue rebellions in Wallo, Shawā, Gojjām, Tigrè, Walqāyt and Lāstā⁵⁹.

After the death of Tèwodros II in 1868, Kāsā Merchā of Tigrāy defeated in 1871 his rival, Gobazè of Lāstā who had proclaimed himself King of Kings Takla Giyorgis following the death of Tèwodros. In January 1872 Kāsā was crowned as Yohannes IV (r. 1872-1889) "... [who] ... was less committed to a unified state and more willing to compromise than Tewdors had been"⁶⁰. However, his successful attempts to check Egyptian and Italian expansion were militarily and politically crucial for the survival of the Ethiopian state, although the full territorial integrity of the country was undermined as a result of the establishment of an Egyptian, and later, an Italian, bridgehead in northern Ethiopia⁶¹.

From the point of view of shaping the territorial extent of the modern Ethiopian state, the reign of Emperor Menilek II (r. 1889-1913) was crucial. The most important development of his reign was the territorial expansion of Ethiopia to the south, southeast and southwest. Motivated by the desire for incorporating areas over which the mediaeval Ethiopian state had historical claims and by more concrete factors such as the acquisition of extensive taxable land and tributes, as well as by the need to exploit the wealth of these areas, Menilek's expansion was more successful than the attempts of his predecessors. Another factor was the Anglo-French colonial threat, especially to the south-eastern regions. The consequence of this expansionist drive was the incorporation of a large territory. The process of expansion was completed in 1900. Most of the communities of the regions were economically, politically and

58. Sven Rubenson, *The Survival of Ethiopian Independence* (London : Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1976), p. 32.

59. *Ibid.*, pp. 172-74.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 270.

61. For a detailed discussion of the struggle with Egypt and Italy, with emphasis on the diplomatic aspect, see *ibid.*, pp. 288-406.

culturally integrated - often through coercion - into the emerging Ethiopian empire-state⁶².

The Advent and Expansion of Christianity

Long before the introduction of Christianity, the various peoples of the Ethiopian region were the followers of traditional religion. Subsequently, elements of Judaism, the Sabaeen religion and Greek polytheism were introduced into the northern parts of the country.

Evidence for the worship of the serpent comes from one of the stelae at Aksum on which a serpent was engraved. It has been suggested that the cult was introduced directly from Persia⁶³. Belief in a sky god and in the existence of spirits residing in springs, rivers, lakes, hills or trees was widespread in Amhara, Gojjām and Shawā as well as in Dāmot, where the practice of human sacrifice was also known⁶⁴.

The coming of Judaism is attested in the *Kebra Nagast* in which the story of the visit of the Queen of Sheba to Jerusalem and the return of Menilek I (the son of king Solomon and the queen) with the Ark of the Covenant and many Israelites is narrated. The Falāshā are believed to be the descendants of the Israelites⁶⁵.

As for the Sabaeen religion, it was brought by settlers from South Arabia around the first millennium B.C. The Sabaeen gods such as Almouqah (the principal one), Astar (or Astarte, which corresponded to Aphrodite and Venus), Sin (the moon god), and Shams (the sun god) had their temples, altars and statues in and around Aksum. At Yeha, Hawilti and Melazo, the temples of Almouqah were erected. At Kaskase, 8 kms northeast of Metara, there was an altar with Sabaeen inscriptions dedicated to Sin and engraved with the symbols of the crescent and disc.

Greek gods were also worshipped. An anonymous king has left an inscription in Adulis mentioning Zeus, Poseidon, Ares and Hermes. Ares was the personal god of the kings and had a temple in Aksum. Statues of Ares were built by King Ēzānā in commemoration of his victory over the Bējā⁶⁶.

62. On this, see among others, Harold G. Marcus, *The Life and Times of Menilek II : Ethiopia 1844-1913* (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1975) and R.H. Kofi Darkwah, *Shewa, Menilek and the Ethiopian Empire 1813-1889* (London, 1975).

63. *The Church of Ethiopia : A Panorama of History and Spiritual Life* (Addis Ababa : The Ethiopian Orthodox Church, 1970), p.1.

64. Tadesse Tamrat, "A Short Note on the Traditions of Pagan Resistance to the Ethiopian Church (14th and 15th centuries)", *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, X, 1 (1972), p. 138 ; Levine, pp. 47-54.

65. *Church of Ethiopia*, pp. 1-3.

66. *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

Christianity was known in Ethiopia before the time of Ēzānā (*fl.* first half of the fourth century). There were Christians among the foreign residents in Adulis, Coloe and Aksum as well as some local converts⁶⁷. Although this clearly suggests the presence of Christianity in the Aksumite kingdom before the middle of the fourth century A.D., its official establishment was the outcome of imperial initiative, and not a result of organized missionary activity from outside⁶⁸.

The work of Rufinus (d.A.D. 410), a church historian, is the principal source for the traditional account about the introduction of Christianity during the reign of Ēzānā. According to Rufinus, one Meropius, a philosopher from Tyre, left his native land on a journey to India. He was accompanied by Frumentius and Aedesius. Due to shortage of provisions, their ship had to anchor on the Ethiopian coast. The local people attacked the ship and all but the two boys were killed. The two survivors were taken to the contemporary Aksumite king who was Ēzānā's father. The king took an interest in them and appointed Aedesius, the younger of the two, as his cup-bearer and Frumentius as his court treasurer and secretary. Before the king died, he gave them permission to go back to their country but the queen mother asked them to stay so that they would assist her young son in the administration of the kingdom and they agreed.

Frumentius encouraged the foreign Christian merchants in Aksum to establish prayer-houses and to preach Christianity. The young king, Ēzānā, was subsequently converted by Frumentius, the two brothers asked Ēzānā to allow them to return and their wish was granted. Aedesius went back to Tyre while Frumentius travelled to Alexandria where he met the patriarch, Athanasius, over whom he prevailed to appoint him as bishop so that he could go back to Aksum and preach Christianity. Frumentius was therefore consecrated as the first bishop of Christian Aksum.

The evidence for Ēzānā's conversion comes from inscriptions and coins. In the pre-Christian inscriptions of Ēzānā, the "king styled himself as the son of unconquered Mahrem. "However, after his conversion, he spoke of "the Lord of heaven and earth". A Greek inscription began : "In the faith of God and the power of the Father, the son and the Holy Ghost". While earlier coins bore the symbol of the crescent and the disc, the later ones had the sign of the cross⁶⁹.

Ēzānā's conversion has been seen as a climax of a cultural influence emanating from the Mediterranean world which had preceded his reign. There may have also been diplomatic and political considerations in the king's conversion⁷⁰.

67. *Ibid.*, p.3 ; Tadesse, *Church and State*, p. 22.

68. *Church of Ethiopia*, p. 3.

69. *Ibid.*, pp. 3-6.

70. Tadesse, *Church and State*, pp. 22, 23.

Moreover, the introduction of Christianity marked the beginning of relations with the Coptic Church of Egypt and "... helped the Aksumites in the refinement and development of their political culture"⁷¹.

Frumentius was succeeded by Minās, an Egyptian. Thus began the spiritual jurisdiction exercised by the Coptic Church over the Ethiopian Church which lasted for sixteen centuries⁷². There was also a stronger and more fundamental link between the two churches : doctrinal affinity manifested in a common attachment to the "Monophysite doctrine, the belief in there being one Person and one Nature in Christ ... The doctrine of the two Natures in Christ was ... reprobated in Ethiopia"⁷³.

The spread of Christianity beyond the royal circle during the fourth century was very limited⁷⁴.

An important landmark in the expansion of Christianity was the arrival in 480 of a group of missionaries later called the Nine Saints. It took place during the reign of Ēllā Amidā. The missionaries came from Constantinople and Syria where they had faced religious persecution⁷⁵. The Nine Saints preached Christianity in different parts of the country and established monastic centres⁷⁶. Another contribution of the Nine Saints was the development of liturgy and literature in Ge'ez into which they also translated the whole Bible and other basic religious works. Moreover, they inspired the development of religious music and art⁷⁷. The monasteries established by the Nine Saints and those founded later served as centres where educational facilities were provided until the middle of the thirteenth century⁷⁸.

The Christian kings of Aksum encouraged the settlement of missionaries in northern Ethiopia⁷⁹, and established churches and military colonies in the central highlands, especially in the Agaw - inhabited areas of Tigrāy, Lāstā, Wāg, Angot and Amhara where they imposed Christianity, their language and political organization on the local people⁸⁰. The spread of Christianity among the Agaw is dated to the time of Kālēb⁸¹.

71. Gebru Tareke, "Origin and Development of the Political Culture of the Aksumites" (B.A. thesis, Haile Sellassie I University, 1964), pp. 39. 43.

72. *Church of Ethiopia*, p. 7.

73. David Mathew, *Ethiopia : The study of a polity 1540-1935* (London : Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1947), pp. 12-13.

74. Tadesse, *Church and State*, p. 23.

75. It has been assumed that the Syrian missionaries came to Aksum on their own initiative or, according to hagiographers, by divine inspiration : Tadesse, *Church and State*, p. 29.

76. *Church of Ethiopia*, p. 7.

77. *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

78. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

79. Tadesse, *Church and State*, pp. 29-30.

80. *Church of Ethiopia*, p. 7.

81. Tadesse, *Church and State*, p. 25.

The second important stage in the development and consolidation of Christianity was associated with the emergence of monasticism. As Tadesse pointed out : "Monasticism was the most effective vehicle for the expansion of the church into the Ethiopian interior"⁸². *Abbā* Iyyasus Mo'a (c.1211-92) founded the famous island monastery and school of Lake Hayq which was attended by many young men from northern Shawā and Amhara. Many of his pupils later became monastic leaders and established their own schools in Bagēmder and Shawā. Two other monastic leaders were *Abbā* Takla Hāymānot (1215-1313) of Dabra Libānos in Shawā and *Abbā* Ēwostātēwos (d. 1352), founder of a militant monastic order and school in Sarā'è in present-day Eritrea⁸³. Takla Hāymānot sought to inject religious vigour and commitment among the Christians of Shawā and strongly disapproved of their complacency towards the pagan environment⁸⁴, while "Ewostatewos taught against the Alexandrian position on the Sabbath"⁸⁵ and "... insisted on the strict observance of the Sabbath, which had long been banned as a 'Jewish' practice by the Alexandrian patriarchate"⁸⁶.

In the first half of the fifteenth century, the Ethiopian Church was polarized between two monastic groups : the House of Takla Hāymānot - the established order in central Ethiopia - and the House of Ēwostātēwos which was predominant in Eritrea. Because of the regional and political undertones in the rivalry between the two orders, Emperor Zar'a Yā'eqob had to intervene by calling a council in 1450 at which a concession was made to the order of Ēwostātēwos by confirming the upholding of the observance of the Sabbath⁸⁷.

There is a general consensus among historians that the expansion of the church was facilitated by the territorial and political expansion of the Christian kingdom⁸⁸ "... the degree of political control which the Christian Kingdom possessed always determined the speed of advance of the Church"⁸⁹. As Levine wrote : "The Amhara expansion [beginning from the late thirteenth century] was not merely an extension of brute power. Political subjugation was accompanied, and often preceded, by a diffusion of Amhara cultural influence in such spheres as language, moral values and political style ... [and] to some extent that influence was imposed..."⁹⁰. Although the generalization that territorial expansion was followed by Christian evangelization may not always hold true -

82. *Idem*, "Ethiopia, the Red Sea ...", p. 160.

83. *Ibid.*, pp. 159-64 ; *idem*, *Church and State*, pp. 158-72, 206-219 ; *Church of Ethiopia*, pp. 20-21.

84. Tadesse, *Church and State*, pp. 168-69.

85. *Ibid.*, p. 209.

86. *Idem*, "Ethiopia the Red Sea ...", p. 162.

87. *Ibid.*, p.163.

88. *Ibid.*, p. 160 ; *idem*, *Church and State*, p. 156.

89. Tadesse, *Church and State*, p. 196.

90. Levine, p. 74.

such a in Shawā, where isolated Christian communities existed long before the establishment of political control in the area, and the fourteenth-century military conquests of Dāmōt and Hadyā which did not lead to the immediate christianization of the people⁹¹ - political subjugation created favourable conditions for the expansion of the Church.

Successful missionary work around Lake Tānā and in Gojjām was facilitated by the military activities of Amda Seyon launched early in his reign : in 1316/17 and before 1332. Local opposition to the expansion of Christianity, especially among the Falāshā, was suppressed by imperial forces. In short, "An active process of religious expansion followed the conquests of the Christian king"⁹².

The expansion of the Christian church and state suffered considerable reverses during the early sixteenth century as a result of the devastating wars with the Kingdom of Adāl under the leadership of *Imām* Ahmad. The principal reasons for the success of the *Imām's* forces were the heterogeneity of the Christian empire as a result of the extensive conquests of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and the fact that the Muslim-inhabited eastern provinces were never fully integrated⁹³. The wars greatly depleted the manpower, resources and wealth of the churches and monasteries⁹⁴.

The movement for independence of the Ethiopian Church from the jurisdiction of the Alexandrian Church is long-established and amply-documented. During the reign of Harbè (*fl.* first half of the twelfth century), brother of Lālibālā, an attempt was made to establish the autonomy of the church by asking "...[the then] Metropolitan Michael to consecrate seven Ethiopian bishops from among the clergy with the idea of creating a nucleus of bishops and ultimately achieving emancipation from the Patriarchate of Alexandria"⁹⁵.

The movement for autonomy was revived during the reign of Emperor Yohannes IV who managed to obtain the appointment of four bishops who arrived in 1889. Much earlier, during the reign of Zar'a Yā'eqob, three bishops had come from Egypt⁹⁶.

91. Tadesse, *Church and State*, pp. 156, 173.

92. *Ibid.*, pp. 189-90, 192-93, 197.

93. *Ibid.*, pp. 297, 300. In view of this, it is difficult to accept Levine's conclusion : "The Solomonid expansion of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries promoted the integration of Greater Ethiopia in two respects. It broadened the base of support for the political and cultural center of an emerging Ethiopian state by increasing the number of people in the highland plateau regions who identified with the Solomonid kingdom and its Monophysite Christian religion ... Second ... it influenced a wide area of peripheral kingdoms and peoples by impressing them with the grandeur of the imperial center and the power of its religion". (p. 75).

94. Tadesse, *Church and State*, p. 301 ; *Church of Ethiopia*, p. 28.

95. Sergew Hable Sellassie, *Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History to 1270* (Addis Ababa : United Printers, 1972), p. 25.

96. *Church of Ethiopia*, p. 34.

The principal aims of the movement for the autonomy of the church were to strengthen its organization and to facilitate evangelical work. It was increasingly felt that the law which prohibited the appointment of indigenous prelates - the so-called 36th Canon of the pseudo-Canon of Nicaea⁹⁷ - was unjustifiable and that the reform and modernization of the Church could not be implemented by a foreign religious hierarchy. In the thirteenth century, the Coptic Church had inserted the same article in the *Fetha Nagast* as a reaction to a movement for autonomy of the Ethiopian Church⁹⁸.

In 1926 *Abuna* Mātēwos, the last of the four bishops who had arrived in 1889, died. The Ethiopian Church requested the Alexandrian Patriarchate to authorize the next metropolitan to consecrate bishops. In 1929 *Abuna* Qerlos was appointed and allowed to consecrate five diocesan bishops. During the Italian occupation (1936-41), the Italians undermined the influence of the church. *Abuna* Pētros and *Abuna* Mikā'el were executed for their refusal to recognize Italian rule. In 1937 Ethiopian monks and other ecclesiastics who sympathized with the anti-Italian patriotic movement were killed. *Abuna* Qērlos was exiled to Rome and he later travelled to Cairo in self-imposed exile. The Italians forced Bishop Abraham to succeed Qērlos and declared the independence of the Ethiopian Church from Alexandria. The Coptic Patriarch excommunicated Abraham and his followers.

From Jerusalem the exiled church, under the leadership of *Echaggè* (later Patriarch) Bāslīyos, maintained the unity of the church and encouraged the patriots to intensify the struggle against the Italians. In 1941 *Abuna* Qērlos returned to Ethiopia and negotiations with the Coptic Church were resumed. The granting of autonomy and the lifting of the ban of excommunication were requested by the Ethiopian Church. In 1948 the Coptic Synod issued a proclamation to the effect that Ethiopians could be appointed as bishops in the lifetime of Qērlos and that Ethiopians could be consecrated upon his death. In 1951 Qērlos died and *Abuna* Bāslīyos was consecrated as the first Ethiopian metropolitan⁹⁹.

The governing body of the Church is the Holy Episcopal Synod consisting of the patriarch and six bishops. Its function is to make decisions on church matters except on dogma which could be examined only in consultation with the Alexandrian Church and other Oriental Orthodox churches¹⁰⁰.

97. The text of the canon reads : "The Ethiopians have no power to create or choose a Patriarch, whose prelate must be rather under the jurisdiction of the Patriarch of Alexandria ... ", Sergew, *op. cit.*, p. 111. However, in *Church of Ethiopia*, p. 9, the article is referred to as "the forty-second Pseudo-Canon". On this, see also Bairu Tafla, "The Role of the Church in Ethiopian History to 1270" (B.A. thesis, University College of Addis Ababa, 1965), pp. 26, 30 and Adugna Amanu, "The Ethiopian Orthodox Church becomes Autocephalous" (B.A. thesis, Haile Sellassie I University, 1969), pp. 3-4.

98. Sergew, p. 9.

99. *Church of Ethiopia*, pp. 34-36.

100. *Ibid.*, p. 39

An important aspect of the history of the Ethiopian Church had been its relations with Egypt based on the centuries-old dependence on the Coptic Church. As noted above, the bishop was an Egyptian selected from among the monks of the monastery of St-Antonios. He was consecrated for life. In Ethiopia "... he always remained in thought and speech a foreigner ... At the period of his greatest influence, the *abuna* [sic] was an object of reverence, anxiety and an unfatigued suspicion"¹⁰¹. Upon his death, requests for a successor were made by Ethiopian kings together with expensive gifts both to Egypt's Muslim rulers and to the patriarch. The elected bishop was accompanied by clerics and relatives who were well provided for. There were extensive pieces of land which traditionally belonged to the bishops.

As the highest ecclesiastical dignitaries in the hierarchy of the church, bishops formed an important and integral part of the imperial court. However, because they were foreigners who often did not speak the local languages, they were isolated figures. The main function of the bishops was the ordination of priests and deacons. Those with strong character and personality provided effective spiritual leadership to the church. However, the fact that they came from a Muslim country potentially undermined their position. Because of the political implications for the Coptic Church in Egypt, the bishops were reluctant to openly encourage Christian militancy against Islam in Ethiopia even at the height of the conflicts between the Christian kingdom and the Muslim states in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Rather they tended to be moderate and accomodating. Such an attitude had an impact on the policy of the Ethiopian rulers towards Islam in the country¹⁰².

The Ethiopian clergy and Christian peasantry could not understand why the bishops refrained from giving their full support and blessings to the religious sentiments against Islam. All this undermined the image of the bishopric office in the eyes of the Christian population and provided an opportunity for militant monks and hermits to suspect the religious integrity and commitment of the bishops¹⁰³.

Resistance to the Expansion of the Church

The notion that there was no opposition to the spread of Christianity is wrong¹⁰⁴. The tradition of pagan resistance can be dated even to the formative

101. Matthew, p. 12.

102. On the relationship between the fate of the Copts of Egypt and that of the Ethiopian Muslims, see Abir, *Ethiopia and the Red Sea*, pp. 27-34 ; Taddesse, "The Solomonids ...", pp. 450-51, 452-53 ; *Church and State*, pp. 46-48, 69-72, 126-27, 129-30, 253-56, 261-63 ; "Ethiopia, the Red Sea ...", pp. 105 ff.

103. Taddesse, "Ethiopia, the Red Sea...", pp. 157-58.

104. *Idem*, "A Short Note ...", p. 137.

period of the establishment of the church. Ēzānā may have faced opposition to his conversion from anti-Christian elements¹⁰⁵.

Pagan resistance became more pronounced and intense particularly in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. There was widespread opposition in Gojjām and among the Falāshā in the first half of the fourteenth century¹⁰⁶. Pagan priests in charge of rituals and ceremonies had social and political influence, and claimed power over natural phenomena. It was these leaders of pagan communities who were in the forefront of the opposition to Christian expansion after the end of the fifteenth century¹⁰⁷.

The timing of the resistance coincided with the period of the expansion of the church in late mediaeval times. This period can be divided into two phases : a) before the accession of Amda Seyon to power during which there were few isolated Christian communities in northern Shawā surrounded by pagan chiefs who persecuted them, and destroyed churches and villages, and b) the period of Amda Seyon who "divided his newly conquered areas in Sāwa and beyond the Awas[River] into a number of monastic spheres of influence and distributed them among the pupils of Tāklā Haymanot"¹⁰⁸. At the insistence of the Christian monks, churches were built on old pagan sites and this intensified opposition. Although in the fourteenth century there was a lot of evangelical activity directed from the island monasteries of Lake Tānā with a view to converting the Agaw population in Gojjām, and although such evangelical work was supported by the kings, the outcome was not impressive. Resistance continued even after the military and political subjugation of the region. That is why the Agaw joined hands with Ahmad Grāñ during his campaigns of conquest in the early sixteenth century¹⁰⁹.

Two factors which contributed to the problem of evangelization were the linguistic and ethnic diversity, and the vastness, of the conquered areas which militated against the smooth expansion of the church. One of the major consequences of the resistance was that the church, seeking to gain new converts, was forced to make concessions to paganism. This affected the external aspects of the church liturgy and, subsequently, the more substantive tenets of worship and faith. This trend towards accommodation continued to the extent of dispensing with the requirement of baptism and the promising of salvation to those who only prepared religious feasts. Another manifestation of the divergence from

105. *Idem*, *Church and State*, p. 23.

106. *Ibid.*, pp. 191-92, 196.

107. Taddesse, "A Short Note ...", p. 139.

108. *Ibid.*

109. *Ibid.*, p. 146.

orthodoxy was that the Christian clergy assumed the role of the traditional pagan ritual leaders¹¹⁰.

As late as the mid-fifteenth century, "numerous pagan practices were rampant even among the Christian communities". Successful pagan subversive propaganda threatened to undermine the religious reforms of Zar'a Ya'eqob and on one occasion prevented the celebration of a religious festival. This prompted the emperor to take harsh measures against the pagan population. It is worth noting in this connection that Abir's denial of the existence of pagan resistance during Zar'a Yā'eqob's reign is unsubstantiated. He wrote : "Zara Yaeqob's coerced evangelisation was unsuccessful, in the final analysis, not due to the resistance of the Cushite pagan and Muslim population, but rather because he failed to appreciate the magnitude of the problem - the spiritual and organisational feebleness of the church ..."¹¹¹

Organized pagan resistance restricted the expansion of the church and contributed to the adoption of a policy of consolidation of the power of the central government in the conquered territories, and to the internal reorganization of the church. However, Zar'a Yā'eqob's attempts to extirpate non-Christian practices were frustrated by opposition within and outside of the Christian communities. The persistence of resistance indicates that strong pagan communities were able to survive within the Christian kingdom and reveals "the superficial nature of the expansion of the Christian faith even in the areas where churches had long been established"¹¹².

Although the church played a crucial role in the legitimation and consolidation of Christian rule, the alliance between state and church "did not always help the further expansion of the Christian faith". Some kings actually "withdrew their support to the militant evangelizing efforts of the Church when it was expedient to do so". According to one tradition, Amda Seyon encouraged "the refusal of a non-Christian community to adopt the Christian religion. When a group of fresh 'converts' were presented to him... [he] is said to have told them : 'Go, and live according to the rules and customs of your ancestor'"¹¹³.

Resentment against Christianity was also intensified because the church was seen as an instrument of political domination. It was thus through "superior military might [that] the Christian rulers kept their heterogeneous Empire together". The resistance of the non-Christian population also contributed to "the

110. *Ibid.*, pp. 146-47.

111. Abir, *Ethiopia and the Red Sea*, p. 63.

112. Tadesse, "A Short Note ...", pp. 148-49.

113. *Ibid.*, p. 149.

syncretist elements in the beliefs and religious practices of the ordinary Ethiopian Christian"¹¹⁴.

Religious Conflicts

Between the early fourteenth and the middle of the fifteenth centuries, the Ethiopian church was beset by internal religious conflicts. The Stephanite movement - founded by Estifānos (*fl.* early 15th century) - advocated the separation of the church from the state. The movement had political implications¹¹⁵.

Early in the seventeenth century, the Jesuit missionaries, who came in the wake of the Portuguese military intervention on the side of the Christian kingdom against Adāl, succeeded in prevailing upon Susneyos to convert to Catholicism and to declare it as the official religion of the country. This led to a prolonged and bloody civil war, and finally to the expulsion of the Jesuits by order of Fāsīladas¹¹⁶. The Jesuit involvement contributed, among other things, to the intensification of religious controversies within the Church which "...arose from the need to re-examine the doctrinal positions of the Church and to purify the Church from possible external influences still lingering even after the expulsion of the missionaries"¹¹⁷.

The controversies were mainly over the nature of Christ. There were three major factions : a) those who subscribed to the official *Tawāhdo* doctrine which confessed "the unity of two natures, divine and human, in the person of Christ, without confusion and without separation - hence the name Tewahdo which means 'unity'" ; b) the followers of Qebāt ('unction') which emphasized the anointment of Christ and not the incarnation of the Son ; and c) those who supported the doctrine of *Saggā Lej* ('the son of Grace') and *sost ledat* ('three births of Christ') : the eternal birth of the Son from the Father, the genetic birth of the Son from the Virgin Mary, and birth from the Holy Ghost after the incarnation of Jesus¹¹⁸. Such doctrinal disputes, besides weakening the unity of the church, "... became a major issue in the political history of Ethiopia in the Gondarine period [mid-17th to mid-19th century]¹¹⁹.

114. *Ibid.*, p. 150.

115. *Idem*, "Some Notes on the Fifteenth Century Stephanite 'Heresy' in the Ethiopian Church", *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici*, XII (1966), pp. 103, 109, 112.

116. On the impact of the Jesuits, see Girma Beshah and Merid Wolde Aregay, *The Question of the Union of the Churches in Luso-Ethiopian Relations (1500-1632)* (Lisbon : Junta de Investigações do Ultramar and Centro de Estudos Históricos Ultramarinos, 1964), pp. 79-104.

117. *Church of Ethiopia*, p. 29, Abir, *Ethiopia and the Red Sea*, pp. 204-7, 211-27, 233-34.

118. *Church of Ethiopia*, p. 31-33.

119. Abir, *Ethiopia and the Red Sea*, p. 234.

During the reign of Emperor Têwodros II, the *tawâhdo* teaching was declared the official doctrine and the followers of the other sects were suppressed. However, doctrinal differences continued to plague the church and in 1878 Emperor Yohannes IV called the Council of Boru Mèdā at which the *tawâhdo* doctrine was again upheld¹²⁰.

Islam in Ethiopia : Introduction and Expansion

Islam in Ethiopia has a long though chequered history which has not engaged the attention of both specialists in Ethiopian studies and the general public in and outside of the country. It is rich in as yet untapped indigenous source materials - both oral and documentary¹²¹.

It is a well-known fact that one of the early converts to Islam was Bilāl b. Rabāh, a freed slave of Ethiopian parentage and the first *mu'adhḥin*¹²². It is also equally well-established that the Prophet Muhammad advised a group of his first followers to seek asylum in Aksum as a result of the hardship and persecution to which they were subjected by the Quraysh rulers of Mecca. The arrival of the refugees marks the earliest contact between nascent Islam and Ethiopia, and stands out as a significant milestone in the history of Islam in the country.

The *hijra* to Aksum was first recorded by the Prophet's biographers, Ibn Ishāq (fl. 704-76) and Ibn Hishām (d. 828 or 833)¹²³. All later commentators - both Muslim and non-Muslim¹²⁴ - based their accounts on these early sources. What was the local impact, if any, of the *hijra* ? Ethiopian Muslim informants are divided on this question. Some say that there was no possibility of preaching Islam among the indigenous inhabitants because of the refugee status of the immigrants which would have restricted their freedom of action¹²⁵. Others speculate that during their thirteen-year stay in Ethiopia (615-628), the *muhājirūn*

120. *Church of Ethiopia*, p. 33.

121. For an extensive and critical survey of the literature on Islam, see my "Clerics, Traders and Chiefs : A Historical Study of Islam in Wallo (Ethiopia), With Special Emphasis on the Nineteenth Century" (Ph. D. thesis, University of Birmingham, 1985), pp.1-79.

122. See the article "BILAL B. RABAH" in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* new edn. (Leiden/London, 1960), I, p. 215 ; H.A.R. Gibb, *Mohammedanism* revised edn. (London, 1961), p. 63.

123. A.G. Guillaume (ed.), *The Life of Muhammad* (A Translation of Ibn Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah) (Karachi, 1967), pp.146-55, 167-69, 179 ; 'Abd al-Malik ibn Hishām, *al-Sirat al-Nabawiyya* Mustafā al-Saqqā, Ibrahim al-Abyari and 'Abd al-Hafiz Shalbī (eds.), (Beirut, 1391/1971), I, pp.344-65 ; II, pp. 3-8.

124. Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari, *Jāmi'u'l-Bayān fi Tafsir al-Qur'ān* 3rd edn. (Beirut, 1398/1977), VII,1-5 ; Ibn Kathir al-Qarshi al-Dimashqi, *Tafsir al-Qur'ān al-'Uzmā* (Egypt, n.d.), II, p. 85 ; M. Hartmann, "Der Nagāsi Ashama und sein Sohn Armā", *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, XLIX (1895), pp. 299-30 ; S.Q. Fatimi, "A New Light on the Hijrat to Habashah", *Pakistan Historical Society Journal*, IX, 1 (1961), pp. 109-15.

125. Informants : *al-Hāj* Muhammad Zaki Ilyās (interviewed on 30 September 1982) and *Shaykh* 'Ali Yusuf (21 July 1983). According to J. Spencer Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, 2nd impression (London, 1965), p. 138, this was because Islam had not yet developed as a propagating force.

must have attempted to propagate Islam, although there are no contemporary records to support such a claim¹²⁶. One informant asserted that between thirty and sixty local converts accompanied the refugees back to Medina¹²⁷.

Of all the episodes associated with the *hijra* to Aksum, none has been more controversial than the alleged conversion of the king, Ashama, and his correspondence with the Prophet. The Arab and Ethiopian Muslim view is that the king had in fact converted to Islam secretly and that the letters which he and the Prophet exchanged were genuine¹²⁸. On the other hand, non-Muslim scholars have consistently maintained an attitude of scepticism as to the reliability of the traditions¹²⁹. One writer has recently stated that one of the original versions of the Prophet's letter to Ashama, asking him to embrace Islam, was discovered, although we are not told when and where such a discovery was made¹³⁰.

It should be noted that these episodes were not recorded in any contemporary Ethiopian source and this seems to have strengthened the scepticism of non-Muslim commentators. However, the tradition of the writing of chronicles did not begin until much later and, besides, Ethiopian and foreign writers rely on the Arabic sources for the *hijra* itself, the historicity of which has not been questioned or challenged. In spite of that, non-Muslim writers have been inclined to dismiss out of hand even the very possibility - however remote it might or might not have been - of the Aksumite king's conversion which could have been kept secret owing to the fear of the reaction it would have provoked. Indeed Ibn Ishāq makes a reference to an active clerical and political opposition to the king's favourable attitude towards the Muslims and to a civil war which ensued¹³¹. It is also likely that the king's benevolence and generous hospitality

126. Informants : *al-Hājj Muhammad Wale Ahmad* (25 June 1983). Cf. W. Montgomery Watt, *What is Islam?* (London/Beirut, 1968), p.100 who wrote that the immigrants were engaged only in commerce.

127. Informant : the late *al-Hājj Muhammad Thāni Habib Bashir* (22 August 1983).

128. The classical Arab writers and Ethiopian Muslim informants quote verse 3 of *Surat al-Mā'ida* of the Qur'ān. See commentary of George Sale (transl.), *The Koran* (London, 1838), pp. 86-87, n.w. Reference is also made to the Prophet's performing the *salāt al-gha'ib* for the Aksumite king upon learning of his death, as mentioned by al-Wāhidi, *Asbāb al-Nuzul* (Cairo, 1315 A.H.), pp. 103-4. According to Taddesse, *Church and State*, p. 34, it was this which "... apparently created the tradition that the king was in fact a convert to the new religion ; and the tradition has in the end led to his being considered as a saint". The tomb of Ahmad al-Najāsh, as he is popularly known, near Wuqro is a centre of local pilgrimage.

129. Trimmingham, *op. cit.*, p. 46 n.4 ; J. Doresse, *L'Empire du Prêtre-Jean* (Paris, 1957), II, p. 4 ; Sergew, *op. cit.*, pp.17, 185.

130. Muhammad Hamidullāh, "African (Black) Muslims in the Time of the Prophet", *al-'Ilm*, 4 (1984), p. 17. The letter to the Byzantine emperor, Heraclius, has been authenticated and put on display in Amman : "Letter from the Prophet to an Emperor, *'Arabia : the Islamic World Review*, 30 (Feb. 1984), pp. 65-66. On the Prophet's letters, see also 'Abd al-jabbār Mahmud al-Sāmīrā'i, "al-Rasā'il allati ba'atha bihā al-Nabiyyu Sallā Allāh 'alayhi wasallam ilā muluk al-duwal al-mujāwara", *al-Faysal*, 55 (1981) pp. 71-81.

131. Guillaume, *op. cit.*, pp. 154-55.

towards the Muslim refugees may have been interpreted as a desire for, or proof of, conversion to Islam¹³². Yet in itself none of this is intrinsically improbable.

From the seventh century onwards, Islam penetrated into the Ethiopian region¹³³ through the Dahlak Islands off the Red Sea coast and through Zeila on the Gulf of Aden coast. The Dahlak route did not, however, play a significant role in the expansion of Islam into the interior¹³⁴ because of the existence of a well-established Christian state and church, and due to the ban on the propagation of the new faith imposed by the Christian rulers and clergy¹³⁵. However, trading communities flourished in the principal commercial centres and along the major trade routes¹³⁶. In subsequent years, small groups of Arab traders, teachers and political refugees settled in the coastal districts in the neighbourhood of Zeila and gradually moved inland carrying Islam with them and propagating it among the sedentary and nomadic populations of the hinterland. This culminated in the establishment of several petty states in the basin of the Awāsh River and further south. The first of these states was the so-called Sultanate of Shawā whose founders claimed descent from the Makhzūmī tribe of Mecca to which, it may be noted, Khālid b. al-Walīd, the hero of early Islam, belonged¹³⁷. According to an Arabic document published by Enrico Cerulli¹³⁸, the dynasty was founded in 283 A. H/A.D.986-7. This has been challenged by Tadesse who proposed the early twelfth century as the most likely period for the formation of the state¹³⁹. The other major states were Ifāt, the earliest "centralized Islamic state", in sub-Saharan Africa¹⁴⁰, Dawāro, Fatajār, Hadyā and Bāli.

132. Similarly, on the basis of the pro-Muslim policy of Emperor Fāsiladas, some Muslim writers have alleged that he had embraced Islam. See E. Van Donzel, "Fasiladas et l'Islam," in Joseph Tubiana (ed.), *Modern Ethiopia from the Accession of Menilek II to the Present: Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, Nice, 19-22 December 1977* (Rotterdam, 1980), p. 391. See also his *Foreign Relations of Ethiopia 1642-1700, Documents relating to the Journeys of Khodja Murad* (Leiden, 1979), pp. 4-12, and *A Yemenite Embassy to Ethiopia 1647-1649* (Stuttgart, 1986).

133. Tadesse, *Church and State*, p. 32 wrote: "During the period between the beginning of the seventh and the middle of the eighth centuries the Christians seem to have gradually lost their control of the maritime trade." On p. 43, he noted: "We have seen above that Aksum had already lost to the Muslims the control of the maritime trade in the Red Sea by the middle of the eighth century A.D. The spread of Islam in the Ethiopian region must have already started by then". One wonders why it could not have started earlier.

134. However, the presence of Islam in the islands from the first century of the *hijrā* is well-attested: Tadesse, *Church and State*, p. 176.

135. Tadesse, "Ethiopia, the Red Sea ...", p. 121; *idem*, *Church and State*, p. 44.

136. Tadesse, "Ethiopia, the Red Sea ...", pp. 121-22; *Church and State*, pp. 46, 83.

137. Trimmingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, p. 58: the ancestors of the dynasty came during the caliphate of 'Umar b. al-Khattāb.

138. "Il Sultanato dello Scioa nel secolo XIII secondo un nuovo documento storico", *RSE*, I, 1 (1941), pp. 5-42.

139. Tadesse, "Ethiopia, the Red Sea ...", pp. 106, 139-40.

140. I.M. Lewis (ed.), *Islam in Tropical Africa* (London, 1966), p. 38.

The principal propagators of Islam in Ethiopia were clerics who were initially of non-Ethiopian origin but who were gradually superseded by indigenous teachers. Oral traditions strongly emphasize the crucial role played by men of religion in the expansion of Islam. The *Jabarti* (north and central Ethiopian Muslims) even claim that their conversion dates from the time of the *hijrā* to Aksum¹⁴¹.

Islam gained access to Ethiopia especially through the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden coastal areas which were remote from any direct and effective control of the Aksumite state¹⁴². The carriers and cultivators of early Islam were therefore clerics and traders on the coast and nomadic elements in the interior, but it was the sedentary communities domiciled in the ecological zone that marked the transition from the arid lowlands to the fertile plateau who established Islam firmly and sustained the emerging indigenous Muslim culture.

The development of trade and the proliferation of trade routes, and the activities of local Muslim merchants, led to the growth of small trading settlements which also served as centres for the diffusion of Islam¹⁴³. As these centres began to have an impact on the local people through their gradual conversion to Islam, the Christian state in northern Ethiopia imposed on the Muslims a ban on public worship¹⁴⁴.

Cerulli has proposed a hypothesis about the process of Islamization in Ethiopia. Accordingly during the early stage, the nascent Muslim community consisted of two social groups : a clerical élite and the "mass of population" whose conversion to Islam was politically and 'nationally' motivated and whose Islam was superficial¹⁴⁵. Needless to say that this interpretation ignores, or fails to recognize, the purely religious-cultural aspect of the propagation of Islam. Moreover, it is based on post-thirteenth-century sources and cannot therefore reflect the situation prior to that period. It does not also explain the nature of the earliest encounter between Islam and the local people.

The progress of Islam in Ethiopia can be said to have passed through the following major phases :

a) a formative phase (from *ca.* 7th to the 11th century) characterized by the arrival of Muslim Arab immigrants consisting of traders, preachers and other specialized groups such as artisans. The evidence for this comes from inscriptions discovered in the Dahlak Islands dating from the mid-ninth

141. Trimingham, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

142. Tadesse, *Church and State*, p. 43.

143. Trimingham, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

144. Tadesse, *Church and State*, p. 44.

145. Enrico Cerulli, "L'Islam en Ethiopie : sa signification historique et ses méthodes," *Correspondance d'Orient*, 5 (1961), pp. 323-27.

century¹⁴⁶, fragments of Arabic chronicles on the founding of the Makhzūmi dynasty, and inscriptions from southern Tigrāy - one of which is dated A.D. 1006¹⁴⁷. The consequences of these developments were the establishment of Muslim trading settlements on the coast ; the conversion of the local inhabitants and of settled and nomadic groups of the plains ; the emergence of Ethiopian Muslim trading communities ; and the rise of Islam as a political factor in the Horn from the tenth century onwards.

b) the period of the emergence and consolidation of such states as Ifāt and Adāl, and of their friction with the Christian kingdom from the late thirteenth to the fifteenth century, although the earliest conflict took place in the early twelfth century between the sultanate of Shawā and the Amhara¹⁴⁸.

c) the period of temporary Muslim military and political ascendancy over much of the territory formerly under the control of the Christian state, following the conquest launched by *Imām* Ahmad in the second quarter of the sixteenth century.

d) the period of the steady expansion of Islam (18th century) when the Christian state declined and Islam regained political power under regional dynasties especially in Wallo ; and

e) the period of Islamic revival and renewed confrontation with the reconstituted Christian state in the second half of the nineteenth century¹⁴⁹.

A major feature of Islam in Ethiopia has been the multiplicity of schools of Islamic law (*madhāhib* : sing. : *madhhab*)¹⁵⁰. Three - and not two¹⁵¹ - of the four canonical schools are represented : the Shāfi'i ; Hanafī and Mālikī. While the Shāfi'i and Hanafī rites were introduced from the Hijāz and Yemen, the Mālikī was brought from the eastern Sudan¹⁵².

Some commentators on Islam in Ethiopia have asserted that the religious brotherhoods (*turuq* ; sing : *tariqa*) were practically nonexistent¹⁵³. This is far from the truth. As in the *madhāhib*, there is a great diversity of *turuq*. The principal Sūfi orders are the Qādiriyya, Tijāniyya and Sammāniyya. The Qādiri

146. According to E. Cerulli, "Ethiopia's relations with the Muslim world" in El Fasi and Hrbek (eds), *UNESCO General History of Africa* (1988, III), (p. 578, the oldest inscription is dated 298/911.

147. The inscriptions are date between 391/987 and 549/1154 : Cerulli, *op. cit.*, p. 579.

148. Taddesse, "Ethiopia, the Red Sea ...", p. 107.

149. Hussein, "Clerics, Chiefs ...", pp. 166-68.

150. J. Spencer Trimingham, *The influence of Islam upon Africa* (New York/Washington, 1968), p. 58.

151. Nehemia Levtzion (ed.), *Conversion to Islam* (New York/London, 1979), p. 5.

152. Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, p. 232.

153. A. Guérinot, "L'Islam et l'Abyssinie," *Revue du Monde Musulman*, XXXIV (1917/18), p. 30 ; S.W. Zwemer, "Islam in Ethiopia and Eritrea", *Muslim World*, 26, 1 (1936), p. 14.

tariqa was first introduced into Massawa and Zeila by Yemenite and Hadrami immigrants, and into Harar in eastern Ethiopia in the early sixteenth century by a certain *Sharīf* Abū Bakr b. 'Abd Allāh al-Aydarūs¹⁵⁴. It spread into Wallo in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century¹⁵⁵. The Tijāniyya was brought by Sudanese mystics and is predominant in Jimmā and Gommā in southwest Ethiopia, while the Sammāniyya was introduced into Eritrea by a Maghribi *shaykh*, Adam al-Kinānī¹⁵⁶. The celebrated Wallo Muslim scholar-saint, *al-Hāj* Bushrā Ay Muhammad (d. 1863), was initiated into the Sammānī order by *Shaykh* Ahmad al-Tayyib al-Bashir (d. 1823)¹⁵⁷.

The introduction and propagation of the Sūfī orders is closely linked with two developments : the revival of the Red Sea trade towards the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries, and the resurgence of Islamic reformist and fundamentalist movements in the wider Islamic world. The latter event had wide repercussions on Islam in Ethiopia in that Ethiopian Muslims who visited the Hijāz (for pilgrimage) and Yemen (for advanced religious training) were exposed to new ideas of Islamic revivalism and initiated into the newly - emerging and already - established orders. Upon their return to Ethiopia, they strove to revitalize Islam both by force and through teaching, *i.e.*, by establishing centres of learning which later developed into centres of local pilgrimage¹⁵⁸.

It is worth noting in this connection that while Islam in Ethiopia did not respond to the Wahhābī call for the rejection of such practices as the veneration of saints and visits to their shrines, it adopted for its own purposes the revivalist spirit and militant zeal of the Wahhābī movement¹⁵⁹. This clearly suggests that, of the three forms of nineteenth-century Islamic movements - Wahhābism, Mahdism and *Tariqa* revival¹⁶⁰, - it was only to the last one that the Ethiopian Muslim 'ulamā' responded favourably¹⁶¹.

Scholarly and popular images of Islam in Ethiopia have not only led to its misrepresentation and misinterpretation but also to the neglect of the study of the history and culture of Ethiopian Muslims. While Ullendorff asserted that the

154. Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, pp. 234, 240.

155. Informants : *al-Hāj* Muḥammad Tāj al-Dīn Ahmad (29 March 1982) and others.

156. Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, p. 236.

157. Informants : *Shaykh* Muzaḥfar Bahru (2 April 1982) and others.

158. On education in Wallo, see my "Traditional Muslim Education in Wallo", in *Proceedings of the Ninth International Congress of Ethiopian Studies* (Moscow : USSR Academy of Sciences and Africa Institute, 1988), Vol. 3, pp. 94-106 ; on Muslim shrines in Wallo, *idem*, "Two Muslim Shrines in Wallo" in *Proceedings of the Fifth Seminar of the Department of History* (Addis Ababa, 1990), pp. 61-74 ; on those elsewhere in Ethiopia, Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, pp. 247-56.

159. Hussein, "Clerics, Chiefs ...", p. 189.

160. J. Spencer Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (Oxford, 1971), p. 243.

161. Hussein, *loc. cit.*

history of Islam in Ethiopia does not deserve a thorough study because of the traditional antagonism between Christianity and Islam, and because of its marginal significance for an understanding of what he called "the essential Abyssinia"¹⁶². Trimingham wrote that Islam in Ethiopia has no history "without [Christian] Abyssinia"¹⁶³. Another stereotype is the notion of Ethiopia as an "island of Christianity" which completely ignores the long presence of the Muslims and of the followers of traditional religion in the country. This notion has been invoked by Ethiopian Christian rulers and by scholars. Among the former was Menilek II who, in his circular letter of 1891 to the European powers, referred to Ethiopia as an "island of Christianity surrounded by paganism"¹⁶⁴. Among the latter, Trimingham wrote : "... the Christian state in northern Ethiopia was a beleaguered fortress in the midst of a sea of Islam"¹⁶⁵ and Cerulli described the country as a "Christian island in an ocean of unbelievers"¹⁶⁶.

While it is true that Christianity had been introduced into Ethiopia as a court religion, as discussed in a earlier section of this paper, some three centuries before the advent of Islam, and had enjoyed preponderance in terms of state patronage and influence, its definitive consolidation, even in 'Abyssinia', occurred only in the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries¹⁶⁷. This clearly shows that it had taken between nine and ten centuries for Christianity to have a wide impact upon the religious life of the people in the north and central plateau. Hence there are no grounds for perceiving either present-day Ethiopia or even old 'Abyssinia' as exclusively or essentially a Christian land. The slow progress of Christianity owing to pagan resistance, the coming and expansion of Islam, and the persistence of other traditional religions make it necessary to regard Ethiopian or Abyssinian history as a history of a multi-religious society. Islam in Ethiopia cannot therefore be reduced to a disposable adjunct to national/Christian history but must be recognized as an integral part of the history of the formation and development of the Ethiopian state and society.

Islam and State Formation

It has been noted earlier that one of the crucial factors for the emergence of Ifāt as a leading state in the region between the Gulf of Aden and the Shawān

162. Edward Ullendorff, *The Ethiopians : An Introduction to Country and People* (London, 1960), pp. 112-13.

163. Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, p. 143.

164. Cited in Rubenson, *The Survival*, p. 408.

165. In James Kritzeck and William H. Lewis (eds), *Islam in Africa* (New York, 1969), p. 21.

166. "Islam in East Africa", in A. J. Arberry (ed.) *Religion in the Middle East* (Cambridge, 1969), II, pp. 210-11.

167. Tadesse, *Church and State*, pp. 156, 158, 204 ; Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, p. 65.

plateau was the beginning of the use of the trade route which terminated at Zeila by the middle of the thirteenth century¹⁶⁸. However, it should be noted that since the trade routes from the Gulf to the hinterland of the Horn had already opened in the tenth century¹⁶⁹, one may argue that the formation of trading settlements and the process of state formation must have started much earlier than the middle of the thirteenth century. This could therefore explain the rise of the 'sultanate of Shawā', the predecessor of Ifāt¹⁷⁰.

Two developments contributed to the further strengthening and consolidation of these early Muslim communities : the expansion of Islam through increasing conversions, thus reinforcing their sense of identity, and the development of long-distance trade which made them economically viable and prosperous. In their attempts to extend the sphere of their commercial activities into Shawā and Amhara, they had to collaborate with the neighbouring Christian communities of these areas. Such interdependence and link encouraged mutual toleration and peaceful coexistence¹⁷¹.

However, this equilibrium started to change during the reign of Amda Seyon who, through his conquests of Dāmōt, Hadyā, Gojjām and the Falāshā country north of Lake Tānā, was able to acquire manpower reserves for his army and to control the termini of the trade routes from the Gulf. This led to his desire to impose his authority on the Muslim states of Ifāt, Dawāro, Sharkha and Bāli. It was Ifāt which led the resistance to this political expansion of the Christian kingdom. Amda Seyon's campaigns of 1332 resulted in the subjugation of Ifāt and the submission of Dawāro, Sharkha and Bāli to his authority¹⁷². This in turn led to the creation of a Muslim league in Adāl headed by a breakaway branch of the Walasma ruling family of Ifāt, and to its attempt to take the offensive against the Christian kingdom¹⁷³. Despite some initial successes, the rulers of Adāl were repeatedly defeated by the Christian forces throughout the last quarter of the fourteenth century¹⁷⁴. During the reign of Zar'a Yā'eqob and his son, Ba'eda Māryām (r. 1468-78), successful campaigns were launched against Adāl in retaliation for its renewed offensives¹⁷⁵.

168. Tadesse, "The Solomonids...", p. 430.

169. *Ibid.*

170. Cf. *Ibid.*, where the emergence of both the 'Sultanate of Shawa and Ifāt is dated the 13th century. In an earlier work : "Ethiopia, the Red Sea...", pp. 106, 139-40, it is stated that the 'Sultanate of Shawā emerged in the early 12th century. Abir, *Ethiopia and the Red Sea*, p.121, dates the beginning of the expansion of the sultanate to the 10th century.

171. Tadesse, "The Solomonids...", p. 432 ; Abir, *Ethiopia and the Red Sea*, pp.12-13.

172. Tadesse, "The Solomonids ...", pp.434-5. According to Tadesse, "Ethiopia, the Red Sea ...", p. 143, the conflict between the Christian kingdom and Ifāt was the outcome of the latter's attempt to use its commercial "influence ... against the interests of the reviving Christian kingdom."

173. Tadesse, "The Solomonids...", p. 439.

174. Abir, *Ethiopia and the Red Sea*, pp. 26-27.

175. *Ibid.*, pp. 32-33.

In the 1490s, effective political power in Adāl was held by Mahfūz, the emir of Harar who took the title of *imām*. Although the legitimate sultan, Muhammad b. Azhar al-Dīn (r. 1488-1518), wanted to maintain peaceful relations with the Christian kingdom, Mahfūz was eager to resume the struggle and his successful raids increased his popularity¹⁷⁶. The trading and agricultural communities of Adāl supported Mahfūz in order to regain their economic influence which had been undermined by the expansion of the Christian state¹⁷⁷. In 1508 Mahfūz led a series of surprise attacks against the eastern and southeastern provinces and returned to Adāl with a large booty¹⁷⁸. In 1516, Emperor Lebna Dengel (r. 1508-1540) led a counter-attack and defeated and killed Mahfūz¹⁷⁹.

After a struggle for power in Adāl, following the death of Mahfūz, Ahmad b. Ibrāhīm assumed the leadership of Adāl and launched his *futūh* (conquest). His decisive victory over the Christian forces in 1529 was followed by his march to Shawā in 1531 and the provinces around Lake Tānā in 1533. By 1540 the Christian kingdom had been completely overrun by the Muslim forces of Grān who organized an administrative system and established a 'Muslim Ethiopian sultanate'. The civil administration of the empire was staffed by members of the traditional aristocracy while the military administration was completely under Grān's commanders who controlled the civilian governors and were in charge of the collection of taxes. The taxes from the conquered lands went to the central treasury and Christian subjects were expected to pay the spoil tax to the new government. The peasants were taxed heavily while the Muslims of the highlands acquired an enhanced position in the social hierarchy¹⁸⁰.

However, the Muslim empire "...was in a constant state of emergency... he [Grān] did not have enough time to consolidate his power in his newly conquered territories... [and] when he lost his life at [the Battle of] Woina-Dega [in 1543], his army disintegrated and his followers rushed back to the Harar plateau in various directions"¹⁸¹.

After the death of Grān, several attempts were made by his successors to challenge the Christian kingdom throughout the second half of the sixteenth century. However, their efforts were not wholly successful largely because of the incursions of the Oromo which threatened Hara. In 1577 the political centre of Adāl was moved to the oasis of Awsā in the Danākil desert¹⁸². The political disintegration and economic decline of Adāl became irreversible. As Abir noted :

176. *Ibid.*, p. 69 ; Tadesse, "Ethiopia, the Red Sea...", pp. 166-68.

177. Abir, *Ethiopia and the Red Sea*, p. 74.

178. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

179. *Ibid.*, p. 82.

180. *Ibid.*, pp. 91-92 ; Tadesse, "Ethiopia, the Red Sea ...", pp. 175-77.

181. Tadesse, "Ethiopia, the Red Sea...", p. 182.

182. Abir, *Ethiopia and the Red Sea*, pp. 133-41.

*"By the beginning of the seventeenth century Adal, as a political entity, loosely unifying the different Muslim elements of the Chercher-Harar plateau and the coast, had ceased to exist. It had disintegrated into insignificant political units fighting each other despite growing Galla pressure. Cultivation lost ground to pastoral nomadism and Adal's mercantile centres, unable to take advantage of the revival of the Red Sea trade, were in a state of stagnation"*¹⁸³.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a number of Muslim regional dynasties were established in Wallo and the Gibè region which enhanced for a time the cultural and political significance of Islam. However, their further development was undermined by their political parochialism and precarious military and economic strength, and by the successful attempts of the revived Christian state to incorporate them into the evolving empire¹⁸⁴.

The Issue of Cultural Integration in Ethiopian History

Religious coercion has been employed by the Ethiopian rulers of the mediaeval and early modern period to bring about political and cultural integration. Emperor Yeshaq's (r. 1413-30) "only solution to the chronic problem [of Falāshā resistance to forced conversion and Christian political domination] lay in bringing an end to the religious difference and in imposing Christianity on the 'rebellious infidels'"¹⁸⁵. He also pursued a "determined policy to uproot the Muslims from the eastern escarpment" - a policy which continued during the reign of Zar'a Yā'eqob when "Muslims were forcibly converted"¹⁸⁶.

It is well-known that the role of Ethiopian Muslims in commerce was long recognized and appreciated, that emperors like Amda Seyon had Muslim commercial agents¹⁸⁷, that both Yagba Seyon (r. 1285-94) and Zar'a Yā'eqob employed Muslims as leaders of foreign missions¹⁸⁸, and that Ethiopian Muslims enjoyed a measure of religious freedom¹⁸⁹. Yet the old Christian state maintained an overtly hostile attitude towards indigenous Muslims who were occasionally subjected to religious persecution, especially in times of conflict with either foreign Muslim powers, mainly Egypt, or the Muslim states within the Ethiopian region¹⁹⁰.

In the early sixteenth century, Lebna Dengel appointed Muslims as governors of the eastern provinces and as administrators in his court. However, he also

183. *Ibid.*, pp. 141-42.

184. Hussein, "Clerics, Chiefs...", pp. 252-81; Abir, *The Era of the Princes*, pp. 73-94.

185. Tadesse, *Church and State*, pp. 200-201.

186. Abir, *Ethiopia and the Red Sea*, p. 32.

187. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

188. *Ibid.*, p. 32; Tadesse, *Church and State*, p. 129.

189. Abir, *Ethiopia and the Red Sea*, pp. 11, 20-21, 32.

190. *Ibid.*, pp. 24-27.

"extorted heavy taxes and other payments from the merchant community... and... instituted discriminatory and oppressive measures against his subjects who were Muslims". Apprehensive of the growing influence and wealth of the highland Muslims and of the rapid expansion of Islam in the plateau, he took measures

*"to humiliate and segregate the Muslim population ... Muslims, even administrators and governors, ... were prohibited from carrying arms and riding horses. Mosques were destroyed and permission was refused to build new ones. Intermarriage of Christians with Muslims was prohibited and a poll tax was levied on all Muslim subjects"*¹⁹¹.

During the reign of Emperor Yohannes I, a religious council was held in Gondar which passed an edict compelling the town's Muslim residents to live in a separate quarter¹⁹². It has been observed that the emperor's measures were motivated by his desire "to divert attention from his pro-Qebat leanings"¹⁹³, while Trimmingham held the view that Yohannes I was alarmed at the progress of Islam¹⁹⁴.

In 1864 Tewodros II ordered the Muslims to convert or face expulsion¹⁹⁵. Rubenson has argued that Tewodros's hostility to Islam may have been politically motivated¹⁹⁶. In 1878 a religious council called by Emperor Yohannes IV to resolve doctrinal disputes within the church decreed the conversion of the Wallo Muslims to Christianity. This was explained by Zewde thus : "There was a strong political motivation behind Yohannes's religious fervour"¹⁹⁷.

Yohannes's policy of the forcible conversion of the Wallo Muslims led to prolonged resistance in the region. It was inspired and directed by militant Muslim clerics, the most prominent among whom was *Shaykh* Talha b. Ja'far (d. 1936)¹⁹⁸.

191. *Ibid.*, pp. 84-85.

192. J. Perruchon, "Notes pour l'histoire d'Ethiopie : Le règne de Yohannes (1er), roi d'Ethiopie de 1667 à 1682," *Revue Sémitique d'Epigraphie et d'Histoire Ancienne*, VII (1899), p.168 (text), p. 173 (transl.) ; Ignatius Guidi, *Annales Iohannes I, Iyasu I et Bakaffa* (Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium), ser. II, vol. V (1903), p. 9 (text), p. 8 (transl.).

193. Merid Wold Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia and the Christian Kingdom 1508-1708, with Special Reference to the Galla Migrations and their Consequences", (Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1971), p.565.

194. Trimmingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, p.102.

195. *Ibid.*, p. 118.

196. Sven Rubenson, "Ethiopia and the Horn" in John E. Flint (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Africa* (Cambridge, 1976), vol. 5, p. 76.

197. Zewde Gabre-Sellassie, *Yohannes IV of Ethiopia : A Political Biography* (Oxford, 1975), p.94.

198. On Talha, see the present writer's "The Life and Career of *Shaykh* Talha b. Ja'far (c. 1853-1936)," *JES*, XXII (1989), pp. 13-30 ; Carlo Conti Rossini, *Italia ed Etiopia del Trattato d'Ucciali alla Battaglia di Adua* (Roma, 1935), Appendix VIII, pp. 468-9 ; Carlo Giannini, "La Conquista Scioana dell'Aussa (Ricordi di Missione)," *RSE*, III, 1 (1943), p. 236 ; R.A. Caulk, "Religion and the State in Nineteenth Century Ethiopia", *JES*, X, 1 (1972), pp. 23-41.

*"The principal causes for the armed insurrections which engulfed eastern Wallo in the early 1880s were, firstly, the attempts of Yohannes and his vassals to impose the Christian faith on the Muslim population of Wallo ; secondly, the heavy economic burden which local Muslims were made to bear by maintaining a Christian clerical, administrative and military class through their labour and tribute ; and, thirdly, the severity and ruthlessness with which the policy of conversion was carried out - all of which sparked off a spontaneous and widespread popular revulsion and reaction"*¹⁹⁹.

The wording of Yohannes's proclamation strongly suggests that it had been well thought-out before it was publicized. It contains an explicit reference to the devastation of Christian territory during the wars of Grāñ and to the forcible conversion of Christians to Islam. Hence it was intended as an instrument of Christian vengeance²⁰⁰. According to one scholar, the Wallo Muslims were an obstacle to the establishment of a religiously homogeneous society and "practically constituted a foreign state in the midst of the Christian heartland"²⁰¹. This appears to be only an assertion and *post facto* justification of the emperor's measures. It would also be misleading to suggest that the Wallo Muslims constituted "groups that were contributing to the division of the country and to bargain with foreigners who sought to expropriate parts of the country"²⁰².

There were three ways in which the Muslims of Wallo reacted to the new decree : outward pretence of acceptance of Christianity, migration to other parts of the country where they propagated Islam, and a religio-political armed protest²⁰³, as noted earlier.

One may conclude that "The resistance of the Wallo Muslims is a ... cogent demonstration of the divisive character, impracticability and bankruptcy of a policy of religious coercion as an instrument of building a nation out of diverse elements"²⁰⁴. As Caulk pointed out, "Towards the end of the reign [of Yohannes], the religious policy, at least as it applied to Muslims, seems to have been abandoned"²⁰⁵.

199. Hussein, "The Life and Career ...", p. 17.

200. *Idem*, "Clerics, Chiefs ...", p. 338.

201. Zewde, *Yohannes IV*, pp. 96, 100.

202. *Ibid.*, p. 99.

203. Hussein, "Clerics, Chiefs...", pp.355-56. It is interesting to note the striking similarity between the three forms of reaction adopted by the Wallo Muslims to forced conversion and those taken by the Muslims of Sokoto (northern Nigeria) to the British threat of conquest early this century : resistance, *tagiyye* ('dissimulation') and emigration. On the latter, see Mervyn Hiskett, *The Development of Islam in West Africa*. (London/New York : Longman, 1984), p. 269.

204. Hussein, "Clerics, Chiefs...", pp. 362-63.

205. Caulk, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

FAMINTINANA

Ity asa ity dia andram-pampitahana ny lanjan'ny Kristiana sy ny Silamo eo anivon'ny kolontsaina etiopiana. Vondron'olona samihafa samy manana ny kolontsainy sy ny teniny no ahatsapana izany.

Hatramin'ny voalohany no nidiran'ny finoana kristiana tao Etiopia kanefa tsy tena nahahenika ny mponina izy. Fanampin'izany, hatramin'ny taonjato faha-20 ny finoana kristiana dia nijanona teo ambany fahefan'ny mpitondra kristiana tany Ejipta. Ny andrana voalohany nataon'ny finoana kristiana hanenika ny mponina etiopiana dia nianjadian'ny fanafihan'ny silamo avy any atsinanana (Somalia?) ka tarangana tamin'ny fomba mahery vaika izy. Nanampy ny kristiana hikatsaka indray ny fahefany ny Paortogey. Tamin'ny alalan'ny misionera zezoita no nahatonga ny finoana kristiana ho finoana ofisialin'ny Fanjakana. Na izany aza anefa dia tsy vavahady nidiran'ny fanjanahan-tany akory ny finoana kristiana. Ny marina aza dia lasa fitaovam-panoherana izy, indrindra tamin'ny fanoherana ny Italiana. Nampiasain'i Menelik I izy ohatra tamin'ny taonjato faha-19, sady hanoherana ny fihanaky ny Italiana no hampisandratana ny fampandriantany nataony ary koa hampivoarana ny Fanjakany. Niadana dia niadana ihany anefa ny fandraisan'ny mponina io finoana io noho ny fanoherana sasany, na dia efa fotopinoan'ny Fanjakana aza izy hatramin'ny taonjato faha-18.

Tsy mba nanana fiantraikany nitovy tamin'izany ny finoana silamo raha ny fiovam-pinoana (fibabahana) no jerena. Tsy lavina kosa anefa fa mba nanana ny lanjany ihany koa ny finoana silamo na dia somary teny antsisim-bala aza. Ireo mpitondra arabo (Sultans) moa dia niezaka nanodina ny mpanjaka etiopiana sasany ho any amin'ny finoany, saingy tsy nandaitra izany. "Nosin'ny finoana kristiana eto Afrika i Etiopia, ary voahodidin'ny mpanompo sampy", hoy Menelik indray mandeha.

Ankehitriny kosa i Etiopia dia manaiky ny fisian'ny finoana maro samihafa.

SUMMARY

This paper is a tentative comparative study of the Christian and Muslim influence in the Ethiopian culture. Such influences can be perceived in various socio-cultural groups which correspond to linguistic groups.

Since the beginning, Christianity entered Ethiopia, but it did not achieve a real integration of the populations. In addition, until the 20th century, Christianity in

Ethiopia remains under the domination of the Christian leaders of Egypt. The first attempt to integrate the Ethiopian populations by the Christians and the expansion of Christianity are faced by the Muslim attacks from the East (Somalia?), and were brutally interrupted. The Portuguese helped the Christians to reconquer their power. With the Jesuit missionaries, Christianity became again the official religion of the Empire. However, Christianity was not a gateway to colonial rule. On the contrary, it was a factor of opposition, especially against the Italians. Menelik I used Christianity during the 19th century to both impede the Italian expansion and to expand his conquests and to modernize his Empire. However, the integration of the populations remained slow due to some resistance, although, since the 18th century, Christianity became the State's ideology.

Islam does not have the same impact in terms of conversion. However, it must be admitted that Islam has some influence, marginal though it is. There were various attempts by the Arab Sultans to convert Ethiopian kings, to no avail. "Ethiopia is an island of Christianity in Africa, surrounded by pagans", Menelik said once.

Today, Ethiopia is a country that accepts religious pluralism.