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NIT 7

States, Principalities, Population Movements & Interactions in Ethiopia 13th to Mid-16th C.

Introduction

This period in Ethiopian history covers the rise and consolidation of states, principalities, and population movements, focusing on the "Solomonic" Dynasty, the Muslim sultanates, and the conflicts between the Christian Kingdom and the Sultanate of Adal. The era also saw significant socio-political changes, including the introduction of the Gadaa system by the Oromo people.

The "Solomonic" Dynasty

- **Restoration by Yekuno Amlak (1270):** Yekuno Amlak, a ruler from Amhara, claimed descent from the Aksumite kings and founded the "Solomonic" Dynasty, using the legendary connection to King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. This claim was elaborated in the 14th-century text "Kibre Negest" ("Glory of Kings").
- **Territorial Expansion:** Under Yekuno Amlak and his successors like Amde Tsion, the Christian Kingdom expanded significantly, covering regions from Tigray and Lasta to eastern Shewa and southern Ethiopia. The expansion aimed to control trade routes and increase economic power.
- **Feudal System (Gult System):** To administer the vast territory, the Christian Kingdom developed the gult system, where state officials (bale-gult) were granted the right to collect tribute from peasants. This system helped maintain a large army and solidified the kingdom's control.

Muslim Sultanates

- **Emergence of Ifat:** The Muslim Sultanate of Ifat, founded by Umar Walasma in the 13th century, became a major power, controlling the Zeila trade route. It was a significant rival to the Christian Kingdom, leading to frequent conflicts.
- **Sultanate of Adal:** When Ifat became vulnerable, a branch of the Walasma family moved to establish the Sultanate of Adal in the Harar region in 1367. Adal became a strong center of resistance against the Christian Kingdom, eventually shifting its capital to Harar in 1520.

Conflicts between the Christian Kingdom and Adal

- **Imam Ahmed ibn Ibrahim al-Ghazi ("Ahmed Gragh"):** In the early 16th century, Imam Ahmed led a powerful Muslim force against the Christian Kingdom, starting in 1527. His victories posed a significant threat, and by 1535, he controlled vast territories from Zeila to Massawa.
- **International Involvement:** The conflict attracted foreign powers like Ottoman Turkey, which supported Imam Ahmed, and Portugal, which allied with the Christian Kingdom. The

decisive battle occurred in 1543, where Emperor Gelawdewos and Portuguese forces defeated and killed Imam Ahmed at Woyna-Dega.

Aftermath and Impact

- **End of the War:** The wars exhausted both the Christian Kingdom and the Sultanate of Adal, weakening them and paving the way for the Oromo population movement. The conflicts also led to cultural and religious exchanges among different groups in the region.

Political and Socio-Economic Conditions of Southern and Central States in Ethiopia

This lesson covers the political and socio-economic conditions of various states and societies in central and southern Ethiopia during the medieval period. It provides insights into the history, economy, and conflicts of the states in these regions.

1. States and Societies in Central and Southern Ethiopia

- **Damot:** One of the earliest states, possibly existing during the Aksumite period. It extended over a vast area south of the Blue Nile River, including regions like Enareya, Bizamo, and Wolaita. The state was annexed into the Christian kingdom by King Amde Seyon in 1316.
- **Kafa:** Located south of Enareya, this kingdom was known since the late 14th century. It remained independent from the Christian highland state.
- **Wolaita:** Possibly connected to Damot, Wolaita paid tribute to the Christian king Yeshaq in the 15th century.
- **Kambata, Gurage Chiefdoms, and Agaw Kingdom of Gojjam:** Other important states in the central Ethiopian highlands. The Gurage chiefdoms were led by local chiefs with titles like Azmach, Abegaz, and Nigus. The Agaw kingdom of Gojjam was incorporated into the Christian state by Amde Seyon in the 14th century.

2. Economy of Southern and Central Ethiopia

- The economy was primarily based on trade and agriculture. Trade items included enslaved people, civets, ivory, and other natural products. The demand for slaves was particularly high in Arabia, Persia, and India.
- Enslaved people were captured in wars and traded from the south and central regions.

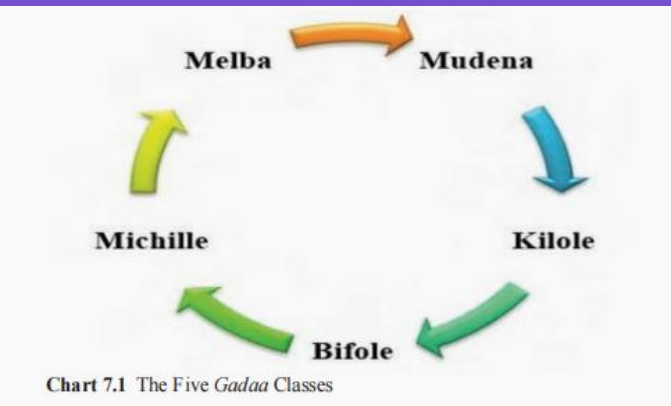
3. Population Movements and Conflicts in the 16th Century

- The 16th century was marked by wars and significant population movements, shaping the history of Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa.
- **Argoba:** The Argoba people played a key role in trade and the formation of Muslim Sultanates like Shewa and Ifat. The Christian kingdom's expansion affected them, leading to dispersed settlements.
- **Afar:** Drought and conflict pushed the Afar people to move eastward. Their territory became a battleground between Christian kingdoms and Muslim Sultanates.
- **Somali:** The Somali people were involved in the wars of Imam Ahmed al-Ghazi. Their population movement was a significant force behind the Imam's military strength.

- **Oromo:** The Oromo people, originally from southeastern Ethiopia, experienced a large-scale population movement in the 16th century due to demographic pressure and conflicts. Their movement had a profound impact on the region, leading to the destruction of old states and the assimilation or displacement of local populations.

4. The Gadaa System

- The Gadaa system was the socio-political framework of the Oromo people, organizing society into age grades and generation sets. It was an egalitarian system that regulated political, economic, social, and religious activities, including conflict resolution and protecting women's rights.



- The system was based on democratic principles like power-sharing and representation. It provided a stable sense of identity and responsibility among members.
- The Gadaa system was periodically interrupted and revitalized, with Madda Walabu serving as a central assembly site until 1900.

5. Impact of the Oromo Population Movement

- The Oromo movement led to significant changes in the Ethiopian region, including the destruction of old states and the assimilation of local populations. The Christian kingdom's territorial and financial strength was weakened, leading to a shift in its political center from Shewa to the Lake Tana area and Gondar.
- The Sultanate of Adal was reduced to the walled town of Harar due to the Oromo expansion. Over time, the Oromo became largely sedentary agriculturists and adopted Christianity and Islam, eventually forming their own kingdoms in Ethiopia.

This note provides an overview of the political and socio-economic conditions of the southern and central states in Ethiopia during the medieval period, focusing on the key states, their economies, population movements, conflicts, and the role of the Gadaa system in the Oromo society.

Gadaa System of the Oromo

The Gadaa system is a traditional democratic governance structure of the Oromo people, characterized by its organization into age grades. This system is an egalitarian framework where leadership is provided by an assembly or chaffe of the ruling Gadaa class. Developed over generations, it regulates the political, economic, social, and religious activities of the community. Key aspects include:

1. Age Grades and Generation Sets:

- The Gadaa system organizes society into ten age grades and five classes. Each grade has specific social, political, and economic responsibilities. The ages and their roles are as follows:
 - **Dabale** (birth-8 years) and **Game** (9-16 years): Socialization.
 - **Folle** (17-24 years): Military training and agriculture.

- **Qondala** (25-32 years): Military service.
- **Raba-Dori** (33-40 years): Political candidates.
- **Gadaa** (41-48 years): Leaders of the Gadaa government.
- **Yuba** (49-80 years): Senior advisors, educators, and ritual leaders.

2. Political Structure and Leadership:

- The Gadaa system operates in eight-year cycles. Each cycle involves the peaceful transfer of power from one Gadaa class to the next. The head of the government is known as the **Abba-Gadaa** ("father of the period"), supported by various officials like the Abba Bokku (father of scepter), Abba Chaffe (head of assembly), and others.
- The **Chaffe** is the assembly of the ruling Gadaa class and holds supreme authority. It meets under a sycamore tree (Odaa), symbolizing dialogue and consensus.

3. Institutional Functions:

- The Gadaa system enforces moral conduct, resolves conflicts (arara), and manages reparations (Guma). It protects women's rights through the Sinqe institution, which allows women to form sisterhoods and participate in decision-making.
- **Gumi-Gayo** (Assembly of representatives): A legislative body where any individual can bring issues for discussion. Delegates from each class contribute to the formation and amendment of laws.

4. Principles and Values:

- The system embodies democratic principles such as periodic succession, balanced opposition, and power-sharing. It ensures the rule of law, accountability, and checks and balances.
- The cycle of eight years represents one Gadaa period, with five periods forming a generation (40 years), and nine generations representing an era.

5. Historical Continuity and Adaptation:

- The Gadaa system was practiced long before the sixteenth-century Oromo expansion. It has undergone interruptions and revitalizations, such as the reestablishment of the Borana-Barentu Gadaa in 1450 at Madda Walabu.

Moggasa and Guddifacha

The Oromo also practiced two adoption mechanisms to integrate non-Oromo individuals and groups:

1. **Guddifacha**: This is a form of adoption where a child enjoys equal rights and privileges as a biological child within a family.
2. **Moggasa**: This process involves incorporating individuals or groups into a clan through an oath of allegiance, granting them equal rights and protection within the community. The **Abba Gadaa** oversees this process.

These adoption practices fostered social cohesion, national integration, and intercultural exchange, enriching the social and cultural fabric of the Oromo people.

The Gadaa system and adoption practices exemplify the Oromo's sophisticated approach to governance, social organization, and integration of diverse groups, reflecting a deeply rooted tradition of democratic values and communal harmony.

7.8 Egalitarian System of Governance

Sidama Governance

- Led by the Mote (king), supported by the Songo (council of elders).
- The Woma served as a cultural and ritual leader, focusing on peace and traditional practices.
- The luwa system, similar to the Oromo Gadaa system, organized society into age groups with cycles of leadership.
- Decision-making emphasized consensus over individualism, guided by the moral code halale.

Gedeo Governance

- Governed by the ballee system, akin to the Oromo Gadaa.
- The Yaa council elected officials, including the Abba Gadaa, who provided leadership.
- Gedeo society was divided into seven clans, each led by a roga.

Konso Governance

- Decentralized with no central authority, leadership shared among elders and the generation set, tella.
- Villages were governed by councils of elders called hayyota, with rotating leadership every eighteen years.
- Society organized around nine exogamous clans, with responsibilities tied to age groups.

Burji Governance

- Governed by an elective system known as basha.
- Leadership roles included hereditary spiritual leaders and elected political elites.
- The system emphasized personal ability, integrity, and communal support.