

Unit 3



PEOPLES AND STATES IN ETHIOPIA AND THE HORN TO THE END OF 13TH C.

Unit Introduction

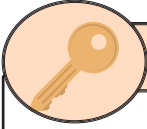
The Region Ethiopia and the Horn are referred to as the cradle of humankind and a place where prerequisites for early civilisations took place. These developments contributed to the evolution of socio-cultural, economic, and political settings. This unit briefly describes languages and peoples' settlements and religious backgrounds in Ethiopia. The purpose is to show that Ethiopia is home to diverse peoples and multicultural ele-

ments. It also deals with the history of states that emerged in the region up to the 13th century. This period saw the emergence and fall of successive dynasties in different parts of the region. For instance, the Zagwe dynasty replaced the Aksumite dynasty in northern Ethiopia in 1270AD; in the mean time, in 1285AD, in the southern half of Ethiopia, the Makhzumite dynasty of the Sultanate of Shewa was succeeded by the Walsama dynasty of Ifat sultanate.

Unit learning outcomes

At the end of this unit, learners will be able to:

- differentiate the main language super families of Ethiopia.
- list the major religions of Ethiopia.
- examine the nature of interaction among different peoples of Ethiopia to the end of the thirteenth century.
- analyse the major achievements of the Pre Aksumite and Aksumite kingdom.
- evaluate the main political-economic, social and cultural features of peoples and states of Ethiopia to the end of the thirteenth century.
- evaluate the success and failure of the Zaguwe Dynasty.



Key Terms

- Language
- Religion
- Dynasty
- Kingdom

3.1 Languages, Religions and Peoples of Ethiopia and the Horn

3.1.1 Languages families

Ethiopia and the Horn region is marked by ethnic and linguistic diversity. The Horn of Africa is inhabited by people who speak various languages and follow different religions. In addition, there are over 80 languages with many dialects. Yet, there is a strong unity beneath this cultural and linguistic diversity.

Lesson learning outcomes

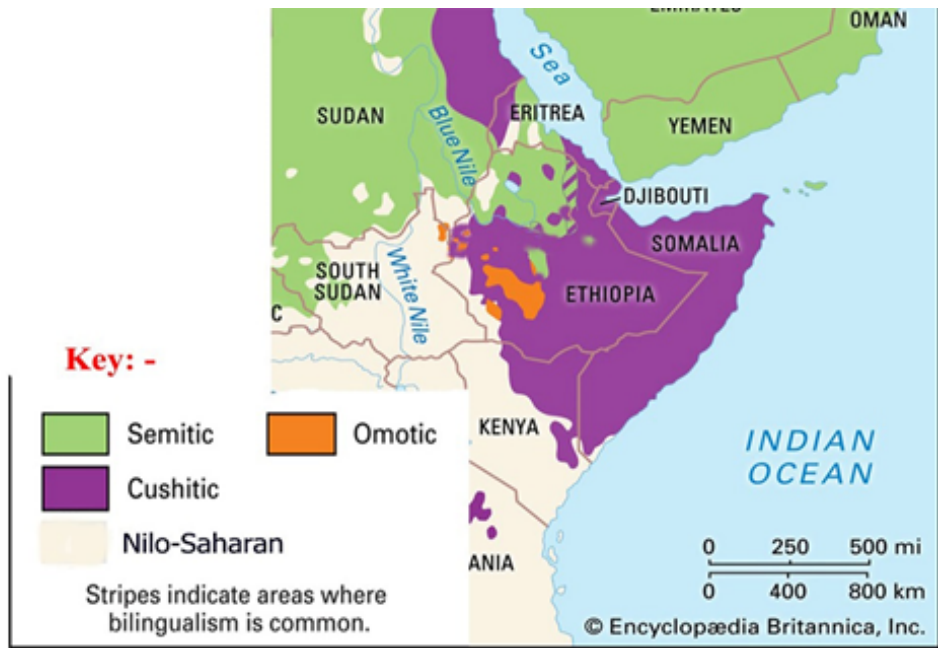
At the end of this lesson, learners will be able to:

- analyse how language influenced Ethiopia's relationship with neighbouring countries.
- draw a map showing the distribution pattern of the various languages of Ethiopia.
- show respect and tolerance to the different languages of Ethiopia.

Brainstorming

- What do you know about the major language families of Ethiopia from your lower grade?

Linguists classify the languages of Ethiopia and the Horn into two major superfamilies. These are **Afro-Asiatic** and **Nilo-Saharan**. Speakers of the Afro-Asiatic super-family are further divided into **Cushitic**, **Omotic** and **Semitic** language families. The speakers of the Nilo-Saharan super-family are also divided into **Chari–Nile** and **Koman** speaking families.



Map 3.1 The distribution of language families in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa, (source: Encyclopædia Britannica)

I. Afro-Asiatic Super - Family

This super-family covers the largest sector of Ethiopia's population. It can be further divided into three linguistic families. These are Cushitic, Semitic and Omotic.

A. Cushitic: –

The vast majority speaks Cushitic language family in terms of both areal coverage and size of speakers. There is spillover into neighbouring countries. The Cushitic languages have sub-divisions: North Cushitic, Central Cushitic and Eastern Cushitic.



Chart 3.1 Afro-Asiatic Language families spoken in Ethiopia and the Horn

- In ancient times, Northern Cushitic was widely spread between the Red Sea and the Nile Valley. North Cushitic is represented only by the Beja people's language, spoken in what is today Northwestern Eritrea.

Central Cushitic spread during ancient times and is represented by the Bilen in Eritrea and the Agaw languages, including Bilen, Agaw, Qimant, Himitagna and Awign in Ethiopia.

Eastern Cushitic is both the largest and the most diverse branch of the Cushitic family languages in Ethiopia. For this reason, it has been subdivided into Highland and Lowland East Cushitic. People under Lowland Cushitic, for instance include: Oromo, Afar, Somali, Konso, Gidole, Erbore, Dassenech and Saho. They are called so because most of the speakers originally lived in the eastern lowlands of Ethiopia and the Horn. This language family has become one of the largest in the region following population movements in the 16th century. The speakers of Eastern Highland Cushitic people are: Hadiya, Kambata, Tambaro, Halaba, Sidama, Gedeo, and Burji live in the highlands of central Ethiopia. Thus, they have the collective name “Eastern Highland Cushitic”.

B. Semitic:

It is divided into Northern Semitic and Southern Semitic.

Northern Semitic – Ge'ez is an ancient language of northern Ethiopia. Ge'ez is now confined to use in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Others are Tegra, found in the Eritrean lowlands and Tigrigna spoken in southern Eritrea and Tigray.

Southern Semitic consists of Amharic, Argobba, Gafat (now extinct), Guraghigna, Silte, Harari and Zay languages.

C. Omotic:

Most of the Omotic speakers live in and around the Omo River basin. In earlier times, it had extended much further to the north. The Shinasha in the Benishangul-Gumuz region and Anfillo in Wallaga are good examples of this movement. There are as many as different Omotic languages spoken in Ethiopia today. Some examples of the Omotic language-speaking peoples are Ari, Banna, Basketo, Bench, Chara, Dawuro, Dime, Dizi, Dorze, Gamo, Ganza, Gayil, Gofa, Hamer, Hozo, Kachama Ganjule, Karo, Keficho, Konta, Korete, Male, Melo, Nayi, Oyda, Sezo, Shekkacho, Sheko, Wolaita, Yem, Zayse etc. Omoto includes Wolaita and Gamo among its groups, while the main Gongga is Keficho.

Nilo - Saharan Super – Family: In Ethiopia, the Nilo-Saharan superfamily speakers mainly live on the Ethio-Sudanese border. But some of these peoples are living in the

Abay gorge and along the banks of the tributaries of Abay in Wallaga. This superfamily has two families:

A. Chari-Nile: this family includes the languages of the people of Anuak Nuer, Mi'en, Majang, Benishangul, Kunama, Mursi, Surma and Tirma.

B. Koman: includes the peoples of Gumuz, Koma, Sese, Ma'o, and Komo.

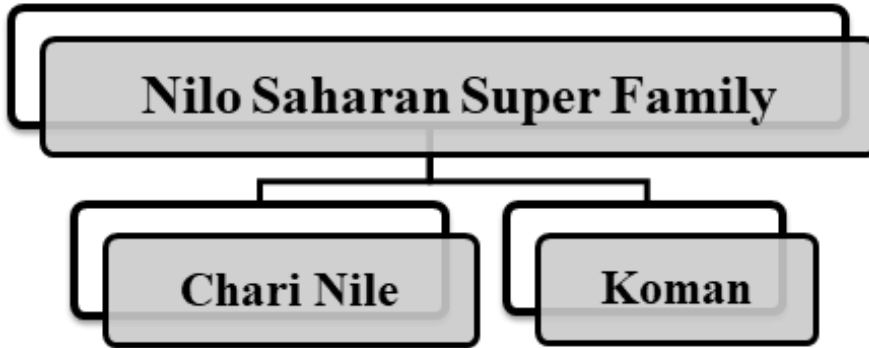


Chart 3.2 Nilo-Saharan Language families spoken in Ethiopia and the Horn

Out of the significant number of the languages of Ethiopia, few have already disappeared, and some are close to death. This is because of the decreasing number of their speakers.

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1. Human race originated from the same species. Debate how language and cultural diversity of people came into existence.
2. List as many languages as possible that are spoken in your locality and draw a chart indicating the language families and super-families they belong to.
3. List some languages in danger of extinction in Ethiopia. Why do languages die out, and some are in danger of extinction?

3.1.2 Major Religions of Ethiopia

Brainstorming

- What are the major religions of Ethiopia?

Ethiopia also has religious complexity, forming a competing platform for religious beliefs and practices. The major religions practised by diverse people of Ethiopia are indigenous religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Lesson learning outcomes

At the end of this lesson, learners will be able to:

- point out factors for the introduction and expansion of Christianity and Islam in Ethiopia.
- show respect and tolerance to the various religions in Ethiopia.

1. Indigenous Religion

Indigenous religions are beliefs that are practiced only within a given culture. Since ancient times, they have been native to the region and followed by the local people. Sedentary settlement and agricultural development saw the emergence of priests who conduct praying for rainfall, thanksgiving and safety from natural hazards. Farmers paid tributes for the services of priests. They laid the foundation for indigenous religions. They either worship or provide sacrifices to them. People of Indigenous Religion also owe special reverence to their ancestors. Followers of traditional religions believe that their supreme deity is the creator.

A distinctive mark of indigenous religion is belief in one Supreme Being, but special powers are attributed to natural phenomena considered sacred. Spiritual functionaries officiate over rituals, propitiate divinities, and are held in a lot of respect as intermediaries between society and spirits. For example, the Waqeffanna of the Oromo is based on the existence of one Supreme Being called Waqa. Waqa's power is manifested through the spirits called Ayyana. Revered experts, Qallu (male) and Qallitti (female), have maintained a link between the Ayyana and the believers.

An exciting feature of indigenous religion is its practices and beliefs are fused with Christianity and Islam. This phenomenon of mixing of religions is known as syncretism.

Activity 3.2



1. Name the major Indigenous religions in your locality and tell your classmates how they are practiced.

A. Judaism

Sources indicate that Judaism has been followed in Ethiopia since early times. Today it is practiced by a community of people known as Bete-Israel (literally, house of Israel).

Until their mass exodus to Israel in the 1980s and 1990s, they used to live in northwestern Ethiopia, to the north of Lake Tana in the provinces of Dembiya, Semen, and Wegera. The Bete-Israel accounts of origin assert that they stem from the tribes of Israel who arrived in Ethiopia during the Exodus in Israel. The Jews appear to have been isolated from mainstream Jewish for at least a millennium. Despite relentless pressure from their Christian neighbours, the Bete-Israel preserved their Judaic heritage for many centuries.

Judaism is established in the teachings of the Old Testament part of the Bible and share common practices with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Both follow the Old Testament practices and use Geez for liturgy. Their priests were likewise identical in dressing, symbolism, behaviour and hierarchy. Thus, they had a greater affinity. Nevertheless, the Bete Israel held on firmly to Judaic teachings and ceremonies. The religion was mainly confined to northern Ethiopia. Currently, a few Judaism practitioners remain in Ethiopia.

B. Christianity

Christianity was introduced to Ethiopia around 330AD by Frumentius (also known as Freminatos), who converted king Ezana (r.320 - 350AD) and his close associates. Consequently, Christianity secured royal support and became the state religion that later helped its expansion. With the coming of monks called the ‘Nine Saints’ towards the end of the fifth century, Christianity spread more among the broad masses. Churches were built, and monasteries were established, of which the first being the monastery of Debre-Damo. The Bible was translated into Ge’ez, and since then, Ge’ez began to serve as the language of the Church in Ethiopia.



Figure 3.1 Aksum Tsion Mariam, (source: UNESCO site)

The introduction of Christianity further reinforced the exposure of Aksum to the outside world. One significant development was the long-lasting relationship between Ethiopia and Egypt. Patriarch Atnatewos of Alexandria consecrated Freminatos as Abuna Salam, the first bishop of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. This tradition of consecrating and sending a bishop to Ethiopia continued until 1959 when Abune Baselios became the first Ethiopian Patriarch. Until that year, the head of the Church was always from Egyptian.

The expansion of Christianity continued during the Zagwe period (1150-1270) and chiefly gained fresh momentum during the Early Medieval Period (1270-1527) when many churches and monasteries were constructed across the territories that were newly incorporated into the Christian highland kingdom. Some churches and monasteries played an essential role as centers of learning and launching pads for the expansion of the Church. One was the Monasteries of Debre Bizen in Eritrea, Debre Hayq in Amhara, and Debre Libanos in Shawa. Among the most prominent religious figures that played an outstanding role in expanding Christianity in the Ethiopian areas outside of the traditionally Christian regions of early medieval Ethiopia include Abba Iyesus Moa, Abba Giyorgis Zegasicha, and Abune Tekle-Haymanot.

Because of the works of these and other religious leaders and their disciples, Christianity was able to spread into regions as far as Ennarya in southern Ethiopia. The expansion of Christianity was accompanied by the development of art, literature, architecture, and music in the country.



Map 3.2 The Expansion of Orthodox Church (13th - 16th C), (adopted from Church and State, 1972)

At the end of the fifteenth century, Portuguese voyages of discovery opened the way for contacts between Catholicism and Ethiopia. From the mid-sixteenth to the early seventeenth centuries, the Catholics, namely the Jesuits, unsuccessfully tried to convert Ethiopian Orthodox Christians to Catholicism. In the mid-16th century, Ethiopian rulers allowed Jesuits to preach in the country. In 1622, Susneyos publicly announced his adherence to Catholicism, a strategy to reinforce his political power.

The Portuguese Jesuit Afonso Mendes was appointed Patriarch of Ethiopia in 1622 by Pope Urban VII and imposed changes against the former Orthodox religious practices. These actions led to uprisings, social unrest and civil war in Gondar. It was concluded with the expulsion of the Jesuits from the country. As a result, Susneyos was forced to resign. His son, Emperor Fasilidas, expelled the Patriarch and the European missionaries in 1636. This action led to the complete closure of Ethiopia to further contact with Europeans until the early 19th century.

At the opening of the 19th century, Catholic and Protestant missionaries started evangelisation activities in Ethiopia. The Catholic missionaries led by Giuseppe Sapeto, Giustino De Jacobis, and Cardinal Massaja, were active. Systematic approach by trained Protestants enabled them to win the confidence of local people. Protestant missions included the Anglican Church Missionary Society, the Church Missionary Society of London and the Wesleyan Methodist Society led by Samuel Gobat, C. W. Isenberg and J. L. Krapf. In the early 20th century, the Sudan Interior Mission started its work in Wolaita, Hadiya and Kambata. However, the missionaries were forced to leave the regions due to the Italian occupation. They returned after Italians were expelled from Ethiopia and Protestantism expanded further. Both Catholic and protestant missionaries made use of various means to spread Christianity. For example, they translated spiritual books into first languages; they adopted local names for God; they established schools and medical centers for the locals and preached the faith. Eventually, continuous and systematic indoctrinations seem to have resulted in the grafting of new teaching on indigenous religion. As a result, large numbers of followers were attracted.

C. Islam

Islam arose in the early 7th century in the Arabian Peninsula and spread to other parts of the world. When Prophet Mohammed began teaching Islam in Mecca, he came into a series of conflicts with the Quraysh tribe. When the persecution against his followers became serious, the Prophet sent a small group of his followers, including his daughter, to the kingdom of Aksum in 615AD. Jafar Abu Talib led this first group of refugees. In his advice to his followers, the Prophet said of Ethiopia, "...a king under whom none are persecuted. It is a land of righteousness, where God will give relief from what you are

suffering.” As a result, the Aksumite king, Armah Ella Seham (Ahmed al-Nejash in Arabic sources), gave them asylum from 615-28.

The warm reception and good attitudes of the king of Aksum towards the Muslim refugees moved Prophet Mohammed not to conduct jihad against Ethiopia. After returning the Muslim immigrants to Arabia safely around 628AD, the Prophet continued to maintain closer links and exempted the kingdom of Aksum from jihad in the future.



Figure 3.2 Al-Nejashi Mosque

Islam was introduced to the Horn through peaceful means following the trade routes. Muslim clerics and merchants served as the missionaries of Islam in the Horn of Africa. Islam was introduced to the region through three main gateways. These were:

- the Red Sea in the north,
- the Gulf of Aden in the, east and
- the Indian Ocean in the southeast.

After the destruction of Adulis in 702AD Muslim Arabs had occupied the Dahlak Islands. By then, Islam had already been firmly established in the Islands. Later in the tenth century, the Muslim sultanate of Dahlak was established.

Muslim communities began to settle on the Red Sea coastal regions about the same time. They converted much of the pastoral peoples living in the lowlands of the Red Sea coast to Islam. But Islam failed in penetrating the interior of northern Ethiopia from the lowlands. This was mainly because Christianity was well-established in the highland regions since the mid-fourth century AD. Consequently, Islam was confined to lowland regions in northern Ethiopia.

The other direction through which Islam entered and gradually spread into the Ethiopian interior was the port of Zeila, on the coast of the Gulf of Aden. After the destruction of Adulis, the importance of the Zeila port began to increase. Several Arab Muslim merchants started to come to the Horn through this port. The Zeila trade route linked this port with the rich interior of the Horn. So, the Muslim Arab merchants used this route to spread the religion of Islam to the interior. As a result, Islam successfully spread into eastern Harar, Shewa and Wollo regions. Later on, Islam spread to south-central Ethiopia's Bale, Arsi and Hadya regions. The third gateway of Islam to the Horn was the Indian Ocean coast from where it penetrated the Somali region. Islam reached the Somali communities through the coastal towns of Mogadishu, Brava and Merca. Arabs and non-Arab Muslim merchants started to settle in these towns.

The introduction of Islam to the Horn of Africa was followed by the rise of a series of Muslim sultanates or states. Generally, Islam and trade led to the emergence of several Muslim sultanates along the trade routes deep into the interior. Islam and Christianity have coexisted peacefully in Ethiopia. The establishment and growth of Islam contributed to the development and enrichment of the cultures of the regions. The mosques and Islamic centers of learning developed. The city of Harar, which flourished from the first quarter of the 16th century, is one very good example of such an Islamic cultural center. At the same time, Ethiopian Muslims maintained close links with Islamic centers of Arabia, Egypt and Yemen through trade, pilgrimage, and visits for religious training.

Activity 3.3



1. List the religions in your area. Then, write a short report about the religions you listed.

Brainstorming

- What do you know about settlement?

3.1.3 The Settlement Pattern of Peoples of Ethiopia

Lesson learning outcomes

At the end of this lesson, learners will be able to:

- discuss the settlement patterns of Ethiopian peoples.
- draw a map showing the distribution pattern of the various languages of Ethiopia.

Regardless of the territories they inhabit now, the people in Ethiopia have traditions that trace their origin. The peopling of Ethiopia results from an extensive process of movement due to pull or push factors. The shortage of resources pushes people, whereas availability pulls. Consequently, individuals or small groups of people migrate to and from places. Migrations were quite common in history, and almost all groups have a story of migration as part of their story of ethnogenesis in Ethiopia. The other form of movement accounting for the origin and settlement of the various peoples of Ethiopia was population movement. Unlike migration, population movements involve masses of people; many organised activities result in the intermix of multiple groups. A settlement pattern, the distribution of peoples across the landscape, results from long historical processes in northeast Africa. Studies indicate that environmental, socio-economic, and political processes significantly shaped and reshaped the spatial distribution of peoples in Ethiopia. In some areas, the settlement was dense and in other areas sparse. Some people inhabited extensive highlands and others the lowlands. Since early times, the Cushitic and Semitic language speaking peoples had occupied the area between the Red Sea in the east and Blue Nile in the west from where they dispersed to different directions. The Cushitic speaking people have evolved to be the largest linguistic group in Ethiopia and the Horn, followed by Semitic speaking peoples.

Except the Shinasha and the South Mao speaking peoples, most Omotic peoples have inhabited southwestern Ethiopia along the Omo River basin. In the west, the Nilotic speaking peoples are largely inhabited along the Ethiopia-Sudanese border, although some of the Chari-Nile family settled as far as Southern Omo.

Activity 3.4



1. Write a short report about the traditions of origin of your family or community religions you listed.

3.2 The Pre-Aksumite States and their Geographical Setting

Lesson learning outcomes

At the end of this lesson, learners will be able to:

- list down the names and achievements of the Pre Aksumite states.
- investigate the nature of the interaction between the early states of Ethiopia and the outside world.

Punt: Punt was an ancient and historically known state in the Horn of Africa. However, Punt's exact location and territorial limits are not well known. Historians suggest that its territory falls in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean coastal parts of present-day Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia.

According to an Egyptian hieroglyphic, the land of Punt was located south of Egypt and had trade relations with Egypt since the third millennium BC. The trade was conducted by land and sea routes.

Egyptian inscriptions and pictorial reliefs dating from early times indicate the objects that Punt supplied to Egypt. The land of Punt was commercially important for the goods it provided to Egypt. These exports originated in the interior, which later became Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa. Such goods include gold undoubtedly from the Ethiopian interior mainly in western Ethiopia. Others such as ivory, panther and other skins, myrrh and myrrh trees, ostrich feathers, etc. were which could have come from anywhere in the Horn. The Egyptians sent hatchets, daggers, necklaces, etc.

Other pre-Aksumite states emerged since 1000BC. These include Yeha, Hawlti-Melazo, Addi-Seglemani, Metera, Kaskase, Coloe, etc.

Yeha: is located 30 kms to the northeast of Aksum and was the oldest of these centers. It probably emerged around 1000BC as a small emporium where South Arabian merchants and their agents bought and stored ivory, rhinoceros horn and other commodities coming from the interior. The period of its prosperity (zenith) was from about 750 to 500BC. Remains of walls of some of its buildings and stone masonry and still standing temple and inscriptions indicate Yeha's glory.

Hawulti Melazo: is situated to the southeast of Aksum, where stone tablets inscribed in the rectangular temple surrounded by a wall decorated with paintings representing herds of cattle have been excavated.

Damat: Damat existed just before the rise of Aksum. Its center was little to the south of the town of Aksum. Information about this state comes from local archaeological sources. Some of Damat's rulers used the South Arabian political and religious title called

Mukarib. This indicates that Damat had established external relations with South Arabia. This can be understood from local inscriptions left by one of its rulers around the fifth century BC. Damat used the port of Adulis on the Red Sea coast.

Activity 3.5



1. Explore from the internet or read from sources in the library and write about the pre-Aksumite states.
2. With which part of the world did the early States of Ethiopia interact?

3.3 Aksumite Kingdom

Lesson learning outcomes

At the end of this lesson, learners will be able to:

- explain the nature of the Ethiopian society and economy during the Aksumite period.
- identify major factors for the rise and fall of the Aksumite Kingdom.
- analyse the socio-political, economic and cultural organisations of the states.
- investigate the nature of the interaction between the Aksum, and the outside world.
- appreciate the place of Ethiopia among the great civilisation of the world.

As discussed above, in the pre-Aksumite period, Aksum was not the first state that emerged in Ethiopia. The term Aksum was derived from two terms, Ak/ku means water in Agaw and sum/shum means chief in Semitic; hence 'chief of water'. Aksum emerged in the first century AD with its nucleus at Aksum. Therefore, the Aksumite civilisation resulted from the fusion of Cushitic and Semitic cultures. The City of Aksum was its political and religious center. The city was adorned by several temples and stone monuments like the monolithic steles of Aksum.

Economically, the Aksumites depended on plough agriculture. Aksum as a kingdom was a powerful state with a well-demarcated social structure. The link between the king and the people was the payment of tribute. The state also generated considerable income from

local and external trade conducted via the port of Adulis on the Red Sea coast.

To facilitate trade, coins of bronze, silver and gold were minted. In the first three centuries, Ge'ez evolved as a written language. Inscriptions and coins show that Sabeian and Greek languages were used in Aksum before Ge'ez. The use of the Greek language possibly resulted from trade contact with the Greco-Roman world. Greek was the lingua-franca of the Red Sea and the Mediterranean region by then. The Aksumites had beliefs in indigenous religions before the introduction of Christianity in the 4th century AD and Islam in the early 7th Islam.

Unlike many other centers of civilisations like Yeha, Mattara and Adulis, Aksum continued to exist as the most important center of a highly developed civilisation for several centuries. This can be attested from the ruins of Aksumite temples, iron tools, bricks, coins, tombs and obelisk. In addition, shipbuilding technology was also well known in the port town of Adulis. As a result, those ruins have become among the known tourism centres in Ethiopia today.



Figure 3.3 Obelisks of Aksum, (source: UNESCO site)

Initially, Aksum was a small state. Between the fourth and sixth centuries, Aksumite kings expanded the kingdom significantly to include territories bounded in the east beyond the Red Sea (southern Arabia), the River Abay in the west, the northern tip of Eritrea in the north and north Shewa in the south.

But gradually, Aksum deteriorated. The process of decline started when the Red Sea had come under the control of Muslim Arabs and the subsequent destruction of the port of Adulis in 702AD. The loss of trade led to the decline of its economic, political and military power. Internally, rebellion against king Kaleb (r.500 - 535AD) broke out. Kaleb had once controlled South Arabia in 525AD. But the South Arabians finally expelled Aksumite governors and soldiers from their region between 580 and 590AD. Thus, Aksum lost its control of the other side of the Red Sea trade.

The decline continued in the following centuries, with internal political disturbances contributing as an additional factor. Finally, unable to check the rebellions of the Beja people from the north, Aksumite state was pushed southward to Kubar in southern Tigray, and by the late ninth century, it took refuge in the area predominantly inhabited by the Agaw people.

Activity 3.6



1. List the legacies of the Aksumite civilisation and discuss their importance to the people of Ethiopia.
2. Explain the way in which Christianity was introduced.

3.4 Zagwe Dynasty

Lesson learning outcomes

At the end of this lesson, learners will be able to:

- identify major factors for the rise and fall of the *Zagwe Dynasty*.
- outline the political-economic, social and cultural features of the *Zagwe Dynasty*.
- investigate the nature of contact with the outside world during the Zagwe period.
- appreciate the place of Ethiopia among the great civilisations of the world.

The *Zagwe dynasty* came from the local Agaw ruling class in Lasta, part of the Aksumite Empire. The Zagwe dynasty was founded around 1150AD by Mera Tekle Haymnot. He established a new capital at Adefa (Roha) in Lasta. The founding of the Zagwe dynasty is not a new kingdom, but it is all about a political power shift. The economy of the Zagwe dynasty

was based on agriculture. Trade brought additional income to the state. The Zeila port was the main outlet during the Zagwe time. The Dahlak Islands on the Red Sea coast served as an outlet.



Map 3.3 Christian territories during Zagwe Dynasty, (adopted from Church and State, 1972)

The *Zagwe dynasty* is known in Ethiopian history for its remarkable architectural achievement. This was the technology of building the monolithic rock-hewn Churches at Roha; later, the capital was renamed Lalibela.

The surviving pieces of evidence are the eleven rock-hewn churches constructed during the reign of Emperor Lalibela in the first half of the thirteenth century.

The presence of these beautiful Churches made the town of Lalibela one of the most important centers of learning and Christian culture in Ethiopia.



Figure 3.4 Rock-hewn Churches of Lalibela

Many factors contributed to the downfall of the *Zagwe dynasty*. The first one was the problem of succession to the throne among the Zagwe princes. Most of the time, they settled this issue by force of arms. However, they could not be able to arrange a smooth succession to the throne. Secondly, there had been strong opposition to the Zagwe kings throughout their rule. This opposition was from the regions of Tigray and Amhara. Particularly in Tigrai, the leading clergy members of the Churches of Aksum and Debre Damo spread anti-Zagwe propaganda related to the legend of the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon of Israel.

Hence, the Zagwe kings were seen as illegitimate successors of Aksum. The intention behind this legend was the restoration of the ancient dynasty of Aksum. However, despite the strong opposition in Tigrai, the initiative to overthrow the Zagwe came from the Amhara region. The Amhara region was located to the south of Lasta, around southern Wollo and northern Shawa. An Amhara chief Yekuno Amlak organised a movement against the Zagwe rule. He defeated Yetbarek, the last Zagwe king, on the battlefield in 1270AD.

Yekuno Amlak established a genealogy that made him a descendant of the last Aksumite king, Dil Naod, who was deposed by the *Zagwe dynasty* around 1150AD. Yekuno Amlak (r. 1270-1285) declared himself an Emperor and, at the same time, became the restorer

of the so-called "*Solomonic dynasty*". Yekuno Amlak and his successors used this legend as an ideological arm to legitimise their political power. The tradition of identifying the Christian kings of Ethiopia with ancient Israel continued until 1974.

Activity 3.7



1. Explain the place of Ethiopia in the great civilisations of the world.
2. Write a paragraph about the similarities between the rulers of the Aksumite and Zagwe dynasties.

3.5 The Sultanate of Shewa

Lesson learning outcomes

At the end of this lesson, learners will be able to:

- identify major factors for the rise and fall of the Sultanate of Shewa.
- analyse the socio-political, economic, and cultural organisations of the Muslim sultanates.
- investigate the nature of the interaction between the Muslim sultanates and the Christian highland kingdom.

The introduction of Islam to the Horn was followed by the emergence of a series of Muslim states since the ninth century AD. The northern Ethiopian trade declined due to the Arab control of the Red Sea and the destruction of Adulis. Thus, Zeila, on the coast of the Gulf of Aden, emerged as a primary port for south-eastern Ethiopian trade. This port became the most crucial gateway for Islam into the Horn of Africa. Several Muslim states were formed along the Zeila trade route, which linked the port with the rich interior.

After the spread of Islam since the beginning of the eighth century, viable Muslim communities and states had been established at many locations, especially along the main trade routes from Zeila and its many branches penetrating the interior. The first to be established was the sultanate of Shawa in 896AD. Since the founders of this sultanate claimed descent from the Makhzunmite clan of southern Arabia, the dynasty became known as the Makhzunmite dynasty. Its location was in the hot lowland region on the left of the Awash River. The ruling family of this state had an internal power struggle which later led to its

final decline.

Ifat emerged to the south of Shewa, founded by Umar Walasma (hence the Walasma dynasty) in 1285AD, it would have destroyed the older Makhzumite dynasty. Instead, it became the strongest Muslim sultanate in the region. Ifat controlled a vast territory through which the long-distance trade routes of Zeila passed. Therefore, most of the profitable Zeila trade came under the control of Ifat. Eventually, Ifat became the strongest rival of the Christian highland state. Since 1270 the Christian highland state had also developed a great interest in the Zeila trade and trade routes. Therefore, the need to control the Zeila trade became the main source of conflict between the two states.

Activity 3.8



1. Describe the major factors that contributed to the rise and fall of the Sultanate of Shewa.

Unit Summary



Ethiopia is inhabited by people who speak various languages and practice different types of religion. Languages of Ethiopians belong to Afro - Asiatic and Nilo -Saharan Superfamilies. Like diversity in languages, diverse religious beliefs characterise Ethiopia.

The major religions are indigenous religion, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Indigenous religions are beliefs practiced only within a given culture and native religious ideology to the lands. Although there is continuing debate over how and when Judaism was introduced to Ethiopia, it has been followed by a community of people known as Bete-Israel.

It is established in the teachings of the Old Testament part of the Bible and has similarities with Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity. Christianity was introduced to Ethiopia in the early fourth century AD. However, Catholicism began from the royal court in the fourth century but faced strong opposition from Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

Protestantism was introduced to Ethiopia mainly in the early 19th century but widely spread in the 20th century through missionary activities.

Islam was founded by Prophet Mohammed around 610AD. When the Quraysh tribe planned to attack, many Muslim refugees arrived in Ethiopia. Islam penetrated the interior of Ethiopia through the port of Zeila, along which Muslim sultanates were formed, Sultanate of Shewa being the earliest. Ethiopia's peopling and ethnocultural groups' formation resulted from a long-drawn-out process of fission and fusion.

In the past, it used to be widely believed that Aksum was the first centralised polity in Ethiopia and the Horn. However, there are many indications that several principalities had emerged and declined before the emergence of Aksum. Punt, Hawlti-Melazo, Addi-Seglemani, Metera, Kaskase and Damat are to mention few.

The Aksumite state derived much of its income from agriculture. However, later on, the Red Sea trade became the primary source of income for Aksum. Territorially, outside Africa, Aksum also expanded to bring part of the Arabian



Peninsula under its control.

The founding of the Zagwe dynasty marked the shift of state power from Semitic speaking of the Aksumite rulers to the Cushitic speaking Agaw people. Thus, it is all about political power shift but not the new Kingdom. Along the Zeila trade route, which served as the most crucial gateway of Islam to the interior of Ethiopia, a series of Muslim states were formed.

The first known Muslim state in the Ethiopian region was the sultanate of Shewa. It was founded by the Makhzumite dynasty towards the end of the ninth century AD on the eastern foothills of the Shewan plateau. Around 1285AD, Shewa was annexed and occupied by another Muslim sultanate called Ifat.

Unit Review Questionns



Part I: Match major achievements of world civilisation under column "A" with peoples or areas under column "B"

A

1. Chari-Nile
2. Semitic
3. Koman
4. Omotic
5. Cushitic

B

- A. Ma'o
- B. Argoba
- C. Erob
- D. Konta
- E. Mursi

Part II: Choose the correct answer from the given alternatives for the questions.

1. Which state was formed first in the region of Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa?
 - A. Punt
 - B. Aksumite
 - C. Damat
 - D. Yeha
2. The people who live along Ethiopia's western border speak the languages that belong to _____.
 - A. Chari-Nile and Koman
 - B. Cushitic and Semitic
 - C. Omotic and Koman
 - D. Omotic and Cushitic
3. Which one of the following is not a Cushitic language spoken in southern Ethiopia?
 - A. Sidama
 - B. Hadiya
 - C. Agaw
 - D. Burji
4. Which language family is not predominantly spoken in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa?
 - A. Semitic
 - B. Omotic
 - C. Koman
 - D. Cushitic
5. The Zagwe dynasty was known in Ethiopian history for its
 - A. large scale territorial expansion
 - B. monolithic churches
 - C. monopoly over the Red Sea trade
 - D. rivalry with Muslim Arabs

Part III: Short Answer

1. How were Christianity and Islam introduced and expanded in Ethiopia?
2. Explore the internet and write a short report about the factors that contributed to the decline of the Aksumite kingdom.

Part IV: Further Activities

1. In groups, study the images in this unit (Figure 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4) and describe what the pictures illustrate about life during that time.
2. Read aloud “chapter three, section 3.3 to your classmates”. After the reader has finished, identify the distinctive features of Aksumite civilisation.