
The Aymälläl Gurage in the nineteenth century: a political history

Author(s): BAHRU ZEWEDE

Source: *Transafrican Journal of History*, 1972, Vol. 2, No. 2 (1972), pp. 55-68

Published by: Gideon Were Publications

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24520215>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Transafrican Journal of History*

JSTOR

The Aymälläl Gurage in the nineteenth century: a political history

BAHRU ZEWDE

Haile Sellassie I University

This paper is in the nature of a progress report. It is an attempt to give some shade to the oral information that I have been gathering from some Aymälläl Gurage elders, relating this to the little that has been written on the tribe. It emphasizes the external rather than the internal aspects of Aymälläl history, i.e. their relations with the Galla and the Shāwan Kingdom rather than the evolution of their religious and political institutions. It is felt that this would more meaningfully and more readily put Aymälläl history into the broader context of Ethiopian history.

The Gurage are a cushitic-semitic people inhabiting a mountainous area in the south-western part of present day Shāwa province. They are traditionally believed to have originated from northern Ethiopia and to have started settlement in their present area around the fourteenth century.¹ They speak a semitic language, and are part of the *ensär*² culture complex that characterizes south-western and southern Ethiopia. Their political set-up is marked by a high degree of decentralization, a factor that has fostered their division and, hence, their relative weakness throughout their history. The numerous dialects also account for the diverse picture that Gurageland has always presented. In their religious beliefs, the majority of the Gurage are either Christian or Moslem. Except on the southern border, which they share with the Hadiya-Kāmbatta, a Sidama people, the Gurage are flanked by the Galla. The Aymälläl Gurage,³ with whom this article is particularly concerned, form the northern branch of the Gurage. Although they share many of the features of the other Gurage tribes, their long Christian tradition and a dialect that is distinctly different from the others have given them a somewhat separate entity.⁴

Relations with the neighbouring Galla is probably the dominant theme of Aymälläl history in the nineteenth century. Although most informants are reticent about this aspect of their history because of the unpleasant memories that it evokes, what scant information they give leaves no doubt that, handled with discretion, this is a very fruitful field of study.

As is only to be expected, this Gurage-Galla warfare goes back to the time of the first Galla settlement. Asme, author of the histori-

cal classic on the Galla, cites the testimony of *Ras Si'ila Kiristos*, brother of Emperor Susenyos (1608-32), about Gurage and Hadiya attacks on the Mecha and their being subsequently forced to move to Bizamo in the north. Although the Gurage were separated from the Christian lands to the north by the Galla wedge, Si'ila Kiristos' testimony goes on, the Gurage consistently prevailed over the Galla, raiding and looting their villages and selling their captives for pieces of cloth.⁵ Nor had the inter-tribal warfare stopped in the beginning of the twentieth century, when the Soddo Galla were reported to be constantly fighting against the Gurage.⁶

But it was in the nineteenth century that the drama of the struggle attained its climax. At any rate that is the period for which we have most of the oral information. This may be partly because the events are relatively more recent and hence fresher in the memories of the elders. Partly, also, it is because the first half of the century witnessed a reversal in the tides of fortune, when, according to oral tradition, the thitherto prevalent Gurage suddenly found themselves victims of successive Galla onslaughts, which brought decimation and enslavement.

The whole story smacks of a classical tragedy: hubris inviting divine punishment. The Aymälläl, confident of their military prowess, reportedly asked the Galla to bring a pole made of *kachamo*,⁷ a rope made of chaff, and a basketful of fleas, to make amends for an offence they had committed.⁸ According to one story, the demands were meant to be a ransom for a Galla royal prisoner.⁹ According to another, the Gurage set their exorbitant demands as blood money for a tribesman allegedly murdered by the Galla but in actual fact swept away by a river.¹⁰ The third version, though somewhat similar to the second, makes the Galla more directly responsible. A Galla married a Gurage girl. On the "return" feast,¹¹ the bride's father purposely drank *kosso* in order not to entertain the guests. Infuriated at this lack of hospitality, the Galla buried in a fox's hole the young boy who, as tradition required, had accompanied them.¹²

Flabbergasted by the excessive nature of the demands, the Galla begged for fairer terms, stooping to the level of putting reins on a girl. The Gurage were not moved to pity. Seeing the girl in reins, they rather derisively shouted "tobisk! tobisk!" as they would say to a horse. The Galla then consulted a local sage, Märandida, who advised them to drive a young male antelope into the Gurage stables. The horses broke loose and rode into Galla hands. To add to the misfortune of the Gurage, the supernaturally potent spear of their strongman, Dänne Adäbay, proved ineffectual. It bounced off the shield of the Galla strongman chosen to fight him, Aryo Wäday, and was buried in the ground. The Gurage fled in consternation, pursued by the jubilant Galla.¹³

A more credible explanation for this beginning of Galla ascendant-

cy, given by one informant, is the fact that they had begun to employ mercenaries.¹⁴ Another informant specifies the Gurage in the story as the Darägot and the Galla as Dula. The Darägot, he goes on, were accustomed to raping Dula women while their husbands waited outside holding Gurage horses. The Darägot thus became the first to suffer destruction in the hands of the vindictive Galla. Dispossessed of their lands, they became tenants elsewhere. Their defeat and dispersion is believed to have signalled and facilitated the invasion of the rest of Aymälläl, as the Darägot were the leading clan of tribe.¹⁵

This significant change in Gurage-Galla relations apparently took place sometime in the 1830s and '40s.¹⁶ The Galla first broke into Aymälläl territory through Ambare Wärgo in Nuränna. Then other Aymälläl areas, like Gäyät, Gäreno, Endäbuyä, Amawte, were invaded and sacked.¹⁷ The main Galla tribes that invaded Aymälläl were the Abado and Malima from the north, both members of the Tuläma branch of the Galla, the Geto,¹⁸ and the Dula. Amawte is said to have been invaded by the Abado, Wacho by the Geto, and Arätge by the Dula. Another, less known, tribe, the Jidda, invaded Gäreno.¹⁹ Of these tribes, the one most feared was the Abado, with whom the Aymälläl had most of their battles. The Jille, on the other hand, found on the eastern boundaries of the Aymälläl and not so reputed for their martial skill, were targets of Aymälläl cattle raids. Pressed by the more aggressive Abado to the north, the Aymälläl used Jille territory as a leeway for their own expansion.²⁰

The principal weapons in these inter-tribal battles were invariably spears and shields. Swords were not common.²¹ In one memorable instance, the Aymälläl employed firearms, with rather disastrous results for themselves.²² Although, as the story cited above indicates, the Aymälläl must have sometimes fought on horseback, the use of a cavalry appears on the whole to have been a Galla specialty. The Aymälläl built barricades to repulse the Galla cavalry.²³ A remark attributed to a famous Aymälläl elder, *Fitawrari* Ibiddo, also clearly suggests that the Aymälläl have rather discomfiting memories of the horse. Seeing a horse pulling a *gari* in Addis Ababa, a person was moved to comment on the fate that has transferred it from the glories of the battlefield to the prosaic task of dragging the *gari*. *Fitawrari* Ibiddo, recalling the role of the horse as an accomplice in the invasion of Aymälläl, wished the horse an even worse fate.

The overall effect of the Galla invasion was one of despoliation, depopulation (through either death or flight), and enslavement. There are still elders who have memories of grandparents or other such relatives sold into slavery by the Galla, although cases of Aymälläl selling one another are also readily cited.²⁴ A number of churches were also burnt. The traffic in Gurage slaves, with the Galla reaping most of the profit, assumed great proportions. Menilek him-

self reportedly paid part of his tribute to Emperor Yohannes in the form of Gurage slaves. It was one such Gurage—one informant says a Gäreno woman, another a priest by the name of Waye²⁵—who had an opportunity to tell the Emperor his place of origin and Menilek's habit of sending Gurage slaves to him as tribute. The Emperor, who is traditionally believed to have regarded the Gurage with affection, was upset by the degradation of his "kith and kin." He is supposed to have written a strongly worded letter to Menilek, reprimanding him for his conduct and ordering him to stop the sale of the Gurage. Many informants see this royal injunction as the reason for the appointment of *Ras Wälde*²⁶ as governor of Aymälläl Gurage in the early 1880s. *Ras Gobäna*, who hitherto had been responsible for the overall supervision of the country, was, they claim, suspected of condoning the enslavement of the Gurage by the Galla. A certain *Qäñazmach* (?) Abba Märssa was entrusted with the special task of checking the slave trade. He was apparently highly successful in this, as the Aymälläl have immortalized his name in this song:

Täfam abba'issa,
Mätam Abba Märssa,
Titigär täfässa,
Titigir säb kissa.²⁷

There were, however, more positive aspects to the story of Gurage-Galla relations. One such was the general mixing and intermarriage between the tribes that came subsequent to the Galla invasion of Aymälläl. This new, more peaceful, dimension of inter-tribal relations largely explains the reluctance of many informants to dwell on the story of Gurage-Galla warfare. Even before the invasion, as the case of the Geto illustrates,²⁸ there was some intermarriage between the two tribal groups. According to one informant, it was a child of such marriage who informed Oda Lelisso, an Aymälläl chief, of the Galla plot to murder him on his way to Ankobär to pay homage to King Sahle Selassie.²⁹ But, Aymälläl informants are quick to point out, in almost all marriages between the Gurage and the Galla, before or after the invasion, it was Galla men who married Gurage maidens; rarely did Gurage men take Galla girls in marriage, supposedly because they were inferior to their Gurage counterparts in domestic chores.

Nor was the peaceful aspect of Gurage-Galla relations limited to intermarriage. Many Aymälläl are almost as fluent in Galliña as they are in their native tongue. The same, probably to a slightly lesser degree, applies to the Galla in the neighbourhood. The Galla, originally pagan, were converted to Christianity largely by Aymälläl priests.³⁰ In fact, the mixing between the two tribal groups has proceeded to such a degree that it no longer makes sense to talk of such Galla tribal units as the Dula as purely Galla. The Geto are quite often cited as Gurage. There is a story of an alliance of the Aymälläl

and Geto against the Abado and the Dula. The Aymälläl, thinking they would best forestall the Galla onslaught by enlisting the support of at least one of the tribes, chose to woo the Geto. The Abado, they decided, were too treacherous; the Dula, too demanding. The Aymälläl then advised attacking the Abado and Dula suddenly at night and killing them off. But the Geto, who no doubt had some sense of Galla brotherhood, refused to agree to this design and instead proclaimed their alliance with the Aymälläl and told the Abado and Dula to leave the Aymälläl in peace, thereby relieving them from their harassment, if only temporarily.³¹

It is probably a mark of the imprint that their bellicose relations with the Galla had left on the mind of the Aymälläl that they have developed a tradition of reciting the deeds of their heroes, or *gotas*. Some of the things these *gotas* are purported to have done read like Greek mythology. But not all of them are incredible. Probably the most illustrious of the *gotas* was Gächo Zäge of Wacho, who is reported to have once battled a huge rock, for lack of any more human enemies:

Yäzäge ge Gächo
Yizäm gibir fäjjo
Tämaye täjājjo.³²

Here is another tribute to Gächo, the song of one presumably angered by the ingratitude of the Wacho to the valiant warrior:

Wacho wäretäñä
Gäfaräm yäGächo yadärssu näftäñä.³³

Gächo, whose horse was called Ange, was so unimposing in stature that he was once refused admission to a feast prepared by *Ras Wälde* for the local dignitaries. When *Ras Wälde* saw that his guests were not eating, he asked them why. They replied that their most redoubtable warrior had been left outside. Feeling insulted, Gächo in turn refused to go in, but eventually did. In recognition of his illustrious deeds, *Ras Wälde* is claimed to have secured the exemption of Gächo and his descendants from paying taxes.³⁴

On another occasion, Gächo, ill-disposed for some reason, refused to fight the Geto, who had gathered their forces at a place called Alati. Exploiting his weakness for Saint Gabriel, a group of women went to his house, beating drums and pleading “yäGäbriel yalähä! yäGächo yalähä! YäGäbriel yalähä! yäGächo yalähä!”³⁵ Touched by their entreaties, Gächo rose, single-handed plunged into the Galla forces, and killed their leader, Bulbula Buta, thereby routing the enemy.³⁶

Another *gota*, Yädutu Dugda, also from Wacho, would become so frenzied before a battle that he would weep blood. About half a dozen people would hold him tight so that, blinded by the blood, he would not kill friend and foe indiscriminately. After the blood was cleared from his eyes, he would penetrate the dense mass of enemy

soldiers, kill a number of them, and come back unscathed.³⁷ Beña Dutu, Däma Roge and Buraqe Gonge used to collect the spears thrown at them on their shields and sell them in the market.³⁸ During the invasion of Endäbuyä, a certain Manora Lämacho, rather unimpressive in stature, is credited with returning to his village from a battlefield with a number of Galla spears planted on his shield and on his body—alive.³⁹ Märate Ege dispersed a band of Jille, whom he had disarmed by sneaking into their midst while they were carousing and by tying their spears in a bundle. He showered his spears on them while they were trying to untie the bundle, and they fled.⁴⁰ The following song commemorates a *gota* who combined valour with wealth, Roge Baruda:

YäRoge Barinät
Bäge dängaṣinät
Bämida gotnet
Atshu gifärin
Yihonibko yinät.⁴¹

Another song testifies to the succour provided to the distressed by Buli Lelisso:

YäLelisso Buli
Balä tirämuli
Balelä awdmuli.⁴²

His brother, Oda Lelisso, was known more for his political acumen than his martial exploits. Probably the most remarkable Aymälläl figure in the nineteenth century, because the most popular in their oral tradition, he is said to have gone to Ankobär to pay homage to King Sahle Selassie, with three Galla chiefs, viz. Mä(d)nissa Ange of Malima, Gädda Chängäre of Abado and Ture Galate of Robe. Oda gave a present of forty lion skins.⁴³ Because he was a devout Christian and fasted on Wednesdays and Fridays, he had the special honor of eating with the king.⁴⁴ Feeling jealous, the three Galla chiefs, after returning to their homelands, plotted to kill Oda on their next journey to Ankobär.⁴⁵ However, Oda allegedly got word of the plot from a child of a Gurage-Galla marriage. The Aymälläl chief feigned illness, but wrote a letter stating the real reason for his absence and gave it to the illiterate Galla chiefs to hand to Sahle Selassie. The Galla chiefs were detained and Oda safely arrived in Ankobär.⁴⁶

It was probably at this time that Oda asked for, and received, help against the Galla. It is said that Sahle Selassie gave instructions to *Däjazmach* Gärmame⁴⁷ to give Oda some *näft āñas*.⁴⁸ Oda returned to his country parading this prestigious band of Amhara soldiers. But the ensuing battle dashed all his hopes of a quick and ready victory to the ground. The *näftāñas* were apparently no match for the swift Galla cavalry. While they were engaged in the laborious task of filling their guns with powder, the Galla horsemen, led by

men like Wakene Bäche, massacred the whole lot. The following song is a sardonic comment on the fate of the *nāftāñas*. Viewed from another angle, it is a brief but revealing essay on the somewhat dubious advantages of firearms in Gurage, nay, Ethiopian history.

Yäqayssi färji,
 Näftäñi aläqmun
 Gärmame läqissindäh zi yädäräm bärchi.
 Yagunän qimalä
 Näftäñi aläqmun yäGärmame malä.
 Yalashi ajiffä
 Bägorqi iniñä
 BäQäre abi bär bāFule wäfānchit fäjjibot
 näftäñä.
 Yakäläbo Milat
 Arä bängus balo mäsälänim sirat.
 YäBäche Wakene bābäzi näftäñä sabat
 gädälo
 Bäkärsaw qomäm goy, sändi mäsäläm goy
 täwalāhom walo.⁴⁹

The career of Oda Lelisso is also significant because it throws light on the pattern of Aymälläl Gurage's relationship with the Shāwan Kingdom. Oda apparently had accepted a position of vassalage to Sahle Selassie. Asme in fact notes that Sahle Selassie, after a campaign to Soddo, had appointed Oda over Aymälläl.⁵⁰ One obvious factor for the readiness of the Aymälläl to accept Shāwan suzerainty was the constant pressure of the Galla, as the above story illustrates. When, sometime later, at the beginning of their epoch-making expansion into the south, east and west, Menilek's forces came to Aymälläl, the country lay waste after the Galla invasion, and *Ras* Gobäna, Menilek's illustrious general, stepped into a political vacuum. There was no leader to unite the Aymälläl to resist incorporation, even if there was such a desire.

But the desire was not there. The religious affinity the Aymälläl had with the Shāwans, the common Christian religion, had dampened their spirit of resistance. The Aymälläl have always prided themselves on their Christian heritage. In some extreme cases, this identification is stretched to rather extreme proportions, as when an informant ascribes the peaceful submission of the Aymälläl to their being Amhara.⁵¹ So, when the forces of Menilek, "King of Christians, grandson of Sahle Selassie,"⁵² came to Aymälläl in the mid-1870s,⁵³ the Aymälläl posed no resistance. Menilek only had to renew the contract first signed by Sahle Selassie, so to say; the precedent had already been established.

This peaceful submission of the Aymälläl was not unique in the history of Shāwan expansion. Such kingdoms as the celebrated Jimma

Abba Jiffar and the Galla principalities of Wälläga also submitted peacefully to the superior Shāwan force. But it contrasts with the opposition, at times fanatical, that Gobäna encountered among the other Gurage tribes such as the Qäbena, Wäläne and Chaha. In both Asme and Nägädä, the incorporation of Aymälläl is almost taken for granted, although, at one point, Nägädä lists Aymälläl (as well as Abado and Geto) among the areas conquered by Gobäna around 1877.⁵⁴ On the other hand, the resistance of the "Säbat Bet" Gurage, and particularly the activities of the great Moslem resistance leader, Hassän Injamo, is given relatively extensive coverage.

In October 1876 Menilek himself campaigned in Chaha. He was defeated and a large number of Amhara captives were sold to Wällamo by the victors. Only about one-third of Menilek's men returned safely. Among those killed in the battle was Aläqa Zänäb, author of the first chronicle of Emperor Tewodros.⁵⁵ In July 1880 *Däjach Wälde* was besieged by the Qäbena and the Wäläne. Menilek in person set out to quell the rebellion. But after he had crossed the Awash, Gobäna persuaded him to return, saying his forces would suffice for "these pagan Moslems." Gobäna lifted the siege and *Däjach Wälde* was relieved.⁵⁶ Again in August, *Däjach Wälde*'s men were besieged at a place called Agäta in Silte. Wälde and Gobäna came to their rescue. This was followed by ruthless destruction and looting of all dissident areas.⁵⁷

The final test of strength came in January 1889 when Hassän Injamo, rallying Gurage and other Moslems, proclaimed a *jihad* against the Christian invaders. Almost coinciding with Emperor Yohannes' campaign against the Mahdists, Hassän Injamo's *jihad* had national significance, as it was viewed as the second front of a double Moslem thrust against Christian Ethiopia. A fierce battle raged from eleven in the morning to five in the evening. Hassän Injamo was defeated and, if Nägädä's reports are to be believed, more than three thousand men died from the side of Hassän, against only twenty-nine from that of Gobäna.⁵⁸ Among those dead from the Shāwan side was Märäd, the son of Gobäna. To avenge his death, his father is said to have massacred all the enemy captives. The final defeat of Hassän Injamo was followed by another round of destruction in Chaha, Qäbena, Innämor, Ija, Gumär, and Geto. The rampage was extended to Mäsqan, Silte, Maräqo, and Shashägo at the death of Yohannes in the hands of the Mahdist Moslems.⁵⁹

In these battles of incorporation, a number of Aymälläl fought under *Däjach Wälde*.⁶⁰ Aymalläl in fact appears to have been a haven for him after his troubles in "Säbat Bet" Gurage. Reciprocally, Aymälläl, like all the territories that did not violently resist Shāwan expansion, was spared the depredations attendant on recalcitrant opposition. Wälde had a relatively permanent camp at Gäreno.

Although one cannot say he was adored by the Aymälläl, one rarely hears his name associated with injustice. Unfortunately, not much is known about his career. He was the great grandson of King Sahle Selassie.⁶¹ He also apparently had some knowledge of the outside world, as he had once visited Russia and France.⁶² Despite the fame he has attained among the Aymälläl, his governorship did not exceed five years.⁶³ We know from Borelli that he was governor in 1886.⁶⁴ Sometime after that, he was replaced by *Fitawrari* Gäbäyähü, whose rule lasted until his death in the Battle of Adowa in 1896.⁶⁵ After the battle, *Fitawrari* Habtä Giyorgis took over the administration of the area.⁶⁶

Probably taking seriously a then current prophecy that the successor to Emperor Menilek would be an offspring from a Gurage wife, as well as no doubt attracted by the famed beauty of the Gurage, the governors of Aymälläl had an eye for the fair local women. Gobäna took one of them in marriage. *Wäyzäro* Askälä Gobäna, mother of *Ras* Abäbä Aragay, was the result of that marriage. *Däjach* Wälde married two Gurage cousins, not counting the many female captives that he turned into his concubines.⁶⁷ The highest prize, Wälättä Selassie, a woman of Geto, went to Menilek himself. But she aroused the jealousy of Empress Taytu and Menilek was forced to send her back. Inheriting her father's domain, and with the benevolent sanction of the Emperor, she exercised immense power there.⁶⁸

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, some of the Aymälläl began to settle in what is now known as Gäjja, about thirty kilometres south-west of Addis Ababa. The reason usually given for this trek to the north is the Great Famine of 1889-90. The general congestion resulting from the persistent Galla encroachments might also have been a second factor. Ad'a is also mentioned as another destination of the Aymälläl exodus, though those who settled there, unlike their tribesmen in Gäjja, did not manage to acquire land and remain tenants to this day.⁶⁹ According to one informant, Gäjja was given to the Aymälläl by a decree of Emperor Menilek as a token of appreciation of the presents given to him by an Aymälläl goldsmith, Wäne. The presents included bracelets and a sieve, all made of gold. Gäjja, a land of the Gälan Galla, was chosen because they were thought to be peaceful and accommodating. Menilek, according to the informant, was even willing to give them some more lands to the south so that they would link up with their original homeland. But the Aymälläl declined the offer, preferring the strength they would derive from concentrating in a smaller area, even if that meant sharing a *gasha* of land for four.⁷⁰

The lands of the Gälan had initially extended up to the Wächächa mountains, about thirty kilometres west of Addis Ababa. In course of time, however, they forfeited a good deal of these to the Metta

through their lax morals and uninhibited pursuit of pleasure. There is a pathetic story of an illustrious warrior, Jima Sänbäro, who, abandoned by his compatriots, tried to withstand the expansion of the Metta and died a heroic death. There was only his horse to guard his dead body, and his dog to announce his death to his fellow tribesmen. The Gälan, as expected, did not create much trouble to the Aymälläl settlers. The two groups maintained very cordial and friendly relations, although they rarely intermarried.⁷¹

The first governor of Gäjja was *Fitawrari* Habtä Maryam. He was followed by *Azaj* Gizaw, who governed the area for the second time after his successor, *Däjach* Wäldä Sadiq. But, of more immediate importance to the local people than these distant governors, who invariably lived in Addis Ababa, were the *endärasses* (representatives), the natures of whose administration are characterized in couplets composed by the local people. The most remarkable of these *endärasses* was Dänboba Rore, who represented *Azaj* Gizaw. *Azaj* Gizaw was succeeded by *Däjazmach* Mätafäria, who, in turn, was followed by *Fitawrari* Tafässa. It is to this latter that the introduction of land tax in Gäjja is attributed. The Aymälläl settlers initially opposed this measure, but were eventually convinced of its long-range value and acquiesced.⁷²

Soon after the settlement of the Aymälläl in Gäjja, their settlement in what is now known as Gäjja Säfar in Addis Ababa began. The place was given to the Aymälläl of Gäjja as a resting place when they came here in shifts to pay their tribute by breaking stones for such building constructions as the Grand Palace. Here again, the Aymälläl displaced a Galla tribe, which was given compensation in Arussi. But the Gurage did not settle in the area in earnest until some time later. After the death of Menilek in 1913, they had to contend against such acquisitive officials as *Fitawrari* Gäbre and *Fitawrari* Endaylalu who tried to grab the land from them. The pioneer settlers were also plagued by the problem of *leba shayi*.⁷³ Amhara soldiers tried to make up for the money they had squandered frivolously by leading *leba shayi* into Gurage houses. To overcome this problem, the Gurage used to build special huts without doors; they climbed in through the roofs.⁷⁴

The nineteenth century was as crucial for Aymälläl Gurage history as it was for Ethiopian history in general. The period witnessed a dramatic conclusion to the centuries-old confrontation between the Aymälläl and their Galla neighbours. The Galla invasion of the early nineteenth century was marked by the spoliation and depopulation of Aymälläl; at the same time it effected a high degree of intermixing between the tribes. This was the beginning of the Aymälläl diaspora, which at first took them to such nearer places as Gäjja and Ad'a, but which later carried them to the different corners of the Empire. An added factor for their migration was

their total incorporation into the newly-created empire of Menilek and the general peace and stability that prevailed after his conquests. The earlier sporadic and ambivalent relationship with the power to the north was thus replaced by complete integration into the economy and administration of the Empire.

Footnotes

I am indebted to Dr. D. Crummey for his critical suggestions, stylistic and otherwise.

1. Their original homeland is generally identified as a place called Gura in present-day Eritrea; hence the name Gura-age. But one informant, *Memire Mulat*, observes that some of the Aymälläl might have originated from such Amhara areas as Begemder, Gojjam and Bulga, a view which is also partly recorded in Mondon-Vidailhet, *La langue Harari et les dialects éthiopiens du Gouraghe* (Paris, 1902), p. 78. Cohen, on the other hand, records a tradition that some of the Gurage, like the Silte, who speak a dialect that is akin to the language of the Harari, came from Harar; cf. *Etudes d'éthiopie méridionale* (Paris, 1931), p. 83; see also Mondon-Vidailhet, *op. cit.*, p. 79.
2. *Ensät* (false banana) is the staple food of the Gurage diet and central, as Shack argues, to an understanding of Gurage society; cf. "Some Aspects of Ecology and Social Structure in the Ensete Complex in South-west Ethiopia," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, vol. 93 (1963), pp. 72-79; also by the same author, *The Gurage: A People of the Ensete Culture* (London, 1966), pp. 52-68.
3. The Aymälläl also call themselves *Amistu Gordanna* (The Five Gordannas), after the traditional administrative divisions. They are also referred to as the Soddo Gurage. But as "Soddo" was initially the name of a Galla tribe and as Aymälläl has gained wider currency in the literature, I have preferred that term. Most probably, Aymälläl itself was originally the name of a clan, but eventually it has come to be the general appellation for the Gurage clans of what Shack has called the northern branch; cf. *The Gurage*, p. 7. The best known of these clans are Wacho, Gäreno, Amawte, Aygädo, Arätge, Nuränna, Endäbuyä, Damu, Ashgädye, Melko, and Darägot (now dispersed; see below, p. 3).
4. A general introduction into the Gurage is found in an Amharic publication of the Gurage House Committee of the 1955 Silver Jubilee Exhibition, *Guragena Nurow*.
5. *Yagalla Tarik* (unpublished history of the Galla, photocopy available at the Main Library of HSIU), p. 53.
6. R. P. Azais and R. Chambrand, *Cinq années de recherches archéologiques en éthiopie* (Paris, 1931), p. 149.
7. A thin plant alternatively used with kosso as a taeniocide for tapeworm.
8. Another version has ants instead of fleas; one informant adds to the list of demands a two-headed horse.
9. *Basha Bobas* Mägän, an Aymälläl elder.
10. *Op. cit.*, p. 197.
11. The feast given by the bride's parents some months after the wedding; in traditional marriages it usually coincides with the feast of Mäsqäl.
12. *Ato Alo*, an Aymälläl elder.
13. According to *Basha Bobas*, the "wise man" consulted by the Galla advised them to slaughter two heifers, one red, the other white, at the river marking the common boundary with the Gurage and to return without looking back. From then on, roles were reversed and Galla spears pinned Gurage rider and horse to the ground while Gurage spears were flying loose.
14. *Basha Bobas*.
15. *Ato Dirissa Wurgessa*, an Aymälläl elder.
16. The earlier date is derived from *Ato Fire Sänbät*, who claims that Ambare Wärga was invaded 148 years ago. *Ato Dirissa's* account suggests 1853 for the same event, while another informant, *Ato Gäbrä Maryam*, associates the Galla invasion with the capture of Menilek by Emperor Tewodros in 1855. Harris in his *Highlands of Aethiopia*, 2nd ed. (London, 1848), pp. 312-313, testifies to Galla incursions into Gurageland in the 1840s; the

Gurage, he goes on, harassed by invaders on all sides, had often appealed to Sahle Selassie for protection. See also Isenberg and Krapf, *Journals* (London, 1843), p. 182, about Gurage appearing naked at the court of Sahle Selassie claiming they were robbed by the Galla, and Abir ("Trade and Politics in the Ethiopian Region, 1830-1855," doctoral dissertation, 1964, p. 387), who says that Aymälläl was under a Galla chief in the 1830s or 40s.

17. *Ato Dirissa*.
18. Geto is elsewhere categorized as a Western Gurage tribe; cf. Shack, *The Gurage*, p. 7. But my informants are consistent in classifying it as a Galla tribe, although many of them qualify this by saying that it includes many Gurage elements as well. It is probably an example par excellence of Gurage-Galla intermixing.
19. *Memire* Mulat, an oral historian who has gathered an impressive amount of information.
20. *Ato Dirissa*. The Jille originated from Arussi and had reached by stages up to Bu'i (in the centre of Aymälläl presently) before they were driven back eastwards.
21. *Basha Bobas*.
22. See below, pp. 7-8.
23. *Memire* Mulat and *Ato Fire Sanbat*.
24. Informants; see, in addition, Harris, *op. cit.*, p. 313; and Isenberg and Krapf, *op. cit.*, p. 180. For a general discussion of the slave trade in south-west Ethiopia in the early nineteenth century, see M. Abir, *Ethiopia: The Era of the Princes* (London, 1968), pp. 53-56.
25. *Ato Dirissa* and *Ato Alo*, respectively.
26. See below, p. 10.
27. Abba'issa has gone,
Abba Märssa has come;
Those who used to be sold, be happy,
Those who used to sell, be disappointed.
The translation, like all the others following, is free. "Abba'issa" was the insult the Galla hurled at the Gurage as they sold them. Regarding him as their protector, the Aymälläl are grateful to Emperor Yohannes. "If Ase Yohannes had not intervened, all of us would have been sold," *Ato Dirissa* mused.
28. See above, n. 18.
29. See below, p. 7.
30. *Memire* Mulat.
31. *Ato Gäbrä Maryam*.
32. *Wäyzäro Adanach Bobas*, who heard the song from the mother of an aunt.
Gächo Zäge
Smashed [household] articles,
And fought against a rock.
33. *Ato Alo*.
Wacho, the fickle ones;
They have forgotten Gächo and are singing the praises of *näftäñas*.
(The *näftäñas* alluded to are presumably the ones brought by Oda Lelisso; see below, p. 7.)
34. *Ato Alo*.
35. "Help us, Gabriel! help us, Gächo! Help us, Gabriel! help us, Gächo!"
36. *Ato Dirissa*.
37. *Basha Bobas*.
38. *Memire* Mulat.
39. *Ato Dirissa*.
40. *Ato Dirissa*.
41. An elderly informant whose name I do not have.
Roge Baruda,
Rich at home,
Gota outside;
Leave at least one of them,
Or you will provoke the evil eye.

42. *Wäyzäro* Adanäch.
 Buli Lelisso;
 If he is around, call him for me.
 If not, tell him [that I seek him].
43. *Ato* Dirissa.
44. An interesting interview, said to have been held between Sahle Selassie and his visitors, is recounted by *Ato* Gäbrä Maryam. Sahle Selassie is believed to have instructed them on the advantages of ploughing (as opposed to hoeing), and of feeding horses dried grass (as opposed to leaving them to graze it raw).
45. Another explanation given by some informants for the Galla plot is that Sahle Selassie had appointed Oda as his representative in Aymälläl and over some of the neighbouring Galla areas; see also Asme, *op. cit.*; p. 63.
46. *Basha* Bobas, *Ato* Gäbrä Maryam.
47. He is, no doubt, the famous Däjach Gärmame, whose official career extends from the reign of King Sahle Selassie to that of Emperor Menilek. But, neither in the biographical manuscript by Qāñazmach Hayle Zäläqa (copy available in the Institute of Ethiopian Studies library, HSIU) nor in Bairu Tafla's article ("Four Ethiopian Biographies: Däjjazmach Gärmame, c. 1810-c. 1889, *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, VII, 1969) do we find reference to this interesting episode. But we have information that he was active in areas adjacent to Aymälläl. He was, for instance, administrator of the Zuquala monastery and conquered Galla areas up to the Gurage border; cf. Hayle, *op. cit.*, pp. 2, 3, 5.
48. Literally a possessor of *näft*, a firearm, after the Shawan expansion of the late nineteenth century, it has come to signify a northern settler in a southern province.
49. *Ato* Dirissa. Cf. Richard Caulk, "Firearms and Princely Power in Nineteenth Century Ethiopia," a paper prepared in advance for the Inter-Disciplinary Seminar of the Faculties of Arts and Education, HSIU, 1969-70, *passim*.
 A slice of cheese;
 The *näftāñas* are wiped out;
 Gärmame, may this fate befall your sons!
 Lice of the hair,
 The *näftāñas* are wiped out, woe to Gärmame.
 Alashi's fair one,
 As he was lying in the valley,
 His *näftāñas* were killed in front of the house of Qare's father.
 Distressed Milat
 Begged for mercy in the name of the king, thinking there was any order.
 Wakene Bäche killed seven of the *näftāñas*,
 And standing on the belly of his victim and drawing out his *sāndi*,
 he did what had been done to him.
 ("Alashi's fair one" is a reference to Wārssa Oda, Oda Lelisso's son, who, confident of the victory of the *näftāñas*, was relaxing. "Milat" (i.e. Mulat) was most probably the leader of the band. *Sāndi* is a big knife used for chopping *ensät*. The last stanza is an oblique statement meaning that Wakene Bäche castrated his victim.
50. *Loc. cit.* See also Isenberg and Krapf, *op. cit.*, p. 97.
51. Not so extreme, perhaps, in view of n. 1.
52. The words of *Basha* Bobas.
53. Sometime around 1877, according to Nägäda, author of an unpublished biography of *Ras* Gobäna in the possession of *Wäyzärit* Tsehay Birhane Selassie of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies; see p. 4.
54. *Loc. cit.*
55. Asme, *op. cit.*, p. 81.
56. Nägäda, *op. cit.*, p. 12.
57. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
58. But this is rather difficult to believe, as the battle is traditionally reported to have been fierce and many people to have died on both sides. The popular couplet,
 Hassan Injamo dāndanaw gäbar,
 Goben gätāmāw ginbar läginbar.

- (Hassan Injamo, the proud vassal,
Met Gobana face to face).
suggests that the battle was almost evenly fought.
59. Asme, *op. cit.*, p. 99; Nägädä, *op. cit.*, pp. 15-16.
 60. Basha Bobas and Ato Dirissa. The former's father was in the service of Ras Wälde.
 61. According to an informant from Mänz, home area of Ras Wälde. Ras Walde was the son of Wäyzaro Shawarägäd, cousin of Emperor Menilek.
 62. Hiruy Wäldä Selassie, *Yehiywät Tarik* (Addis Ababa, 1915 E.C.), p. 75.
 63. Ato Dirissa.
 64. *Ethiopie Méridionale* (Paris, 1890), pp. 112, 151.
 65. Ato Dirissa; Cf. Guèbré Selassie, *Chronique du règne du Ménélik II roi des rois d'Ethiopie* (Paris, 1931), II, p. 362, n. 8.
 66. Ato Dirissa; Guèbré Selassie, *op. cit.*, p. 429, n. 4.
 67. Ato Dirissa. For a discussion of this interesting phenomenon, see Bairu Tafla, "Marriage as a Political Device: An Appraisal of a Socio-political Aspect of the Menilek Period, 1889-1916," a paper presented at the First Annual Conference of the Historical Society of Ethiopia (May, 1971), pp. 2-3.
 68. Azais and Chambrand, *op. cit.*, p. 152; *Memire* Mulat.
 69. Ato Dirissa.
 70. Basha Bobas. A *Gasha* is a unit of land measurement equivalent to forty hectares.
 71. Basha Bobas.
 72. Basha Bobas.
 73. A thief-detector who goes about his job of hunting the culprit in a state of frenzy after taking a special drug. The practice easily lent itself to abuse, as the *leba shayi* could be persuaded to "detect" an enemy as thief, though he be innocent.
 74. Basha Bobas, who is among the first settlers in the village.