

THE COUNTRY OF THREE THOUSAND YEARS OF CIVILIZATION: WOLAITA OR ETHIOPIA?

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ABSTRACT

The ancient and medieval empire of Wolait predates any civilization Ethiopia and reached its peak during its powerful and expansionist king Motolame in the 13th century. This article explored the political, social and economic achievements of the empire in the period under discussion. The data was collected in 2018 through fieldwork, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis. Scholars used the names Damot and Wolaita interchangeably and its political influences included the south, south-west and the central region of present Ethiopia. As it is one of the first historically known sites in the Horn of Africa, the Wolaita-Damot civilizations predate any other civilization in Ethiopia. The Wolaita was the first to wear cloths made by their own hands out of cotton and had their own currency called Marchuwa.

INTRODUCTION

Ethiopia is said as the cradle of humanity and ancient civilization which is endowed with plenty of breathtaking heritages and untold history especially the formerly wesetern Cushic nations or currently the Omotic nations¹. The existing culture, language, place names and other evidences unequivocally point to the fact that they are the owner of the pre-Axumite ciilization². Available information clearly indicates that the Omotic nations particularly the Wolaita-Damot civilizations existed for thousands of years in the Horn of Africa³. The Wolaita were very ancient race, the indigenous stock, perhaps, on which most other peoples in this part of Africa have been grafted. As Getahun (1982) and Bahru (1991) put, situated exclusively in south-western Ethiopia the Omotic peoples {Wolaita} were the evolution of highly organized polities. The region had served as the sources of long distance trade routes of the ancient and medieval Ethiopia⁴. However, Abyssinian rulers, court historians and monks contend that the Wolaita nation is not well-organized states until the late 17th century. In dedeed, there had been great confusion among popular and even professional writers concerning the great ancient and medieval empire of Wolaita.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Most of the hitherto written history of Ethiopia which begins in the later Middle Ages from the pens of monks and court historians and whose main purpose is the laudation of Abyssinian kings does not deal with the comprehensive history of Ethiopia and the Ethiopians at large. It does not particularly touch upon the history of the regions and peoples annexed by Emperor Menelik II to the Ethiopian Empire-state towards the end of the 19th century following the bloodiest wars⁵. Similarly as Bounge (201) puts both the Christian and the Muslim medieval historians ignored the history of the "pagan" nations⁶.

The Wolaita region, though they were the home of highly organized polities and had their own unique civilization, their achievements were totally robed by the medieval scholars. Their past cultural, historical, social and political achievements were not well researched due to lack of

government attention, less foreign contact and lack of written records. Its contribution to the civilization of Ethiopian in particular and to Africa in general was either consciously overlooked or unconsciously ignored by the Christian Highland politicians⁷. Historically, most attentions have been given to northern Ethiopia where the latest states are emerged especially the Amhara⁸. However, the state formation of southern Ethiopia is of great interest but received much less attention⁸. Our knowledge of the politics of Wolaita is not satisfactory. Southern kings, their territories and populations do not seem to have raised specific concerns among medieval historians, perhaps because this space and its inhabitants were ‘pagans’ and as such differed from the Christian and Muslim societies, which have been the subjects of choice for Ethiopian studies⁹.

As it is one of the first historically known sites in the Horn of Africa, the Wolaita-Damot civilizations predate any other civilization in Ethiopia but get extremely less attention or intentionally ignored by some scholars. It was also the most powerful and dominant medieval state with its expansionist king Motolame or Sasso Motole¹⁰. Hence, it will be the duty of the professional historians to pinpoint the shaded history of the ancient and medieval history of their nations so that the history of modern Ethiopia will be complete. Many outsiders including the home land popular historians had attempted to write the history of Ethiopia and the Ethiopians based on inadequate data and information, and sometimes relying on secondary sources and hearsay.

Objective

Today an impressive change is taking place in Ethiopia that ninety nine percent people who were considered insignificant and not worth any place in history; now they are getting surprising attention¹¹. So far there has been an insufficient study conducted on historical achievement of the ancient and medieval empire of Wolaita. In fact, scanty historical, anthropological, and linguistic studies exist for this region but the gaps in our knowledge are great. Information on the history of Wolaita, its economic and political system tends to be scanty and very uneven. Thus, the primary objective of this article is to reconstruct the history of the ancient and medieval empire of Wolaita and to inspire others to give place to this nation in the historiography of Ethiopia since the regional analysis of the political and economic profile of the kingdom of Wolaita at its peak in the thirteenth century offers a new geopolitical analysis of Ethiopia from the early Middle Ages¹².

DATA COLLECTION AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUES

As Johnson and Christensen (2004) state a qualitative research approach was employed for its convenience to find detail information on the topic¹³. To collect reliable data, fieldwork took place entirely in the Wolaita zone from June 2018 to February 2019. In the meantime, selected key informants were interviewed. Accordingly, the subjects of the study were selected assuming “who knows what”. The aged groups of the society (elders who have good knowledge of the oral traditions), traditional religious men, concerned local politicians and professionals (teachers, lawyers and heritage management experts) were included in the study. In addition, two focus group discussions were conducted with indigenous peoples. With regard to the document analysis, the researcher used records, reports, letters, magazines, diaries, bulletins, theses, dissertations, and published books and journals.

LANGUAGE OF THE WOLAITA

Until 1970s the Wolaita were grouped as one of the Cushitic-speaking peoples. According to Greenberg (1963), Omotic was generally considered as the most divergent branch of the Afro-asiatic languages and classified as the Western branch of Cushitic. It was only in the late 1970s

that the Omotic was separated from its mother language family, the western-Cushitic and took a new name; Omotic. In 1970, the first formal written proposal of the name Omotic and its classification was worked by Fleming. He noted that the western branch of Cushitic should be reclassified as 'Omotic'. Actually, Bender, Adams, Ehret and others accepted the language classification by Fleming¹⁴. The former western Cushitic language but newly grouped Omotic groups are spoken in the vicinity of the Omo River system and the most indigenous of Ethiopian languages. The ancestors of the speakers of Omotic languages have been in place for many millennia¹⁵.

However, too little said about the ancient, central and southern Ethiopian States, Kingdoms, and Chiefdoms and more importantly about the ancient and medieval empire of the Wolaita history had been totally ignored.

Naming of Wolaita-Damot

As it is said the first historically known sites in the horn of Africa were Punt and Damot. Some scholars argue that the territory of Punt constituted the Eastern parts of the Greater Ethiopia which constitutes Eritrea, Djibouti and Somalia whereas the ancient empire of Damot was occupied the southern, south-western and central parts of the present Eritrea and Ethiopia¹⁶. Damot was the first known state in Ethiopia which arose around 1000 BC predating the Axumite state. Axum was one of many successor kingdoms to Damot that arose around the first century BC. Until the coming of the Axumite Empire at the beginning of the first Century BC, the Cushitic people such as the Bejas, the Awi, Saho, Kunama, Wolaita and others were under one political entity¹⁷. The migrant Semites had intermixed with the indigenous Cushitic in which the Wolaita was the dominant. Nonetheless, the new comers took the upper position in the area and then ended the Wolaita's dominancy to the north of the Blue Nile or the Abbay River and forced to limit its power to the south of the Abbay River¹⁸.

Most of the medieval literatures use Wolaita and Damot interchangeably. For instance, Gabra-Sellase, cites the hagiography of Takle-Haymanot as his sources and write as 'The land known as [Wolaita] was once ruled by a pagan king called Motolame. He adds, "Wolaita people were the Damot's original inhabitants"¹⁹. According to, among the most known kings in the Wolaita Malla dynasty was King Motolame who governed during the second half of twelfth century. Taddese Tamirat states as "Shewa was subject to a number of devastating raids by Matolomi, the pagan king of Damot". He believes that Damot was ruled by a famous pagan king, Motolami²⁰.

Huntingford and Beckingham claimed as the kingdom of {Wolaita} belonged to three separate dynasties. The first is said to have come from Damot in the time of Yekuno Amlak and the first king is given as Motolami²¹. As Zebdewos (2009) says, "it is said that the king of Wolaita known as Motolami who was famous and powerful made a campaign to Shawa as far as Bulga and captured Christians and enslaved them"²². Still others confirmed that the original inhabitants of Damot were Wolaita. Zebdewos writes as "... monastery was destructed by Yodit-Gudit, Ahmed Gagn and king of Wolaita Motolome"²³.

Those scholars who comprise the court historians, the monks, the chroniclers and the academicians claimed that the 'pagan' king named Motolame was the ruler of the medieval empire of 'Wolaita' or 'Damot'. Most of them preferred to say king Motolame ruled Wolaita and few of them preferred to say king Motolame ruled Damot. Klausberger (1956), Huntingford and Beckingham (1954), Chiatti (1984), Gabre-Sellase (1959), Wana Wagesho (1990), Ayisha (1992) and many others considered Motolame as the king of Wolaita²⁴. On the other hand,

Taddese Tamirat (1972), The hai Berhane Selasse (1973) and few others referred Motolame as the king of Damot²⁵.

In addition to oral traditions and written sources, there are persuasive linguistic, cultural and place names evidences that independently suggest that the state of Wolaita had controlled the region south of the Blue Nile before the 14th century. There are plenty of such linguistic, physical, or cultural materials to support the idea that the medieval Damot was Wolaita and as the Wolaita's civilization predate any civilizations in Ethiopia.

The name Damot was very common in Wolaita. Damot in Wolaita has been 1) the name of the persons from ordinary to the kings' level. For example, the last king of the Wolaita Aruja dynasty's name was Damot and also one of the kings of Wolaita Tigre dynast was Damot²⁶. The name Damot is also one of the clans of Wolaita; damta clan. 3) Different names including district names used Damot as their prefix: Damot-Gale, Damot-Woyde, Damot-Pulassa and Damot-Sore.²⁷ Above all, very historical is Mount Damot. The etymology of Damot emanated from the Mount Damot of Wolaita zone that situated almost at the center of Wolaita Sodo town which has the height of 3000metres above the sea level. The hagiography of Täklä Haymanot, agree on the thirteenth-century king of Damot as Motäläme. Mount Damot is the highest mountain in the present Wolaita zone. The mountain was/is surrounded by amazing natural and historical events such as more than forty springs, caves (the most popular is Moche Borago which have about 58,000 years), The Trinity (Silase) church (founded in the 13th Century by Saint Takle Haymanot), palaces(xazza Garuwa, founded by Kawo Motolome; Dalbo Garuwa, the place of the kings of the Wolaita Tigre dynasty including Kawo Tona, the last king of Wolaita but fired by King Menelik of Shawa in 1894) etc.²⁸.

Moreover, the socio- cultural ruins are also ample evidences to indicate that the medieval Damot was Wolaita. For instance, Xossa (Tossa) Terara or Mountain situated at the present Wollo was once dwelled by the Wolaita at the height of the Wolaita's empire. This was said "Xossa" was/is The Heavenly God of the Wolaita. One of the districts of Shawa in the Amhara region, Ensero (Saaro is Wolaita word which means 'peace'); Yeha the pre-Axumite town is Ya (Wolaita word means come in); It is a (bad or difficult place) the birth place of Abune Teklehaimanot that situated at Aleltu worda of North-East Shewa zone of Oromia regional statesignify the existences of Wolaita in those areas before its decline²⁹. Linguistically, one of the principal titles of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, called the Echege (He is old), second only to the Abuna (he is too old), Awi (father), Gosa and qomo (clans), qochqocha (one of the Wolaita's cultural food made up of meat and cabbage), qeerro (the younger) are examples of typical Wolaita origins³⁰.

The sources very clearly ascertain that in the earlier time scholars' called of the kingdom of Woaita and Damot interchangeable and its political influences included the south, south-west and the central region of present Ethiopia. King (Kawo) Motolomi who is mentioned in the religious book Gedle Teklehaimanot as a powerful, great expansionist, higher unifier and the invader of the north. King Motolame was born from his father Sato and from his mother Esladan in the current village called Fate, Sodo Zuria district. He founded the Xazza Garuwa (the palace of Kawo Motolame) at the top of Mount Damot in the 13th century³¹.

However, as stated in the introductory part some scholars intentionally or unintentionally worked to distort the history of Wolaita. Some of the medieval history writers of Ethiopia were monks, court writers and the foreign scholars whose data based on those northern monks and who knew the history of the south by hearsay distorted the history of Wolaita

unconsciously³². Others especially some professionals such as Taddese Tamirat and Tsehai Brehane-Selase consciously worked against Wolaita. For instance, Taddese claims, ‘A [Wolaita] which is found in a praise song of the famous warrior king Amdà Seyon, originally was the title of the Gafat political leader but not the political kingdom of Wolaita. However, Taddese Tamirat had information gap for Gafat was one of the states of medieval Wolaita³³. Still others worked to erase the great achievements of the ancient and medieval Damot or Wolaita. Aiming to create confusion, they used to spell the state of Damot as ‘Damat’ or as ‘D’mt’ and refer its origin to Yemen. Of course, Wolaita has one of its districts named Dimtu next to Duguna-Fango district bordering with the Sidama zone³⁴.

One of the notorious scholar, Tsehai Berhane Selassie argued as the Damot kingdom of the thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries was located in the upper regions of Gibe River while Wolaita was located some 400 kms to the south of historical Damot of Motolame. In addition to that she said Damot was historical, ancient and powerful state but Wolaita was local, weak and recent (17th century) phenomena³⁵. Nevertheless, the state of Wolaita had four successive dynasties with fifty kings. How this could be with less than two centuries’ of duration?

Another great form of distortion of the achievement of the empire of Wolaita was confusing the history of queen Yodit who ruled Wolaita for forty years (c.945-985). Conti Rossini argued as she was the ruler of the once-powerful kingdom of Wolaita. Other mention queen Yodit as a “pagan” and an ancestor of king Motolame of Wolaita³⁶. According to oral tradition Gudit attacked the Axumite kingdom, sacked and burned Debre Damo, destroyed churches and monuments etc³⁷. Nevertheless, the hijackers of Wolaita history interested to link Yodit with Amara; others attached her with queen Furra of Sidama³⁸. For those who link Yodit with Amara origin, she was mentioned as non-christian whose origin was south of the Blue Nile. In the 10th century, the area which called as Amara was around Lasta (Wollo) not crossed the Abbay River. And it was her enemies or the Semetic who called Yodit as Gudit or Esato (fire)³⁹.

Matching queen Yodit of Wolaita with queen Furra of Sidama is really joking and creating a new history. According to written sources, the state of Sidama is the late 16th century phenomenon. Scholars such as Haberland (1975); and Ketebo (2002) believe on the existences of Oromo, Hadiya, and Sidama together around Bale up to the 16th century⁴⁰. Stanley says “... the Sidama and the Hadiya were subject to common or similar influence” up to the 16th century.”⁴¹ Besides, some linguistic scholars used to call Sidama in order to refer the language groups of Kafa, Kambta, and Wolaita etc. John Markakis states as “the best known Sidama of the south-west was Kafa.” Some of Sidama Kingdoms were Jimma, Kafa, Gomma, Qucha, Wolailta, Kambatta, Hodiya, Alaba and Koyra⁴². Thus, the south-western parts of Ethiopia were generally named as Sidama. The Oromo called Sidama referring to all peoples other than the Somali. Therefore, it is impossible to talk in vacuum about the state or monarchical system of Sidama in the 10th century.

THE GEO-POLITICAL ENTITY OF THE EMPIRE OF WOLAITA

In the thirteenth century, the political sphere of influences of king Motolame of the Wolaita was bounded on the north by the Amhara (before 1270, Amhara was probably a peripheral region of the Christian kingdom of the Lasta area. It attained a new status only with the advent of the Solomonic dynasty in 1270), on the west the Ennareya state of Mettu, on the east the Sultanate of Ifat upto Aliyu Ambaof the Afar depression and on the south the entire states up to Lake Turkana⁴³. Accordingly, Zorzi (1848), reported as there was ‘a large province called [Wolaita] whch extends to Turkana Sea.⁴⁴. Taddese stated as “Gamo was the most southern extreme of Damot” (Taddesse Tamrat, 1972). Likewise, Klausberger writes that, “...waging

wars on the neighbor [the Wolaita malla dynasty] extended their sovereign power to the territories of Kucha, Gamo, Boroda, and [Dawuro]”⁴⁵. Until the second half of the 19th century those states were under the influence of Wolaita and they were used to pay tributes to Wolaita. The living evidence as the Wolaita had lived in Kucha since the ancient time is still inhabiting of the Wolaita-Mala clan at the top of the Woyza mountain and the Woshesha clan at the top of mount Ganda of the Kucha high lands⁴⁶.

Cerulli claims the domain of Damot as Enaryain the west and Gamo as was the most southern extreme. He adds, the kingdoms of Enareya, Kaffa and Wolaita had similar connections with Damot. King (Kawo) Motolomi was mentioned in the religious book *Gedle Teklehaimanot*, as an invader of the north and the king who was surrendered the mother of the Ethiopian saint, Tekle Haymanot. Some scholars revealed Teklehaimanot as the son of this king since the saint's parents had no child before and after him. Tekle Haymanot was born after his parents Tsega Zeab and his wife Egzi'e Haraya, who had failed to have children. As the son of the king, Teklehaimanot visited his father's palace at the age of thirty and stayed with his father for twelve years. During his stay he baptized 10,999 men including his father, king himself at the River called Wosole⁴⁷.

Most researchers like Wana Wagesho, Bogale Walalu and Elias in their works state that king Motolame after establishing his capital at Damot Mount (Xazza Garuwaa) made aggressive expansion towards north direction and put Shawa under his control. He was one of the most powerful and expansionist medieval ruling dynasties of Walayta known as Walayta Malla⁴⁸. At the height of his political and economic might, King Motolame held more than three-quarters of the present Ethiopia. During his reign the empire of Wolaita challenged the authority and the expansionist ambitions of the Muslim and Christian neighbors. The reign of Motolame marked the zenith of the Wolaita Malla dynasty in the thirteenth century. States and Sultanates such as Shaäwa and Ifat were subject to Wolaita. At that time, Shäwa was the name of a Muslim sultanate located most likely south of Amhara and west of the Muslim state of Ifat which extends up to the central plateau, east of Däbrä Bərhan and Ankober, near the Afar depression and near Alu Amba⁴⁹. In the period under discussion, Ennarea was also recorded to be one of the provinces of the Motolami's of Wolaita. Alaqa Taye suggests as, before its occupation by Oromo, Enarya included Wollega, Illubabor, Jimma and Kaffa⁵⁰.

Historian Taddese Tamirat also indirectly the geopolitical entity of Wolaita as follows: “...Shewa was subject to a number of devastating raids by Matolomi, the pagan king of Damot, which lay beyond the Jamma River”⁵¹. Others suggest as one of Matolomi's most notorious predations was the raid which led to the abduction of Egzi'e Haraya, the wife of Tsega'ab.

Accordingly, Zebdewos highlights, “this king not only marked Tabota Iyesus with many priests and deacons but also the soldiers kidnapped the mother of Saint Tekle Haimanot”. The pagan ruler of Wolaita had captured the mother of Abunä Täklāhaymanot and wished to marry her. At the end the Tabota Iyesus was remained in the land of Wolaita whereas the wife of Tsegaab, Egzaharia was returned to her home⁵².

Concerning the origin of the Wolaita civilization most of the existing literatures argue as it was begun around the Omo River valley. Bahru writes, “The Omotic-speaking peoples derive their name from their location on both sides of the Omo River. Situated exclusively in south-western Ethiopia, they (Omotic peoples)...the evolution of highly organized polities.” It is also believed that the Omo valley people of Wolaita are the ancient in the region⁵³. Likewise, Getahun remarks the existences of different Wolaita-Gamo peoples in the Omo valley from ancient time

to 1270 A.D Furthermore, the largest portion of literature on the Wolaita, portray the idea that their ancestor had lived in the vicinity of the Omo River⁵⁴.

Nevertheless, there are other brand though believe that the Wolaita civilization is part and parcel of the Omo civilization they totally reject the argument that the Wolaita's state formation was around Kindo. According to them the origion of Wolaita is the top of Mount Damot. To strengthen their argument they highlight the existences of more than forty water streams that made their origin to Mount Damot and man-made cave of Moche Borago cave which has the age of more than fifty eight thousands (58,000 years ago.Mount Damot had served as the political centers for three dynasties (the first and second Wolaita malla dynasties and the Tigre dynasty).It was from this Damot Mountain that the Wolaita or the Damot civilization spread over the whole parts of the present Ethiopia until 1270⁵⁵.

In dedeed, scholars have no concise on the number of Wolaita dynasties. There are research works that indicate on the existences of two dynasties;(Wolaita Malla and Wolaita Tigre dynasties)⁵⁶; others mention as there were three dynasties;(Arujia, Wolaita Malla, and Wolaita Tigre dynasties)⁵⁷; still there are scholarly works that show that Wolaita was ruled by four successive dynasties(first Wolaita Malla; Arujia, Second Wolaita Malla, and Wolaita Tigre dynasties)⁵⁸. According to written and oral sources, Wolaita had ruled by four successive dynasties: the first Wolaita Malla dynasty, the Arujia dynasty, the second (the restored) Wolaita Malla dynasty and the Wolaita Tigre dynasty. Particularly, the last two dynasties had developed the most sophisticated form of political administrations. Here are the lists of the kings of the four dynasties'

I.Names of the kings of the first Wolaita Malla dynasty

1	Bito	4	Hadiyo	7	Wode	10	Haruro
2	Bidinto	5	Yate	8	Sagada	11	Halala
3	Hanise	6	Worde	9	Bure		

II.Names of the kings of the Arujia dynasty

1	Bada'a	4	Godira	7	Bade	10	Dangula
2	Badila	5	Bayuwa	8	Gonga		
3	Gadila	6	Burana	8	Dangula		

III. Names of the kings of the Second Wolaita Malla dynasty

1	Sana	4	Samora	7	Sata	10	Ocha
2	Sabora	5	Sassa	8	Motolam	11	Lacha
3	Sagula	6	Saamm	9	Mota		

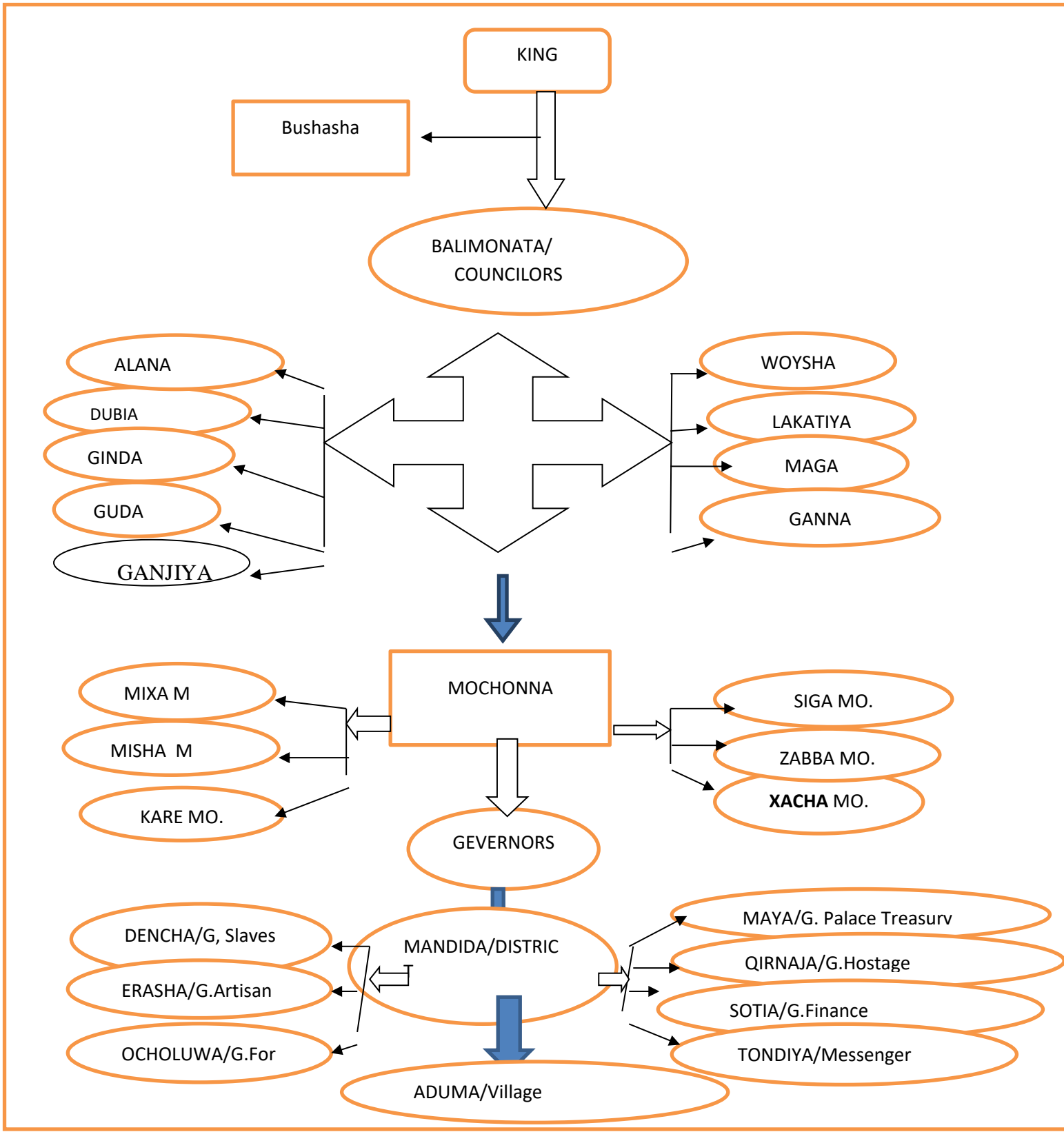
The last three kings (Mota, Oche and Lache were extremely weak as the result Wolaita was exposed to various rivals and lost its vast territories and assimilated to either to Amhara or Oromo mostly until the 17th centuries(The first and mass assimilation period).

IV.Names of the kings of the Wolaita Tigre dynasty

1	Mihala	5	Adaya	9	Sana	13	Goba
2	Guruma	6	Kota	10	Ogata	14	Tona
3	Katama	7	Libana	11	Amada		
4	Gazana	8	Tuba	12	Damota		

Some researchers make the total number of the Wolaita kings to fifty and that is why Wolaita is called as the nation of "Fifty Kings"⁵⁹. Those kings especially the last two dynastic kings had esblished highly sophscated and and advanced political and administrative structures until its total devastations by the devastating Amhara invaders in 1984.On the eve of Menelik's invation the political boundery of Wolaita was

Wonjala Demba (near to Hossan) in noth-west, Chaqqoor worancha maxuwa (near Hawasa) in the norh-east, Kulfo river in the south and Omo River in the west.



Political hierarchy of in the 19th century: Source: Balisky (1984) .

The above political hierarch illustrates that until its conquest in 1894, the empire of Wolaita had achieved highly developed and civilized form of government. All the above mentioned kings were the constitutional monarchy because they were headed by the Balimola or the National Council. The Balimola had two houses. The first house consisted of Eight Members (the Hospun Balimola) with the right to seat on the office for four years, while the second house had 54 members (54 Barimola) with two years term in office. The degree of socio-political and economic advancement of Wolaita clearly stated by Captain Stigand (1969), who visited Wolaita in the first decade of 20th century, illuminates the advancement of the people as, “The [Wolaita] appear to have reached a very advanced state of civilization for an African tribe, until just lately, entirely cut off from the outer world.”⁶⁰

THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE WOLAITA ECONOMY

In the thirteenth century, the empire of Wolaita was not only a dominant political power but also an economic powerhouse or an economic center as its civilization predates any civilization in the Horn of Africa. The Wolaita’s apex of civilization was illustrated by Stigand, a European explorer than any other scholars. He says, ‘in many ways the Wolaita appear to have reached a very advanced state of civilization for an Africa kingdom... In many ways the Wolaita remind one of the Baganda (Uganda) form of civilization. Both have currency, cloth and their own kings and had mixture of blood. The major economic achievements of Wolaita:’⁶¹

1. Agriculture

According to Robert Shanka, early travelers to the Wolaita area of Southern Ethiopia were so impressed with their great attachments to the cultivation, harvest and preparation of enset foods that they labeled as ‘the Enset culture’ or ‘the Enset belt people’. Around 6000-5000 BC, with the coming of domesticated livestock, a settled culture evolved around the use of Enset product as a major and co-staple food among the Omotic peoples basically near the Damot Mountain of Wolaita. Enset foods are traditionally incorporated into cultural events such as births, circumcision, deaths, weddings, and rites of planting, harvesting and purification. The Wolaita who were lived in the cave of Mochena Borago at the bottom of Mount Damot are said to be the first to domesticate Enset, commonly called as false banana with its multi-facet form of food culture. Evidences proved that Wolaita is the home of enset culture.⁶²

2. The Land of Arts

Collecting the best artisans and the musician from the entire of the empire and promoting, organizing and supervising the activities were given to the Zirgomal clan by the decision of the balimols or councilors (The highest law makers) initially whose members were four and later reached to fifty four. In the land of Wolaita the Weaver, black-smithing and pottery men commonly referred as “the golden hands” were instructed to in the left (pottery) and right (the Weaver and black-smithing) sides of the kings’ palace. The Wolaita kings’ palaces were surrounded by artisans since its state formation around Mount Damot. Those the best weavers weave various colorful and beautiful cotton cloths to the kings whereas the best black-smithing produce decorated golden, metal and silver instruments that symbolize the kings such as the king’s gold ring, the crown (Kalacha) and others. They also produce different forms of metal, skin and from other materials for the kings’ horses decorations. The empire of Wolaita was the producer and exporter of luxury goods of black smiths and weavers to its neighbors like the Egyptians, Yemen etc.⁶³.

As Stigand states the Wolaita had developed the art of weaving and wearing cloths made up of cotton prior to any other Ethiopian communities. The importance of cotton to Wolaita was

more than clothing. Cotton (Shalluwa) and cotton's products like karretta Sinna (the black-colored thread made of cotton) as currency. In the period under discussion different parts of Africa used the barter system (exchanging of goods by goods), but the state of Wolaita developed this form of currency through out its empire. Next to Karretta sinna, the Wolaita had achieved one of the most important civilizations in the sphere of currency: the foundation of Marchuwa, an iron pieces. Wolaita had its own currency known as Marchuwa⁶⁴. As Chiatti highlights in 1903, one marchuwa is equal to 18 Maria Thersa Thalers or 0.50 USA dollars. The foundation of Marchuwa as the currency was dated back when Saint Teklehaimanot preaching at the top of Mount Damot garuwa of King Motolame around 1270⁶⁵.

The French journalist who came into Wolaita land with Menelik to Wolaita in 1884, said about the Marchuwa as follow: "...bundles of thin metal strips one cubit long, used as trading currency." Thanks to the Wolaita black-smithing, the Wolaita had used the Marchuwa throughout its empire during the medieval period. Oral tradition claim that there was the storehouse of Marchuwa at Dalbo palace established by one of the kings of the Wolaita Tigre dynasty. Thus, the state of Wolaita had developed the banking system prior to other states of Ethiopia. Sources proved that until the Menelik's conquest of the the south Hadiya, Kambatta, Sidama, Dawuro, Gamo Gafa had used this Marchuwa as currency⁶⁶.

3. TRADE

The economy of the ancient and medieval Wolaita was based on profits from trade and agriculture. In the 13th Century, the kingdom of Wolaita lay at the crossroad of two trade routes: the east-west axis leading to Zeyla, and the southwest-north route going to the port of Massawa. So Wolaita had a monopoly on long-distance trade. The main items of trade were gold, civet, ivory, cotton, luxury goods, slaves (latter time) and other natural products. The gold of Wolaita states' reached the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, Massawa and Zeyla and then reached to Yemen, India, China etc. This very important position was the result of Wolaita's military and economic conquests on its Christian and Muslim neighbors in the 13th century⁶⁷.

Wolaita state had sophisticated and organized political entity. Wolaita had also well organized and self-sufficient economy; agriculture is the main-stay of economy followed by trade and craft technology. By using plough technology, the people of Wolaita produced variety of crops which is more than enough to feed the whole people of the state. With regard to trade three items of currency were put into use in Wolaita- the shaluwa, the Karetta and the Marchuwa; Shaluwa was a kind of thread spun by women. Karetta was "a thread like material but dyed in different colours" and the Marchuwa was a thin iron bar and "was used for no other purpose but buying and selling". Stigand (1969) notes that they (The Wolaita) possess money and hold markets (great steps in civilization and commerce). when Menelik marched to Wolaita."⁶⁸

CAUSES OF DECLINE

I. The foundation and Expansion of the Christian kingdoms: Axumite, Zagwe and the Solomonic dynasties.

The Abyssinians Empire, having its center in Axum, Lalibella, Gondar and Ankobar successively expanded its territory southward starting from the first century to the end of the nineteenth century expansion. However, the two Abyssinians kings King AmdeTsiyon of the 14th century and King Menelik of the 19th century) were responsible for the decline and its total loss of sovereignty in one of the bloodiest campaigns of the whole process of annexation in the 14th century and in 1894 respectively.⁶⁹ Between 1270 and 1529, different linguistic, ethnic and religious communities were conquered by the Christian highland state. This state made

large scale conquests and territorial expansion mainly in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and ruled over a vast empire. Particularly, during the expansionist king of Amdetsion (r. 1314-1344) the highland Christian state conquered and occupied large territories south of the Blue Nile the whole Shawan territory with the great support of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church⁷⁰.

II. The Foundations and Expansions of Muslim Sultanates

The introduction of Islam to the Horn was followed by the emergence of a series of Muslim states since the ninth century AD. Beginning from the 9th centuries a large numbers of Muslim states (such as Shoa, Ifat, Bali, Hadiya, Adal etc. were emerged in the interior, western and eastern parts of Ethiopia and occupied the lands of the medieval Wolaita and pushed them to the southwards⁷¹.

III. The war of Ahmad ibn Ibrahim al-Ghazi (Ahmed Gragh)

Once Ahmad Gran had gained control of the Muslim Somali state of Adal, he launched a jihad (Islamic holy war) against Christian Ethiopia. Between 1535 and 1543, at the height of his conquest, Ahmad Gragh held more than three-quarters of the highland Christian kingdom and most of them converted to Islam. Though the Wolaita were not conquered by Ahmad Gragh., they moved toward the south in order to unit and resist against the invading force, Ahmad Gragh⁷².

IV. The Oromo Population Movement and Expansions

In the 16th century the ethno linguistic and political shape of the Horn of Africa was changed forever when the Oromo expanded into different parts of the territories dominated by the Abyssinia, Wolaita, the Adal and other kingdoms⁷³.

V. The Disintegration of the Ennareya or Gonga

According to various scholars the people of Gonga which were Ennareyea, Bosa, Mocha, Kafa, Sheka, Shinasha and Anfilo was disintegrated in the 14th century. Among those states the most powerfull were Ennaria and Kaffa. In the 13th century, Ennareya was recorded to be a province of the Motalami's of Wolaita, a kingdom south of the Blue Nile. As Alaqa Taye states, before its occupation by Oromo, Enarya included Lukama (Lekmite), Jimma and Kaffa. Howeve, Ennareya became independent from the kingdom of Wolaita in the 14th century and become one of the most powerful kingdoms in the western parts of Ethiopia occupying the land between Gojeb and Gibe Rivers until its decline in the 17th century.⁷⁴ As the result of the invasion of Mecha Oromo in the 17th century, some of them were migrated to Kafa while the rmaining Enareye people fused with the expansionist Oromo and totally assimilated to Oromo: still some of them were moved to the present Beneshangul-Gumuz region⁷⁵.

Like the Ennareya the state of Kafa also emerged as one of the most powerful state in the west in the 14th century. John Markakis states as ‘‘the best known Sidama of the south-west was Kafa, whose territory lay west of the Omo River and immediately south of the GojebRiver. As Lange arues ’’...Kafa strongly influenced nearly all major historical developments of the Gonga and other peoples south of the Blue Nile. There were three well recorded dynasties in Kafa since its foundation: in the 14th centry: Manja, the Matto and the Minjo dynasties. The kingdom of Kafa was very powerful, extensive and independent until the end of the 19th century⁷⁶.

VI. Succession Problems

The last three kings of the Wolaita Mala dunasties: Kawo Talame, Kawo Oche and Kawo Lache were said to be too weak and involved in the power struggle. Accordingly, the last three kings

of Wolaita Mala dynasty seems to have contributed their failure to death. The struggle for power among rival aspiration usually inviting non-Wolaita mala elements into the political struggle accelerated their ends. Thus; since the late 16th century having lost substantial territories to the Shawa (Amhara or Shawa), Arsi and Guji Oromo, Sidama, Hadiya, Kambata etc. (the main challenges of Wolaita since the 16th c.), the Wolaita Empire declined in power for centuries and even become district in its worst political shadow⁷⁷.

6. Menelik's Conquest and Annexation of Wolaita

The genocide form of the 1894 war ended not only the sovereignty of the Wolaita but also the whole socio-political and economic organizational institutions of the three thousand years of civilizations. The palaces, the museums, seventy ministerial status residences and the surrounding houses of the nobilities were changed into ash. Then Menelik and his nineteen generals and other officials returned to Addis Ababa with more than eighty three thousand Wolaita (Emperor Menelik II-30,000; Ras Mikael of Wollo-18, 000, Ras Wolde Giorgis, Ras Mengesha, Ras Alula and other rases and Dejazmachs had shared the remaining Wolaita according to their respective ranks). Some of them camped in a separate quarter down to Menelik's palace in Addis Ababa whereas others were taken to Wollo and still others taken to different parts of Ethiopia⁷⁸.

Besides, in 1896, eighty thousand Wolaita were marched to north to fight against the Italians at the battle of Adwa. This marked the end of Wolaita sovereignty and with its civilization, identity and population. Oral tradition rationalize that Emperor Menelik took such extreme punishment against Wolaita was a revenge to the evil deeds of the 10th century queen Yodit (the ancestor of King Motolame) and king Motolame of the 13th century against the Christians⁷⁹.

Summary

Wolaita is one of the fourteen Zones of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Regional State of Ethiopia. Its capital Wolaita Sodo is found in Southern Ethiopia some 330 kms south of Addis Ababa (the capital of the country) through Butajira-Alaba and 120kms south-west of Hawasa (the capital of (SSNPRS) through Dimitu-Badeas Highways. The total population is said to be eight million with seven outlets towards its neighbours. Politically it bounded by Oromia and Sidama in the north-east, Kambata and Hadiya in the north, Dawuro and Konta in the west and Gamo and Gofa in the south.

Wolait was one the first historically known sites in the horn of Africa. As it is one of the first historically known sites in the Horn of Africa, the Wolaita civilizations predate any other civilization in Ethiopia and it reached its peak during the reign of Kawo (king) Motolame in the 13th century. In the period under discussion the political influences of Wolaita reached to Abbay River in the north, Turkan Lake in the south, Enanrea regions in the west and Afar depression in the east. Nevertheless, because of its internal and external factors Wolaita begun to decline since the 14th century and totally lost its sovereignty in 1894 following one of the most bloodiest war in Ethiopia. Until its downfall in 1894, Wolaita had experienced four successive dynasties: I Wolaita-Malla dynasty; Arujia dynasty; II Wolaita-Malla dynasty and Wolaita-Tigre dynasty.

Foot Notes

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¹⁵Ibid.

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¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Alāqa Tayā Gābrā Mariam, Yā Itiyepiya Hezib Tarek. Addis Ababa: Central Printing Press, 1964 E.C, p.87; Gābrā Sellassie Wāldā Arāgay. Tarek Zāmānā Zādagemawi Menilek Neguse Nāgāst Zā Ityopya (Amharic) Addis Ababa: Artistic Printing press, 1959. E.C, p.303.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Klausberger.

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