



Full Length Research Paper

The Yejju Oromoo in the Politics of the Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia
(1786-1853)

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Abstract

The Oromoo had been playing a significant role in the power politics of Ethiopian history. The period of the Yejju Dynasty (1786-1853) was peculiar in this regard. However, this historical fact was abused and was written as if the country was in a state of disorder and political anarchy during that period. This was done mainly to praise and justify the political measures of the “Great kings” of Gonder in the 17th and early 18th centuries and the emperors who were recognized as “unifiers” of Ethiopia in the second half of the 19th century. Hence, this is an attempt to disclose the role of the Oromoo in the political history of the country during the period under discussion. This role is explained by taking some issues into consideration: struggle for political power, the nature of political administration, economic activities mainly agriculture and trade, foreign relations and socio-cultural systems. Known sources were consulted thoroughly to bring to light to the ideas overlooked intentionally or unknowingly by professional and public historians. Thus, works of earlier traditional historians, European travellers and missionaries’ accounts, Ethiopian chronicles and the works of few professional historians were used for this purpose. Accordingly, the sources indicate that the Oromoo became the actual governors of the country designing a limited monarchy-type of government system by enthroning ceremonial kings as head of state. Unlike what is common in the literature of Ethiopian history, it was a period of continuity of the previous unifying factors with relative peace than the prevalence of only divisive factors. Moreover, it was also a period of wider economic activities when agriculture and trade, both local and cross border, were extensively carried out.

Key terms: *Christian kingdom, Great kings, Oromoo, Yejju Dynasty*

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Axeereraa

Seenaa sirna siyaasa Itoophiyaa keessatti Oromoon gahee olaanaa taphateera. Waggootiin (Baroonni) Yeejjuu Deenastiin (1786-1853) itti bulchaa ture kanaaf fakkeenya gaariidha. Haata'u malee, seenaan qabatamaan kun akka waan biyyattiin seer-maleessummaafi finxaleessummaan yeroo kanatti bulteetti akkaataa burjaajii keessa nama galchuutti barreeffame. Kun hunduu haala kanaan akka barreeffamu kan ta'eef siyaasa Nugusootaa Goondar ol kaasanii mul'isuufi ittiin dhugoomsuuf; akkasumas, Jaarraa 17^{ffaa}, jalqaba jaarraa 18^{ffaa}fi walakkeessa Jaarraa 19^{ffaa}tti mootonni dhufan mootoota Itoophiyaa tokko gochuuf dhufan jedhanii beekamtii kennuufiif akka ta'e yaanni isaan kaasan ni mul'isa. Kun yeroo kana keessatti gahee Oromoon siyaasa biyya Itoophiyaa keessatti qabu xiqqeessuuf yaalii godhameedha. Faallaa kanaa yaanni kun akka sirrii hintaane ibsuuf, dhimmoota tokko tokko xiyyeeffannaa keessa galchuuni yaanni qindaaye kahameera. Isaanis: sochii gama aangoo siyaasaa, sochii haala bulchiinsaa, warraaqsa dinagdee, keessattuu gama qonnaafi daldalaa, hariiroo gama haajaa alaafi tooftaa walhidhatiinsa aadaafi gama hawaasummaatin. Maddeen kun maddeen beekamoo ta'an xiyyeeffannoo keessa galchuun ilaalamaniiru, kunis, yaada beekaas ta'ee, osoo hinbeekin hayyoota ogummaa seenaa qabaniifi warroota beekumsa seenaa ummataa qabaniin xiyyeeffannoo dhaban akka xiyyeeffannoo argataniif ragaadhaan deeggaruun barreeffamee jira. Kunis, barreeffamoota warra seenaa katabdoota osoo seenaa hinbaratiini, warra Awurooppaadha dhufanii biyya keessa deemaa turaniifi misiyoonoota wabeeffachuun. Barreeffamoonni warra ogummaa seenaa qabaniifi kironikiliwwan Itoophiyaas dhimma kanaaf wabeeffatamaniiru. Haaluma kanaan ragaan akka mirkaneessuutti Oromoon biyya kana bulchaa akka tureefi akka nugusaattis mataa biyyattii ta'uun fakkaattii mataa biyyaa ta'uun bulchuu isaanii mirkaneessa. Haalli kun gama faallaa ta'een ogbarruu seenaa Itoophiyaa ibsan keessatti wanta mul'atuudha. Kunis, tokkummaa walitti fufiinsa qabuufi nageenya biyyattii keessatti shoorri isaan taphatan waan guddaadha. Dabalataanis, baroonni kun baroota sochiin dinagdee keessumattuu gama qonnaa, daldalaafi gama hariiroo biyya keessafi biyyoota alaa (ollaa) wajjin ture daran itti babal'ateedha.

Jechoota Ijoo: Oromoo, Mootummaa kiristanaa, Deenastii Yeejjuu, Mootoota Gurguuddoo

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Introduction

Historical facts were abused frequently in the modern historiography of Ethiopia. The history of the country has been written as if some of the ethnic or religious groups were strange to Ethiopia and had less contribution in the processes of state formation. The notion that some groups became part of the Christian highland Ethiopian history only in the 16th century has begun to be challenged by newly disclosed historical evidences¹. It became possible by critically reading the already known historical sources. Basically, the abuse of history in Ethiopia was to legitimize the illegitimate political power by defaming predecessors². Particularly, post conflicts and post dictatorial government history topics or lessons tried to justify the positions and deeds of the existing political power that it is there to correct those wrong acts of the predecessor³.

In such cases, history is not taught for reconciliation rather it tends to give recognition for one group and deny the contribution of others. Even, it accused only one group for the instabilities that took place frequently in the history of the country. It associated the absence of national unity or the retardation of the process of national unification with the fault of only one group of the peoples of the country⁴. This had been done through the implementation of some interrelated forms of abuses in the process of historical reconstruction in Ethiopia.

One was by omitting the historical sources that discuss the contribution of “unwanted” groups of the society; they could be religious, ethnic or occupational group. This was done sometimes to the extent of destroying sources pertaining to those groups⁵. The second one was by defaming through sorting out only the failure of those groups in the course of history of the country⁶. This was also strengthened by labelling all the socio-cultural and economic systems different from that of those groups on the political power as backward, barbarian or practices of the *Satan*⁷. The third was by adding opinions more than what were easily identified in the historical sources of the country⁸.

¹ Mohammed Hassen, *The Oromo and the Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia 1300-1700* (Oxford: James Currey, 2015), pp. 15-61; Asafa Jalata, “The Struggle for Knowledge: The Case of Emergent Oromo Studies” in *African Studies Review*, Vol.39.No.2 (Cambridge University Press, Sep. 1996), pp. 95-123.

² This can be understood from the historical literature written about Ibin Ibrahim Aligazi (Mohammed Geragn) and the Oromo in the post 16th century period, about Yejju Dynasty during the reign of Emperor Tewodros II, about Emperor Tewodros himself during the reign of Menilek II, about *Lij Iyyasu* during the reign of Emperor Haile Silassie I, and about Haile Silassie himself during the period of the *Derg* and now about the period of the *Derg* itself.

³ Afework Gebre Iyesus, *Dagmawi Ate Menilek* (Addis Ababa: United Printers, 1973), pp. 1-2; Mahteme Silassie Wolde Meskel, *Zikre Neger* (Addis Ababa: Artistic Printing Press, 1962 EC), pp. 506-515.

⁴ Tekle Tsadik Mekurya, *Ye Itiyopiya Tarik: Ke Atse Libne Dingil Iske Atse Tewodros*(Addis Ababa: Birehanina Selam Printing Press, 1961 EC), pp. 94-98; Getachew Hailie, *Ye Abba Bahriy Dirsetoch, Oromochin Kmimlektu Leloch Sndoch gara* (Addis Ababa, 2002), p.118-123; Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia: 1855-1974* (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 1992), p.9.

⁵ Mohammed Hassen, *The Oromo of Ethiopia 1570-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge university Press, 1994), pp. Xii-xiv.

⁶ Getachew Hailie, pp. 118-123.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

The overall purpose of the abuses was to label those groups as outsiders or strangers to the history and systems in the country. It was also to ostracize or marginalize those groups from the national privileges in the consecutive regimes of the country⁹. The common privileges that were denied included political power, lucrative job opportunities, economic activities and possession of major national resources¹⁰.

One of the national groups that was subjected to the abused historical writings in Ethiopia was the Oromoo. Their share in the politics of the Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia has been overlooked or marginalized in the historical writings in the country or abroad for the last one century. In fact, significant efforts were made to correct those abuses by a number of scholars recently¹¹. So, the main objective of the present attempt is to add on those efforts to disclose the historical truth pertaining to the Oromoo in the history of the country.

1. Historical Background

Sources indicate that the profound involvement of the Oromoo in the politics of the Christian highland Ethiopia began to be seen clearly with the reestablishment of the center of political power in the region north of the Abay (Blue Nile) by the first quarter of the 17th century. One of the major roles of the Oromoo was to serve as soldiers for the political power aspirant. The service helped the aspirants to come to the political power and maintain their positions. The earlier of such service was provided to Susenyos in the last decade of the 16th century. The other role of the Oromoo was hosting rebels who exiled among them retreating from the center of political turmoil of the Christian Highland kingdom of Ethiopia. Susenyos was one of such royal family members who was brought up among the Oromoo and familiarized with the Oromoo culture and could communicate in the language¹². Geographically, the Oromoo began to inhabit areas not very far from the capital town, Gonder. It is said that, Susenyos settled a number of clan-based Oromoo regiments in the provinces north of the Abay like in Gojjam. So, he was one of the Ethiopian emperors who brought the Oromoo to the heart of the post- sixteenth century political power struggle in the country¹³.

Of course, the Oromoo were serving in the army (*chewa*) of Iyyasu I (1682-1706) to fight against his opponents including the Oromoo themselves. Clan regiments like *Itu*, *Wallaga*, *Gadisa*, *Tulama* etc were some of the Oromoo armies that served in the Gonderine kingdom¹⁴. Hiroki further mentions that “the royal army at the end of the reign of Iyyasu I comprised troops led by provincial governors, troops of the Oromoo people and others”¹⁵. The same author underlined that “... Emperors had considerable household troops and that they depended increasingly on the Oromoo people, and that the latter’s political position rose

⁹ Aleqa Taye Gebre Mariam, *Ye Itiyopiya Hizib Tarik* (Addis Ababa: Qidus Giyorgis Printing House, 1958), p.24.

¹⁰ Olana Zoga, *Giztina Gizot* (Addis Ababa: Bolie printing House, 1985 EC), pp. 24-25).

¹¹ Asafa Jalata, pp. 95-123.

¹² Getachew Hailie, pp. 134-136; Alemu Haile, *Ye Itiyopiya Tarik (1597-1625 EC) Ye Atse Susenyos Ziena Mewa 'el* (Addis Ababa: Sirak Printing Press, 2005), pp.3-5.

¹³ Alemu Hailie, pp. 79-82; the text narrates about Oromo and Gojjam significantly chapter after chapter and pages after pages.

¹⁴ Ishikawa Hiroki, “Changes in the Military System during the Gonar Period (1632-1769): Their Influence on the Decline of the Solomonic Dynasty” in *Annales d' Ethiopie*, Vol. 18, annee, 2002, pp. 217-218.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 220.

during latter half of the Gonderine period”¹⁶. So, it is suffice to say that almost all emperors of Gonder depended heavily on the Oromoo for military purposes from its large size population, the practice continued to the 21st century history of Ethiopia.

The foundation of Gonder as a capital town of the kingdom in 1636 by Fasiladas, the son and successor of Susenyos, gradually resulted in the confinement of the political power in the town and its vicinity. Even, the immediate successors of Fasiladas, who were called the “Great Kings” of the Gonderine period, could not strictly put all the areas within their domain under their full control. The main achievement of the Gonderine kings in this regard was compelling those regions to pay annual tribute. Otherwise, they send their army to raid those rebel regions. Internally, those kings were pre-occupied by power rivalry and turbulence. They attempted to solve such problems by confining all possible contenders in a royal prison, Wohniamba¹⁷. Bakafa (r.1721-1730), who was the second next to Sysenyos in bringing the Oromoo to the politics of the Christian Highland Kingdom, was one of the victims of the royal imprisonment. He managed to flee from the royal prison and exiled himself among the Oromoo in Wollo, Warra Himanu, at the home of a lord called Amizo. Later on, Bakkafa was supported by the Oromoo of Wollo to secure his political power. That was followed by a marriage alliance between the two, Bakafa and Amizo, who allied Iyyasu II (r.1730-1755) with Wabi (Christianized and named as Wubit or Wolete Bersabeh) the son and daughter, respectively¹⁸. The measure brought a number of influential Oromoo individuals and groups to the palace to support one power contender against the other. The marriage alliance also gave rise to kings who had blood line from the Oromoo. Those kings needed the support of their kinsmen in counseling, military commandments and services as the majority of the army. The case in point was that of Iyoas (r. 1755-1769), the son of Iyassu II who brought his uncles (Brilie and Lubo) and other numerous relatives from Wollo¹⁹. As a result, it has been said that his Oromoo followers “over flooded” the town of Gonder that their language became a court language (ልሣነገገሥ). Iyoas himself spoke mostly Afan Oromoo by which his other relatives from Quara were disappointed²⁰. The act brought two groups of power contenders not only for the position of kingship, but also for the positions of counseling and military commandments. Regarding the contenders, one group was from the Oromoo and the other from the non-Oromoo ethnic perspectives; and one from the Muslims (identified as *Galla*) and the other from the Christians (identified as *Amhara*). The latter could be the Agaws and other related Cushitic peoples like the Qimant from Quara. Most probably, the *Quaregnoch* were the Amharic speaking Qimant and the *Gojjames* were the Amharic speaking Oromoos or Agaws²¹. At certain point, the monarchs could not manage the rivalry among these two groups, the *Quaregnoch* and the *Wollowoch*. As a result, they attempted to bring a neutral

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 222.

¹⁷ Tabor Wami, *Ye Wugena Dirsetochna Ye tarik Iwunetoch* (Addis Ababa: Artistic Printing Press, 2006 EC), p. 298.

¹⁸ Richard Greenfield, *Ethiopia: A New Political History* (London: Pall mail press, 1965), p. 45; Birru Tsegayie, *Ye Silitanie Afrikawi Minchina Beteret Megarejawoch Yetdbqu Iwunetoch* (Addis Ababa: Bedir Printing House, 2002 EC), p. 321.

¹⁹ Richard Greenfield, p. 45.

²⁰ *Ibid*; Fitsum Wolde Mariam, *Ye Atsime Giyorgis Gebre Mesih Dirsetoch, Ye Oromo Tarik (1500-1900 EC)* (Addis Ababa: Azop Printing, 2009 EC), p.222.

²¹ Fitsum Wolde Mariam, pp. 227, 232.

body from Tigray²². Unfortunately, that measure worsened the weakness of the monarchs and limited the power of these groups. This continual weakness of the Gonderine monarchs paved the way for the rise of the Yejju Dynasty (1786-1853) in which the Oromoo became the main actor in the politics of the kingdom. With regard to this period, a number of abusive historical literatures were contributed. Some of the abusive stories pertaining to the period were on the rise of Yejju Dynasty, struggles for political power, the nature of political administration, the territorial extent of the kingdom, foreign relations and the nature of socio-cultural systems of the country.

The Rise of the Yejju Dynasty and the Struggle for Political Power

The end of the period of “king making and unmaking” by *Ras* Sehum Mikael of Tigray who was identified as “ቀታሌ ንጉሥ” “murder of kings” in Gonder gradually gave rise to the appointment of the Oromoo to the position of the *inderasie* (viceroy) with a title *ras betwode*; the highest politico-military rank next to the monarch. The first *inderasie* from the Yejju family was appointed by King Tekle Giyorgis who came to power in 1777. In fact, it was his father (Guangul) who was invited by King Tekle Giyorgis for the position. But, Guangul recommended his own son, Ali and the latter was appointed to the position²³. By then, the political domain of the king was very small; he could not collect taxes and tributes from the regions which were tributary to the kings before him. Because of this, he planned to collect taxes from Begemidir itself which was exempted from that for their military services²⁴. Unfortunately, the nobles of Begemidir initiated by certain *Dejach* Eshete Hailu from Estie rejected this plan or decree of King Tekle Giyorgis saying; “there was no tax in Begemidir like there was no desert in the sky. Begemidir was exempted from tax of honey or cash but gave his chest for spear and his foot for gravel. Please, govern like your fathers Fasil, Adiam Seged Iyyasu did, we continue our loyalty to you.”²⁵

However, the king refused their appeal. As a result, they suggested a new form of government saying, “If the king changed his administration system, we [also] change our governor; our throne is in our hands!” They invited Ali to the position of their own *inderasie* instead of that of the king as “አጼ ተክለጊዮርጊስ የሰጡዎን እንደራሴነት ይተወና በኛ በኩል እንደራሴ አድርገንዎታል፤ አልጋ ግን ከአገራችን እንዳይጠፋ ወይዛዘር ከሚባሉት ከነገሱታት ዘር አጼ እያልን አንዱን እያነገሰን እናስቀምጣለን...”²⁶. “Leave the position of *inderasie* of *Atse* Tekle Giyorgis, we will appoint you as our *inderasie*, but to preserve the tradition of monarchy, we will put ceremonial kings on the throne from the royal family.” The act was to limit the absolute power of the king, in which the real political power should be in the hands of people’s *inderasie*. Therefore, the government was headed by the *inderasie* of the people. And the king became the ceremonial head of the state without real political power. So, Ali Guangul became people’s *inderasie* (people’s appointee) by leaving his position with the king. The king was disappointed because of the measures and exiled to

²² *Ibid*, p. 223.

²³ Birru Tsegaye, p. 324.

²⁴ Tekle Tsadik Mekuriya, *ke Atse Libine Dingle iske Atse Tewodros*, p. 291.

²⁵ *Ibid*.

²⁶ *Ibid*; Tekle Tsadik, *Ke Atse Libne Dingil Iske Atse Tewodros*, p. 292.

Aksum saying, “በጌምድር! ከኔ ከወንድምሽ የየጁ ጋላ ከተሻለሽ ደግ ነዋ!”²⁷; “Begemidr! If the Yejju Galla is preferable to you than I, your brother, it is well.” Thus, this measure was the opening of the period of the Yejju Dynasty, the end of absolute monarchs not the end of government, but a change in the form of government. Tekle Tsadik Mekuria rightly commented that “ፍጻሜ መንግስት..... ይባላል:: ነገር ግን የነገስታቱ ጎይል ደከመ ለማለት ነጩ እንጂ፤ መንግስቱ በመሳፍንቱ እጅ ቀጥሏልና ፍጻሜ መንግስት በማለት ፈንታ ፍጻሜ ነገስት ማለት ይገባል::”²⁸; “...they called it the end of state; but it should be called the end of monarchs because the government continued in the hands of *mesafints*.” Unfortunately, the official history of the country identified the period as the time of “disorder” or “statelessness” instead of identifying it as the period of limited monarchy. Several opinions were written against facts concerning this historical period. Of these, the following can be re-thought looking into the official sources contributed by the royal chroniclers and traditional historians. The majority of modern professional as well as amateur historians omitted those historical facts to legitimize all the political activities of Emperor Tewodros II (1855-1868) who brought the period to an end. Shiferaw Bekele and Tekele Tsadiq Mekuria, to the knowledge of the present author, became different from Ethiopian historians of the 20th century in this regard. Both of them interpreted sources on this historical period genuinely and invited others for further investigation²⁹. Asme Giyorgis Gebre Mesih also shared this peculiarity to some extent in his description of the period³⁰.

The political power of the Yejju Dynasty was identified as “vassalage system” by Shiferaw Bekele, in which regional lords can grant land and mobilize their own armies which were totally dependent on them. This inhibits the full control of the Yejju rulers on the regional lords indirectly³¹. In fact, all the rulers of the Yejju Dynasty from Ali I to Ali II were suzerain to all other regional lords within their domain. Of course, the majority of the regional lords were protesting frequently either for the position of *ras betwoded* by which the Yejju rulers were identified³².

Thus, the period of the Yejju Dynasty was characterized by intense power struggle for the position after the death of each *inderasie*. The claim for the position of *ras betwoded* from other regional lords was carried out frequently under the cover of identifying the Yejju *inderasies* as usurpers to the position³³. The two major rival provincial lords for the position of *inderasie* were the lords of Tigray-Simien and Gojjam-Damot. The rest two, Begemidir and Wollo, were not frequently part of the struggle against the Yejjus because Wollo was already the main actor in the government system and Begemidir was the host of the system; even the

²⁷ Tekle Tsadik, *Ke Atse Libne Dingil Iske Atse Tewodros*, p. 292.

²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 288.

²⁹ Shiferaw Bekele, “The state in the Zamana Masafent (1786-1853): An Essay in Reinterpretation” in *Kasa ana Kasa, Papers on the Lives, Times and Images of Emperor Tewodros II and Yohannis IV (1855-1889)* (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Book Center, 1990), pp. 52-53.

³⁰ Fitsum Wolde Mariyam, p. 244;

³¹ Shiferaw Bekele, “Reflections on the power Elite of the Wara Seh Masfenate (1786-1853)” in *Annales d’Ethiopie*. Vol. 15. Annee, 1990. P. 159.

³² Tekle Tsadik, *Ke Atse Libne Dingil Iske Atse Tewodros*, pp. 291-320.

³³ *Ibid*.

Yejju rulers themselves were officially not only the *inderasie* of the kingdom but also lords of Begemidr³⁴.

Initially, there was a rivalry between *Ras Wolde Silassie* from Enderta and *Ras Gebre Meskel* from Tembien for the position of governorship of Tigray. They were aspiring not only for the governorship of Tigray but also the position of *inderasie* in Gonder. For instance, *Ras Gebre Meskel* enthroned his own ceremonial king *Ase Be'idemariam* to mobilize support for the position of *inderasie*. At this stage, *Ras Ali I* was siding with *Ras Wolde Silassie* against *Ras Gebre Meskel*. Because of this, *Ras Ali* had got at least the neutrality of *Ras Wolde Silassie* in his confrontation with *Ras Gebre Meskel*. As a result, *Ras Ali* was successful in defeating *Ras Gebre Meskel* and killed *Ase Be'idemariam*. *Ras Ali* maintained his alliance with *Ras Wolde Silassie* and urged him to fight against *Ras Gebre Meskel* who escaped death and retreated. Accordingly, *Ras Wolde Silassie* confronted *Ras Gebre Meskel* and defeated him. Finally, he became the sole governor of Tigray, and *Ras Ali* secured his suzerainty in Tigray³⁵.

The successor of *Ras Ali* was his own son *Ras Aligaz*. We cannot see clear confrontation between the lords of Tigray and *Ras Aligaz* from the available sources. What we can see from the sources is only the refusal of *Abuna Yosab* and *Ichiegie Wolde Iyesus* to give recognition for *Ras Aligaz* as *inderasie* under the pretext that “they would not submit to the Galla”. As a result, he had battle with them in which they were defeated. *Ras Aligaz* also had strong problem of power competition with his Yejju relatives and with *Ras Asrat* and *Ras Wolde Gebriel* of Lasta³⁶ who interrupted the Yejju Dynasty for six years (1794-1800) after the death of *Aligaz* of Yejju³⁷.

The death of the Lasta brothers resulted in power vacuum at the position of *inderasie*. Then, *Gugsa* came to the position by the help of his brother, *Alula*; “አሉላም ጉግሳን አለጢ ባልጋጢ አንተ ተቀመጥ.... ጉግሳም ማን ሰጠን ብለን ቢለጢ:: አሉላም መለሰ ረቢ ሰጠን ብለን ብሎ::”; “Alula said to *Gugsa* ‘sit on the throne!’ *Gugsa* replied, ‘Who gave us?’ *Alula* said, ‘God gave us!’”. So, the second Yejju ruler who had long dealt with Tigray was *Ras Gugsa* (1800-1826). He had hard times with *Ras Wolde Silassie* throughout his period of rule. The sources from the Tigrian side presumed that *Ras Wolde Silassie* did not accept the suzerainty of *Ras Gugsa* directly³⁸. Of course, they did not have direct confrontational battles with each other; rather they were using a third party. *Ras Gugsa* instigated different opponents of *Ras Wolde Silassie* so that the latter could not have time to strengthen his force even if he had access to modern European weapons in comparison to other provincial lords because of his proximity to the outlet³⁹.

As usual, *Ras Gugsa* enthroned his ceremonial king *Ase Eguale Tsiyon* immediately after he came to the position of *inderasie*. Then, the new king became focus of attention for both *Ras Gugsa* and *Ras Wolde Silassie*. *Ras Wolde Silassie*, even if he was an old man, requested for

³⁴ *Ibid*; Guluma Gamada, “The Glory and the price of serving Empire: The Oromo Elite and the Ethiopian State, c. 1600-1900” in *The Journal of Oromo Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 1, August, 2014, pp.27-53.

³⁵ Tabor Wami, pp. 330-332.

³⁶ *Ibid*.

³⁷ Tabor Wami, pp. 323-325.

³⁸ Berhanu Belachew, pp, 39, 43-45.

³⁹ Tekle Tsadik, *Ke Atse Libne Dingil Iske Atse Tewodros*, pp. 302-305.

the hands of the daughter of the king and married her. On the other hand, *Ras Gugsu* “forced” the king to marry *Gugsu’s* sister, *Wolete Iyesus* and the king, *Ase Eguale Tsiyon*, married her. As a result, the king stretched between his son-in-law and his brother-in-law. Still, *Ras Wolde Silassie* could not be confident enough on this alliance that he was secured from the attack of *Ras Gugsu* as long as he did not accept the latter’s suzerainty. Then, he allied with *Ras Gebre* of *Simien* against *Ras Gugsu*⁴⁰.

In the middle of this, *Ras Gugsu* confiscated 500 ounce of gold from the then old *abun* who stored such amount of gold for a gift to the government of Egypt to bring an *abun* that would take the position of church leadership after the former’s death. *Ras Gugsu* took the gold justifying that how such amount of gold was going to be given to a foreign government from his country. *Ras Gugsu* was accused by his northern opponents, *Ras Wolde Silassie* and *Ras Gbrie*, who tried to mobilize the Christian population against him under the pretext that he is a Muslim Oromoo and working against the church so that the church could not get its *abun*. At this moment, *Ras Gugsu* became wise and gave back the gold, plus compensations to avert the coming challenges⁴¹.

After this incident, he was working to separate their alliance. Then, he was instigating internal rivals for power in Tigray and the Raya Oromoo persuading that “he is their brother” against *Ras Wolde Silassie*. Thus, he could divert the attention of *Ras Wolde Silassie* from the alliance with *Ras Gebre*. Then, *Ras Gugsu* was going to confront *Ras Gebre* alone in the mid of rainy season when *Ras Wolde Silassie* could not cross to *Simien* for support. Unfortunately for *Gugsu*, *Ras Gebre* disbanded his army and retreated to *Amba Gishien*. While *Ras Gugsu* was waiting for *Ras Gebre* to descend from the *amba*, the rainy season passed and *Ras Wolde Silassie* became ready to support the latter. Now, *Ras Gugsu* could not be confident enough to confront the allied forces of the two, and went back to *Begemidir*. He continued urging the Raya and other opponents against *Ras Wolde Silassie* particularly, when the latter left his territory for *Simien*. However, he did not support both opponents of *Ras Wolde Silassie* up on their confrontation. As a result, the internal opponents and the Rayas begged for mercy and seem reconciled with *Ras Wolde Silassie*. But, after a while, they set the camp on fire including the home of *Ras Wolde Silassie* in Tigray. Anyways, after a certain period of time, *Ras Wolde Silassie* died naturally and *Ras Gebre* was confined to his own territory. By then, *Ras Gugsu* secured his suzerainty in Tigray and *Simen*⁴².

The same struggle continued between the *Yejju* and lords of Tigray and *Simen* after the death of *Ras Gugsu* in 1826. However, his successor and son *Ras Yimam* was not as wise as *Ras Gugsu*. He rushed and made battles with these lords of Tigray and *Simien*, but failed to defeat them. Particularly, the son and successor of *Ras Gebre*, *Dejach Haile Mariam* of *Simien* claimed that he was an *inderasie* of *Ase Be’idemariam*. But *Ras Yimam* confronted and defeated him at *Waleb* and *Gonder*. After a year, *Dejach Haile Mariam* died and his son and successor *Dejach Wubie* also refused the suzerainty of *Ras Yimam*. They made a battle at

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Tabor Wami, p.334.

⁴² Tekle Tsadik, *Ke Atse Libne Dingil Iske Atse Tewodros*, pp.304-305.

Wegera and *Dejach* Wubie was defeated and returned to Simien. Thus, Ras Yimam became his suzerain⁴³.

After the death of *Ras* Yimam, only after two years in office, *Ras* Mariyie, his brother succeeded him. *Dejach* Wubie of Simen accepted the suzerainty of *Ras* Mariyie after his own defeat and the death of his ally *Dejach* Matentu at Inchet Kab. But *Dejach* Sabagadis of Agamie-Tigray refused the suzerainty of *Ras* Mariyie and prepared for battle. Here, *Dejach* Wubie allied with *Ras* Mariyie getting a promise for governorship of both Simien and Tigray, after defeating Sabagadis, from *Ras* Mariyie. Finally, they fought at May Islamay in which both *Ras* Mariyie and *Dejach* Sabagadis were killed⁴⁴. It seems that the battle gave safe position for *Dejach* Wubie who returned home with glorious victory and began to govern both Simien and Tigray as far as Hamasien. *Ras* Mariyie's brother Dori, who was in the support of the former in the war, managed to settle the disorder and secured Gonder. Immediately, he became *inderasie* with the title of *ras*. He also recognized *Dejach* Wubie as the governor of Simien and Tigray and in return secured his suzerainty. Surprisingly, his period of rule was only for three months, after which he died in a natural cause⁴⁵.

Ras Dori was succeeded by *Ras* Ali II (Ali Alula), another son of *Ras* Gugsu who died before his father⁴⁶. A challenge to *Ras* Ali Alula from Simen-Tigray was *Dejach* Wubie himself who was planning to refuse the suzerainty of the former, and struggled to take the position. At first, *Dejach* Wubie did not refuse the suzerainty of *Ras* Ali. He was paying annual tribute. They also made marriage alliance and *Ras* Ali married Hirut, the daughter of *Dejach* Wubie⁴⁷. But still, *Dejach* Wubie was working against *Ras* Ali. Particularly, he tried to attract *Dejach* Goshu of Damot-Gojjam and ceremonial king Yohannis III by then the husband of *Etege* Menen, the mother of *Ras* Ali. *Dejach* Goshu was promised Hirut Wubie as a wife in case they could defeat *Ras* Ali. Conversely, *Ras* Ali instigated the brother of *Dejach* Wubie, *Dejach* Merso, against Wubie⁴⁸.

By that time, *Dejach* Wubie was confident and was proud of the large number of army he mobilized from his vast territory. Moreover, he had amassed much more weapons from abroad because of his access to the outlet or the then colony of Ottoman Empire. He was also successful in bringing a patriarch *Abuna* Salama II from Egypt for his possible coronation ceremony. Moreover, he built a beautiful church at Deresgie, Mariyam, designed by a foreigner Schimper Wilhelm for the ceremony⁴⁹.

⁴³ Tabor Wami, p.336-337; Tekle Tsadik, *Ke Atse Libne Dingil Iske Atse Tewodros*, pp. 313-314.

⁴⁴ Tekle Tsadik, *Ke Atse Libne Dingil Iske Atse Tewodros*, pp. 314-319.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.320.

⁴⁶ Tesfaye Akalu, *Ate Tewodros, Be Sositu qedemt Tsehaft: Be debtera Zeneb Itiyopiyawi, Be Aleqa Woldemariam ze Mehuy, Baletaweq Tsehafi* (Addis Ababa:Far East Trading PLC, 2004),p. 39; Donald Crummey, "Family and Property amongst the Amhara Nobility" in *The Journal of African History*, Vol.24.No. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 213, 219; Mordechai Abir, *Ethiopia: The Era of The Princes, The Challenges of Islam and Re-unification of the Christian Empire, 1769-1855* (London: Longmans,Green and Co Ltd, 1968), p. 37.

⁴⁷Tabor Wami, p. 342, 345.

⁴⁸ Tekle Tsadik Mekuriya, *Ke Atse Libne Dingil Iske Atse Tewodros*, pp. 342-347.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

All these activities were not out of the knowledge of *Ras Ali*, but he did not react directly but waited for *Dejach Wubie* to wage the war. After a while, as already expected, *Dejach Wubie* refused to pay the annual tribute and the suzerainty of *Ras Ali*. He then rushed to Debre Tabor with large army and the patriarch for the final battle. *Ras Ali* also mobilized his army and got ready for the same purpose. On the incident, the patriarch was excommunicating the army and the people saying, “I excommunicate those who ally with *Ras Ali* and fight *Dejach Wubie!*”⁵⁰. However, the army of *Ras Ali* did not worry about the excommunication of the patriarch. At the climax of the fighting both *Ras Ali* and *Dejach Wubie*, retreated from the war front before knowing their final fate in the war. For a moment, the forces of *Dejach Wubie* seemed victorious and occupied the town of Debre Tabor and the court of *Ras Ali*. However, *Dejach Wubie* was captured suddenly by a certain band of *Ras Ali*’s army under the command of a man called *Aligaz*⁵¹. Consequently, *Ras Ali*’s army was victorious and *Dejach Wubie* became prisoner of war and *Dejach Goshu* retreated to Gojjam. Of course, he was in Debre Tabor during the brief days of *Dejach Wubie*’s victory and it is said that he met *Hirut Wubie* during this time assuming that *Ras Ali* was defeated and she was to become his wife⁵². However, after *Ras Ali* came back and secured his town and court, he made peace with all of his opponents, *Dejach Wubie* and his allies. Then, *Dejach Wubie* was released and returned to his previous position accepting the suzerainty of *Ras Ali*, but leaving the patriarch behind for the latter. Then, he became one of *Ras Ali*’s vassals until the rise of Emperor *Tewodros II*. The ceremonial king *Yohannis III* was also brought back to his position⁵³.

The second provincial lords who tried to refuse the suzerainty of *Yejju inderasies* throughout the period of the dynasty, but without success, were those of Damot-Gojjam. They were Oromoo like that of the *Yejju*, but were Christianized and fully converted to the Amhara identity. So, their identity was not questioned unlike that of the *Yejju* rulers who were considered as Oromoo and Muslims⁵⁴. Regarding, their relations with the *Yejju inderasies*, the sources do not indicate the position of earlier lords, like *Ras Hailu I* and his son *Ras Merid*. What we know from the sources is that *Ras Merid* was active participant in the conflict between the two *indersasies*, *Ras Asrat* and *Ras Wolde Gebriel*. *Ras Asrat* had the collaboration of lords of Tigray, Simien and Gojjam, whereas *Ras Wolde Gebriel* had the collaboration of *Gugsa*, the future *inderasie*. Finally, *Ras Asrat* and *Ras Merid* were killed whereas *Ras Gebrie* and *Ras Wolde Gebriel* retreated⁵⁵. Then, *Gugsa* came to the position of *inderasie*.

Now a lord from Damot that did not recognize the suzerainty of *Ras Gugsa* was *Dejach Zewde* who had also battles horizontally with *Dejach Gualu* the son and successor of *Ras Merid*. Because of this horizontal conflict between *Dejach Zewde* and *Dejach Gualu*, the latter became loyal to *Ras Gugsa* so that he could withstand the attack of *Zewde*. In fact, his

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p. 344; Birru Tsegaye, p. 330.

⁵¹ Birru Tsegaye, p. 330.

⁵² Tekle tsadik Mekuriya, *Ke Atse Libne Dingil Iske Atse Tewodros*, p. 345.

⁵³ Birru Tsegaye, p.330.

⁵⁴ Shiferaw Bekele, “Reflections on the Power elites ...”, p.166.

⁵⁵ Tekle Tsadik, *Ke Atse Libne Dingil Iske Atse Tewodros*, pp. 302-305; Fitsum Wolde Mariyam, p. 226.

father *Ras Merid* was also an Oromoo. And that was why Gugsu declared “የሞትንም እኛ ያለንም እኛ... ያለዉ ራስ መርዕድ የጎሃሎም ኦሮሞ ነዉና”⁵⁶; “It is we who died, and it is also us who are alive

’....said since *Ras Merid* of Gojjam himself was an Oromoo”. In this multiple struggle for political power, *Dejach Gualu* also got the collaboration of *Dejach Elias* of Agewmidr. So, *Dejach Zewde* was alone and began to design a strategy on how to deal with them separately and he defeated both *Dejach Gualu* and *Dejach Elias* one after the other. Of course, he had mobilized a large number of Oromoo and Amhara armies⁵⁷.

Now, *Zewde* went for another battle with *Ras Gugsu*. However, he was defeated and captured at the war and imprisoned on an island in Lake Tana. His son *Goshu Zewde* took the position of leadership in Damot. Still, Gojjam continued its loyalty to the Yejju *inderasie* but Damot refused it under the leadership of *Dejach Goshu Zewde*. *Ras Gugsu* came to Damot supported by *Dejach Gualu* to defeat *Goshu* but *Goshu* retreated to the fort mountain of Jibela. Fortunately enough for *Goshu*, both *Dejach Gualu* and *Ras Gugsu* died after awhile. Then, he took Gojjam and began to govern both Gojjam and Damot⁵⁸.

Then, *Dejach Goshu* remained the strong opponent of the Yejju *inderasies* one after the other. For instance, he refused the suzerainty of *Ras Mariyie*. As a result, *Ras Mariyie* went for war with *Dejach Goshu* and his son *Dejach Birru* but they retreated to inaccessible mountain as usual. Then, *Ras Mariyie* appointed another lord, *Dejach Matentu* of Simen on Gojjam and returned to Gonder. Immediately, *Dejach Goshu* descended from the mountain fort and chased the appointee of *Ras Mariyie* to his locality Simien. The successor and brother of *Ras Mariyie*, *Ras Dori* also attempted to bring *Dejach Goshu* and his son *Dejach Birru* to the position of vassals but he could not because they defeated his force and forced them to turn back from Gojjam to Gonder⁵⁹.

Still, after the death of *Ras Dori*, *Ras Ali II* succeeded him. As usual, *Ras Ali* sent an order of loyalty (for his suzerainty) to *Dejach Goshu* and his son. Both of them refused the order and got prepared to confront him. Then, *Ras Ali* sent his three vassals (*Dejach Seyum* from Begemidr, *Dejach Adoyie Babbu* and *Dejach Meshesha Babbu* from Yejju) to Gojjam for the fighting. Unfortunately, they were defeated and killed by the force of *Dejach Goshu* and his son⁶⁰. Now *Ras Ali* approached them for reconciliation. He made marriage alliance, gave his daughter, *Yewubdar*, for the son of *Dejach Goshu*, *Dejach Birru*⁶¹. And, *Ras Ali* became successful in breaking the collaboration between *Dejach Goshu* and his son *Dejach Birru*⁶². The reason for disagreement between *Dejach Goshu* and his son *Dejach Birru* was on the nature of their relation with *Ras Ali*. *Dejach Birru* was not ready for the reconciliation with *Ras Ali*, his father-in-law but *Dejach Goshu* recognized the suzerainty of the *Ras*. Finally, the

⁵⁶ Fitsum Wolde Mariyam, p. 227

⁵⁷ Tekle Tsadik, *Ke Atse Libne Dingil Iske Atse Tewodros*, pp. 307-309.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 310-311.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 314-317.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 330-332.

⁶¹ Genet Ayele (trans.), p.

⁶² Tabor Wami, p.342.

father and the son went for battle in which the son was victorious⁶³. Now, *Ras* Ali summoned both of them to his court for punishment. *Dejach* Goshu accepted the call and appeared in the court of *Ras* Ali but *Dejach* Birru refused. After a brief imprisonment, *Dejach* Goshu was reappointed as governor of Damot and his son Tessema was appointed as governor of Agewmidr; and pay their loyalty to *Ras* Ali until the rise of Emperor Tewodros II. But *Dejach* Birru remained rebel to the time of Tewodros⁶⁴.

Generally, the major position that was the bone of contention between the rivals was not the position of emperorship; rather it was the position of *inderasie* where the actual political power was located. This was well understood and explained by TekleTsadik Mekuriya as “... በአሁኑ ጊዜ ያለዉ ትንንቅ ለንጉሠ ነገሥትነት በመሆን ፈንታ ስልጣን ያለበትን የእንደራሴነቱን ስፍራ ለማግኘት ብቻ ሆነ።”⁶⁵. “Now the struggle was instead of for the emperorship, it was for the *inderasie* where the real political power was.” This was one of the genuine analyses contrary to what the professional historians have been teaching to their students indicating that the rivals were not struggling for the position of emperorship since they were not from the Solomonic blood line. However, the actual reason behind was that they were struggling for the position where the real political power was located. Anyways, these were the *inderasies* during the period of Yejju Dynasty (1786-1853), with brief interruption for about six years (1794-1800) by the Lasta brothers: *Ras* Ali I (1777-1789), *Ras* Aligaz (1789-1794), *Ras* Asrat and *Ras* Wolde Gebriel from Lasta (1794-1800), *Ras* Gugsa (1800-1826), *Ras* Yimam (1826-1828), *Ras* Mariyie (1828-1831), *Ras* Dori (1831) and *Ras* Ali II (1832-1853)⁶⁶.

The other related manifestation of the Yejju Dynasty was that the politico-military title “*Ras*” was not bestowed on anyone except the *inderasies* themselves; i.e, an indication of their suzerainty. The earlier lords with the title of *ras* from Tigray, Simen, Damot and Gojjam, were given the title before the rise of the Yejju⁶⁷. After their death, none of their successors were given a title above a *dejzmach*.

The Nature of Political Administration

One of the major characteristics of the social and political systems of the Yejju Dynasty was the power continuity of the preceding systems both in the court of Debre Tabor and in each region of the kingdom. Traditional royal houses in each region of the kingdom that were founded in the early 18th century continued within the same family to the 19th even 20th century⁶⁸. If it were the period of disorder and anarchy, they would have been an interruption and the position would have been overtaken by new classes. The anarchy happened when Emperor Tewodros attempted to interrupt that position in the middle of the 19th century. The nature of political administration throughout this period of Yejju dynasty was a kind of center-periphery relations as it was common during the tenure of other dynasties. The Yejju

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Tekle Tsadik, *Ke Atse Libne Dingil Iske Atse Tewodros*, p.334.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 297.

⁶⁶ Tabor Wami, p. 325.

⁶⁷ Shiferaw Bekele, “Refelections...”, 1990, pp. 157-179.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

inderasies were suzerains from the center and the provincial lords outside Begemidr were vassals⁶⁹.

The other important characteristics of the Yejju political administration was that it did away with the absolute power of the emperors and the continuous wars for the position of emperorship or succession disputes. This was because the ceremonial emperors during this time were handpicked of the *inderasies* and had no political power to wage wars or create disputes. In fact, it also resulted in another form of rivalry for political power as it is mentioned above.

It can also be understood that throughout all their wars, the Yejjus were not aggressive against their war captives or opponents in comparison to their predecessors, contemporaries or successors. After a showdown and achieving victory, the Yejjus let free and re-appointed their opponents through reconciliation instead of brutal killings or imprisonment. *Dejach* Wubie described one of such acts as “ሲቻለዉ ማሪ ዓሊና ፈጣሪ”⁷⁰; “Ali and God are merciful [although they could kill]” for the mercy he got from *Ras* Ali II; contrary to what was common during the time of *Ras Betwoded* Sehul Mikael and Emperor Tewodros⁷¹.

Besides this, they did not rush to kill their war captives except in the case of *Dejach* Sabagadis who was killed after the death of his Yejju opponent, killed by the son of Sabagadis, Hagos⁷². They also did not rush to war for every disagreement before attempting other peaceful means. They attempted to understand the actual power of their opponents. The case in point was the reign of *Ras* Gugsa and that of *Ras* Ali II. They failed to analyse such issue only in their confrontation with Kassa Hailu, the later Emperor Tewodros II who was successful in defeating the vassals of *Ras* Ali II one after the other and finally the latter himself.

Moreover, unlike the claim of many scholars, the Yejju were strong and wise enough to collect the annual taxes and tributes in the kingdom. Let alone, those provinces in their own vicinity, they managed to collect taxes and tributes from Tigray which was strong rival and fought for complete autonomy⁷³. The declaration of *Ras* Gugsa about the land ownership of the kingdom was one of the manifestations of such system of administration; “if a possession is stronger than its possessor, what is the value in it? Landlords, known individuals, tenants, there is no inherited lordship. It is given to those who deserved it by God. That is given to me. I distribute land to the *mequanents*, *balabbats* and tenants by my own will. Come to me and request. I will bestow every rank.”⁷⁴,

⁶⁹ Shiferaw Bekele, “Refections...”, 1990, p. 173.

⁷⁰ Fitsum Wolde Mariyam, p. 229.

⁷¹ Birru Tsegaye, p. 324.

⁷² Tekle Tsadik, *Ke Atse Libne Dingil Iske Atse Tewodros*, p. 319.

⁷³ Tabor Wami, p. 345.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p.333.

Moreover, *Dejach* Wubie, one of the strongest lords of Simen-Tigray, was paying huge amount of taxes annually for *Ras* Ali II⁷⁵. As a result, one can safely say that the Yejju were the actual governors of the kingdom rather than puppets who were denied recognition from the provincial lords. Therefore, the inward pulling political force was strong enough to save the kingdom from disintegration. There were also social and political practices pertaining to the administration of the period that were more unifying agents than dividing one. Marriage can be a case in point. Almost all provincial lords had marriage alliance or blood relations with the *enderasies*. The one at the center himself had his wife and wives for his sons from those provinces. Particularly, those who became aggressive against the Yejju were teamed through marriage alliance⁷⁶.

The peculiar nature of the Yejju Dynasty in their administration was that it was the period in which the Muslims were not marginalized in the political affairs of the kingdom. Even, sometimes they became the main actors. As a result, the kingdom during this time was relatively free from the dominance of the church in the politics or governance system⁷⁷. Because of this, the period of the Yejju Dynasty was relatively free from the persistent wars under the cover of religion. The type of continual wars between the Highland Christian kingdom and Lowland Muslim sultanates from the last quarter of the 13th century to the first half of the 16th century were not prevailing during the period of Yejju Dynasty. Both the travelers and missionaries by then indicated that the political behavior of the Yejju in comparison to the then provincial lords as generous, kind and disciplined. One can see the description of d'Arnauld Dabbadie who described *Ras* Ali II as kind and disciplined as well as generous, and *Dejach* Wubie as arrogant and greedy. Not only *Dejach* Wubie but his predecessor, *Ras* Wolde Silassie was known for his greedy behavior according to the same historical sources⁷⁸.

Territorial Extent of the kingdom

Concerning this issue, what has been available in most of the historical literature about the period is very far from facts. The issue has been treated as if there was no central government and the country was divided among regional lords who were in constant fighting for extra territory. However, sources indicate that no territory was lost during the period of Yejju Dynasty, from what the Gonderine kings administered beginning from the 17th century⁷⁹. The only difference between the first half of the Gonderine period and that of the Yejju Dynasty in this aspect was the detachment of proper Shewa (approximately the districts of Menz, Merhabete, Moret as well as Tegulet and Bulega which were united under Negasi by the beginning of 18th century), from the subordination of Gonder in about 1730. As a result,

⁷⁵ Walter Chichele Plowden, *Travels in Abyssinia and the Galla Country with an Account of a Mission to Ras Ali 1848* (London: Longmans, Green, and co, 1868), pp. 376-398.

⁷⁶ For the detail of this analysis see Shiferaw Bekele, "Reflections on the power Elites...", pp. 162-167.

⁷⁷ Donald Crummey, "Family and property...", pp.213-215.

⁷⁸ Genet Ayele (translator), *Be Itiyopiya Kefitegna Teraroch Qoyitaye* (Addis Ababa: Graphic printers, 2009 EC), pp. 373-391 ; Berhanu Belachew (trans.), *Zemene Mesafint: Natinael Preace be Itiyopiya yenebrew Qoyita ina ye Mister Kofin Ye Gonder Gubgnit Yguzo Mastawesha* (Addis Ababa, 2009 EC), pp. 82, 83, 158,159.

⁷⁹ Tabor Wami, pp. 296-297.

Shewa became an “independent” territory governed by its own *rases* even latter *neguses* (kings) without recognizing the supremacy of Gonder. This status continued throughout the period of the Yejju Dynasty. So, all the territories which were inherited from Gonderine kings in 1780s were fully governed with their usual internal autonomy by the Yejju *inderasies*⁸⁰.

The major territories of the kingdom after the 16th century were Gonder, Begemidr, Tigray, Simen, Damot, Agewmidr, Gojjam, Dembiya, Lasta, Wollo and North Shewa⁸¹. All these were also parts of the kingdom during the period of Yejju Dynasty except Shewa. Different historical accounts put similar descriptions about the territorial extent of the kingdom during the period of Yejju Dynasty. For instance, the British traveller John Plowden listed the following regions as part of the kingdom; from Yifat to Sennar including the Aynana and Worra Himano Oromoo area, the Agew of Lasta, Dembiya, Gonder, Quara, Gojjam, Damot, Agewmidr, from Bass (Gojjam) to Hamasien⁸². For d’Arnauld Dabbadie, the territory included the following regions, Wollo, Worhimenu, Wag, Lasta, Wadla, Dalanta, Amara Saint, Begemidr, Gojjam, Damot, Agewmidr, Dembiya and Quara⁸³. Of traditional historians, *Aleqa* Taye included the following regions, Yejju, Lasta, Agew, Wadla-Delanta, Wollo, Begemidr, Simen, Gonder, Wogera, Dembiya, Agewmidr, Damot and Gojjam in his description⁸⁴. The only difference between *Aleqa* Taye and *Ato* Asmie was that Asmie⁸⁵ included Tigray otherwise both of them listed down identical regions. The lords of all these territories were paying annual tributes to the Yejju rulers in Debre Tabor and mobilized army when they were ordered to do so. Thus, if all these territories were part of the kingdom, no territories were lost during the time of the Yejju compared to that of the territories of the Gonderine period to 1780s and that of the reign of Emperor Tewodros (1855-1868).

Economy: Trade and Agriculture

The region south of the Abay became marginal to political power of Ethiopia after the end of the 16th century. Gonder and its neighbours became the center of political power beginning from the 17th century. Particularly, in the 18th and 19th centuries, the only constant agent of connection between the northern and the southern regions of the country was the long distance trade⁸⁶. There were trade routes that stretched from the southwestern region to the north and northeast regions of the country. Here, the focus of this discussion is the one that led to the north mainly, to the region that was considered to be the political heartland of the 17th century Ethiopia and the platform for the politics of the “Zemene Mesafint”. In fact, there was also a minor trace of the eastern branch of the route in Gojjam and Wollo⁸⁷. These northern trade routes passed through vast territories and arrived at the town of Gonder. From there, it led to

⁸⁰ Dechasa Abebe, “A Socio-Economic History of North Shewa, Ethiopia (1880s-1935)” Thesis, Doctor of Literature and Philosophy in History (University of South Africa, 2015), pp. 57-65.

⁸¹ Tabor Wami, p. 296.

⁸² Plowden, pp. 129-130.

⁸³ Genet Ayele (tras.), p. 44-45.

⁸⁴ *Aleqa* Taye Gebre Mariyam, *Ye Itiyopiya hizbi tarik* (Addis Ababa: Qidus Giyorgis printing press, 1958), p. 50.

⁸⁵ Fitsum Wolde Mariyam, p. 227.

⁸⁶ Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia: 1855-1974* (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 1991), pp. 21-24.

⁸⁷ Abir, p. 51.

two directions. One of the two routes led to Northwest via Metema to the Sudan and the second route led to the north via Adwa to the Red Sea⁸⁸.

So, the period of the Yejju Dynasty was not the time in which the trade activity was deteriorated, agriculture was stagnated or arts were withered away. Rather it was a period in which cross-border trade was expanded or prospered. Abir discussed extensively about both cross-border trade and local markets. Of course, he spent much of his time discussing about slave trade. European travellers and missionaries' accounts tell us that long distance trade activities were carried out in large magnitude. They also listed down not only the types of trade items but also a number of trade terminals and taxation posts across the routes⁸⁹.

Here, one important question has to be asked: how could the long distance and irregular geographical setting and lands of multiple culture and languages be crossed by merchants if there was the prevalence of the so-called total political anarchy. The trade activities need a stable political system to transport such varieties of trade items and amount of human merchandise from the southern half of the present day Ethiopia to the north since all the routes passed through the domain of the kingdom. Moreover, a number of markets were located within the kingdom that needed also relative peace.

Of course, besides, the multiplicity of taxation posts established by local lords within their territory, the presence of bandits hiding themselves in irregular river valleys along the route was a big challenge for the merchants. In fact, the merchants had different protections from the lords along the routes for whom they had paid taxes. Most probably, that was why the declaration after the coming to power of every local lord or the *inderasie* who claim that “they are patrons or protectors of merchants” contains “ሰራተኞች ስሩ ፣ ነጋዴዎች ነግዱ...”⁹⁰; “[you] the workers work, the merchants trade”.

The Yejju Dynasty was the period in which not only trade but also other economic activities were in a better situation in relative terms. Donald Crummey explained that it was a period in which agricultural products including honey wax and cereals were produced in large amount. He has extensively gone through the travellers accounts of the early and mid 19th century as his sources for this purpose. Unlike Abir who claimed that all the exported items were from the southern regions of the country, Crummey listed down a number of exported agricultural products from the Central Christian highland kingdom of Ethiopia. Moreover, the fertility of the soil, the ratio of productivity per hectare and other related issues about the agricultural practices throughout the kingdom were described by the European travellers. Depending on their descriptions one can argue that all those items for export, items for local consumption and the level of productivity could not be achieved in the situation of total political instability.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Plowden, p. ; Genet Ayele, pp. 113, 116, 119, 175; Berhanu Belachew , pp. 125, 138-141 ; Abir, pp. 51-60.

⁹⁰ Tabor Wami, p. 336.

So, it can be deduced that the agricultural activities were even in better situations than the decades before and after the period of Yejju Dynasty⁹¹.

Foreign Relations

The presence of numerous European travellers and missionaries in the country was another possible indication that there was a relative peace and security rather than total anarchy during the period under discussion. If there was threat of peace and security like for instance during the period of closed-door policy of the Gonderine kings and the later policy of Emperor Tewodros, there could not be such numerous foreigners in Ethiopia. The foreign relations of Ethiopia during this period were predominated by the British and the French because of the then global reality⁹². Portuguese and Spaniards were excelled. Germany and Italy did not emerge as nation states and were on the process of national unification. That was why we have a number of foreigners from these two European countries. That does not mean other Europeans were totally absent in Ethiopia during those decades. The early British attempt to have economic and diplomatic relations with the kingdom was not successful because they could not bypass the Tigrian territory to Gonder under the pretext of security problem. But it seems that the Tigrian lords did not allow them to go to Gonder. That was why the relations of Valentia, Henery Salt followed by Nathanael Pearce and Coffin were limited to Tigray. Particularly, the latter two were in Tigray for years serving the lords of Tigray. Mainly Nathanael Pearce was with *Ras Wolde Silassie* for years and left after the death of the latter. Similarly, Coffin was also there for long and he was with *Dejach Sabagadis* after the death of *Ras Wolde Silassie*⁹³.

It can be understood that the contact between Europe and lords and kings in Ethiopia would result in the strength of the latter because it created access to modern weapons as part of international trade and enabled him to defeat his possible rivals. Probably, this idea was in the minds of the Tigrian lords. And that was why they prohibited the Europeans from penetrating into the interior of the kingdom. Once the Europeans crossed the territory of Tigray, they did not face significant security problems unlike it was presumed. They could move and explore almost many areas of the kingdom⁹⁴. If it were in a sort of total anarchy as it has been described in a number of literatures, they could not have moved from one area to the other within the entire kingdom.

The travellers and missionaries' books and memoirs are not predominated by descriptions of wars and conflicts rather they were filled with the descriptions of how they were provided with different types of provisions for themselves and their animals. The situation in the kingdom enabled them even, to the extent of compromising with the peasants about the quality of the provisions (*metin*) they and their animals were provided with. They also

⁹¹ Donald Crummey, "Ethiopian Plow Agriculture in the Nineteenth Century" in *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol.16 (Addis Ababa: Institute of Ethiopian Studies, July 1983), pp. 1-23; Plowden, ; Genet Ayele, ; berhanu Belachew, ;Tabor Wami, p.351.

⁹² Barbara in den Bosch, "Anglo-Ethiopian relations: 1840-1868" M.A Thesis in History (University of Nebraska, December 1979), pp.30-53.

⁹³ Berhanu Belachew, *Zemene Mesafint*, pp. 10-15.

⁹⁴ Genet Ayele, Pp.112, 118, 146-177.

described to what extent the general public were peaceful and needed different medical treatment from those travellers and missionaries. Some of the travellers and missionaries moved even to the territory outside the domain of the kingdom by then. Several French citizens moved to Gonder, Gojjam and to Shewa or Enaria and made a number of geographical and other related studies. They narrated about the resources, peoples' life style and other detailed issues instead of total lawlessness. Such descriptions came after Tewodros became an emperor. The threat to the lives of the foreigners began to appear during his reign. They described that the major obstacles to trade or exploit the products of this part of Ethiopia was the geographical set up, absence of rivers conducive for transport and the blockade of the outlets in all directions by the Ottoman Turkish. Still, some of the travellers and the missionaries were expelled from the kingdom not because of the wars but because of religious issue that they were preaching their own version of Christianity which disappointed the clergy of the kingdom⁹⁵.

The British made a successful official diplomatic relations with the last Yejju *indersasie Ras Ali II* by means of Plowden. By the way, the descriptions of Plowden about the kingdom had stories of wars. He attempted to emphasize his and John Bell's role in those wars particularly in their service to *Ras Ali*. While explaining the poverty of the country, Plowden underlined that the poverty was not because of lack of resources but because of the prevalence of such wars. However, all the European accounts about Ethiopia during the period did not describe why some Europeans stayed in Ethiopia for long even adapting the customs of the country and marrying Ethiopian women if the country was in Hobbesian state of nature⁹⁶.

The Socio-cultural Systems

The Yejju Dynasty was a period of Oromoo government in somewhat a form of limited monarchy in the present context of the concept⁹⁷. The rank and file in the army of the Yejjus at Debre Tabor were Afan Oromoo speakers and affiliated to the religious fathers of the Muslims Oromoo of Wollo. The Yejju were dependent on those Muslim kinsmen for counselling purposes⁹⁸. Unlike what some professionals say⁹⁹, the sources do not indicate that Christology was the issue of controversy or reason for conflicts for them. Probably, they gave priority to national issues; their nature of relationship with the *abun* was also not strong¹⁰⁰.

So, the strong abusive historical interpretation about the time was to persuade that the Oromoo and non-Christian peoples of Ethiopia were obstacles to the unity and social harmony of the country. Most of the modern historians were giving emphasis for the divisive political and social nature of the system to justify this notion. Contrary to this, there were a number of unifying agents in the political and social systems of the period. One of them was marriage. The marriage interrelationship among regions and ethnic groups was very strong through the

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, pp, 373- 416.

⁹⁶ Plowden, pp. 38-51.

⁹⁷ Shiferaw Bekele, "the state in the Zamana Masafent (1876-1853):" pp. 49-53.

⁹⁸ Genet Ayele (trans.), pp. 130-131.

⁹⁹ Bahru, p. 14.

¹⁰⁰ Tabor Wami, p. 334.

agency of three social classes of the society; the elites, the clergy and the army¹⁰¹. The peasants (*balagers*) who were the over whelming member of the society were relatively static in their geographical settlement. The interrelationship among the *balagers* of different region was very minimal.

The marriage alliance was the basic means of interrelationship for the elites of the national court and regional lords. It played a very important role in a national integration. Most of the elites either in the central palace or in the provinces were products of such marriage alliance and each was kinsmen or relatives of one another. Of course, what is common in the literature is their consistent rivalry for power. The funeral song “የገደለው ባልሽ የሞተው ወንድምሽ፣ ሀዘንሽ ቅጥ አጣ ከቤትሽ አልወጣ፡፡”፣ “the murderer is your husband, the murdered is your brother. Your sorrow is endless, since it is not out of your home” was not only for the marriage alliance and its outcome for a single family but also for a number of elites faced such problems because of the interrelationship¹⁰². From the very beginning, it was such marriage alliance that brought the Oromoo to the national palace and it was not interrupted during the period of their dynasty rather it was strengthened. A given ruler from the national court was the kinsmen of all the elites in Tigray, Begemidr, Gojjam and Wollo¹⁰³.

The clergy were also one agent of interrelationship during the period just like that of the earlier or later period. They were moving from one region to the other where best teachers and church scholars were available to attend different levels of education. Similarly, they move from one region to the other where they could be paid better. As a result, they consider each province as their own “country”¹⁰⁴. The governing system of the Yejju family did not interrupt such practice.

A member of the army also moved from one region to the other to be employed where one could get better master. A man from Gojjam can be employed in the court of Gonder or the Tigrian gun bearers were moving from region to region and employed where they could enjoy better life¹⁰⁵. That was why the early Gonderine kings had a number of Oromoo army regiments and even later Menlik II had a military regiment known as Gonderie in the last quarter of the 19th century. The other aspect of the army’s life was their movement from one region to the other for battles. In fact, the military arrangement of the period was a bit modified in comparison to the preceding period that strengthened the centrifugal force or makes it real decentralization in the modern sense of the term. During the preceding period it was challenging to mobilize army for protest against the Emperor for a regional lord, because the soldiers may hesitate that in case they were defeated they will lose everything but could appeal to the king in case there happen the punishment of regional lords because of their refusal to fight against the king; i.e all the army in general throughout the country were indirectly under the command of a king, who was a sovereign. This was because it was only

¹⁰¹ Shiferaw Bekele, “Reflections....”, pp. 162-167.

¹⁰² Tekle Tsadik Mekuriya, *Atse Yohannis ina Ye Itiyopiya Andinet* (Addis Ababa:Kuraz PUBLISHING Agency, 1982 EC), pp. 27-29.

¹⁰³ Shiferaw Bekele, “ Relections....”, pp. 162-167.

¹⁰⁴ Mengistu Lemma, *Meshafe Tizita ze Aleqa Lemma Wolde Tarik* (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2003), pp. 165-185.

¹⁰⁵ Shiferaw Bekele, “Relections....”, pp. 162-167.

the Emperor that could grant land for them for their services¹⁰⁶. But now the *inderasie* or regional lords can do that. The decree of *Ras* Gugsä mentioned above is a case in point.

In general, most of the clergy and the army got their marriage partner from their area of destination not from areas of their origin by the agency of their masters or teachers. Here, the intention of the present discussion is not only indicating that the Yejju's continuing the previous national administration and social interaction in a similar way but also to indicate that all the Oromoo of the Nile basin were part of all these social interminglings during the period under discussion.

The fall of Yejju Dynasty

The Yejjus could not establish sustainable Oromoo hegemony to the extent of their active role in the political history of Ethiopia. One of the reasons for that was the negative reaction of the Amhara and Tigrian nobility as well as the clergy against their rising to the political power by referring to their Oromoo and Muslim background. Particularly, the notion that the continuous territorial expansion of the Oromoo took place at the expense of the others was used as propaganda by the Amhara and Tigrian nobility and clergy¹⁰⁷. Even if it was a gradual process, the fall of the Yejju Dynasty was resulted because of the rise of Emperor Tewodros II. Before the actual rise of Tewodros, there were multiple rivals of the Yejju *inderasies* and waiting for the right time to dismiss them from their position. Thus, the initial period of the rise of Tewodros (Kassa) was considered as the golden opportunity for them to do away with the Yejju. Unfortunately, all of the rivals were dismissed by Tewodros himself one after the other. None of them allied to confront him together, either because of the reasons mentioned above or because of their feeling about him. They looked down on him and considered that it was not up to their status to confront a village bandit in an open battlefield. In fact, Menen the mother of *Ras* Ali II attempted to team this newly emerged aspirant as a loyal servant by giving him the hands of her granddaughter as a wife. Unfortunately, that political strategy did not work because of the further ambitions of Kassa¹⁰⁸. Primarily, the prevailing internal and external contexts pushed Kassa from being loyal to the Yejju in Debre Tabor. Externally, he was inspired by the existing political situation that anyone who was capable enough to mobilize forces can come to the top of the politico-military ladder. He was also disappointed by the nature of the treatment he got in the court of Debre Tabor and wanted to upgrade his status. Internally, he had background that connected him with local lords of his birth place as well as claimed remote blood relations with the monarchs of Gonder. By the way, this attitude of Kassa about himself pushed him to develop hostility against the Yejju *inderasies*, the **ፀሮሜፀሮሞዕ**s. He was claiming that “ያባቶቼን መንግስት ለጋላ ሰጠባቸዉ።”¹⁰⁹; “[God] gave the government of my fathers to the Galla.” He knew that the Yejju were the successors of the *Quaregnoch* in the position of *inderasie* or popularity in Gonder. So, it would be reasonable to

¹⁰⁶ Ishikawa Hiroki, pp. 222-225.

¹⁰⁷ Abir, p. xxiv.

¹⁰⁸ Tekle Tsadik, *Ye Itiyopiya tarik: ke Atse Tewodros iske Qedamawi Hayile Silassie* (Addis Ababa: Berehanina Selam Printing House, 1936), PP. 1-13.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p. 27.

assume that he developed hostility against the Oromoo although he joined them through marriage.

Consequently, he left Debre Tabor for Quara as a bandit. Then, the Yejju began to send series of forces against him. First a force from Gonder was sent to capture him on *Tikimit* 14, 1839 EC (October, 1847). But he could defeat that force and captured about a hundred guns from them. This was followed by another fighting with a force of Menen from Gonder under the command of certain *Dejazmach* Wondirad. He confronted and managed to defeat his force. Thirdly, a force from Gonder, under the nominal command of Menen herself went to fight him and still he defeated the force and captured Menen herself. All these victories of Kassa on the forces of Yejju signalled the downfall of their dynasty. At that spot, *Ras Ali II* attempted reconciliation and managed to free his mother from the captivity¹¹⁰.

Then, *Dejach* Goshu of Gojjam was ordered to fight Kassa. Unlike his expectation, *Dejach* Goshu was defeated and killed by the force of Kassa. As a result, it was said that:

ሃሹ እንደ ኦርጥ። አሊ እንደ ዳዊት፤
 ከጥንት አይደለም ደብዳቤ መሞት።።
 ሐዋርያት አርምቶ ጥለውት ቢሸሹ፤
 አርብ ተሰቀለ አማኑኤል ሃሹ።።¹¹²

Goshu as Uriah, Ali as David

Wasn't it the ancient tradition to be sent and died?

The disciples Oromoo retreated, left him behind

Goshu crucified on Friday like Amanuel.

This poem indicated that *Ras Ali* was suzerain of *Dejach* Goshu and ordered him to fight against Kassa. Still, *Ras Ali II* did not confront Kassa by himself since he had suspected the position of *Dejach* Wubie in the north. After the defeat and death of *Dejach* Goshu, *Ras Ali* mobilized the army of several *dejazmaches* and sent against Kassa for confrontation on April 5, 1853. They were also defeated. Now, after all those attempts, *Ras Ali* had confronted Kassa by himself. He mobilized about hundred thousand number of army and confronted Kassa in Gojjam at Ayishal on *Senie* 23, 1845 EC (July, 1853). Unfortunately, he was defeated by the force of Kassa. Because of this victory, Kassa put the last nail on the coffin of the Yejju Dynasty¹¹³.

Generally, the down fall of the Yejju Dynasty was followed by the reconstruction of a number of abused histories about the dynasty and the personal behaviour of the rulers. However, all those abused histories were written to defame the Yejju Dynasty because of their social background. Particularly, defaming the Yejjus to praise Tewodros was common throughout the literature of modern Ethiopian history. The earliest in doing that was the chronicler of Emperor Tewodros, *Aleqa Zeneb* who wrote that Alula died in his early age because of certain

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 1-13.

¹¹¹ It is an attempt to make comparison with Biblical David and his soldier Uriah mentioned in the second book of Samuel 11:11.

¹¹² Fitsum Wolde Mariyam, p. 229.

¹¹³ Abir, pp. 138-139.

stimulant (“ኣርዝም ኣደንድን...”; “enlarge and erect tough...”) for sexual interaction¹¹⁴. Similar defamation was told against Aligaz, the successor of Ali I who was said to be wronged (had sex with) his own sister¹¹⁵. *Ras* Ali II was also labelled as a homosexual¹¹⁶. Those writers justified that Tewodros was enthroned divinely by God to punish the Yejjus and their followers because of all such evil deeds. They added that Tewodros was extremely aggressive and cruel in most of his acts still to serve that purpose¹¹⁷.

Conclusion

The period of the Yejju Dynasty was portrayed negatively in the literature of Ethiopian history. Facts were abused and descriptions about the period were extremely biased. Unlike what is common in the literature, the period was characterized by a relative political supremacy of the Oromoo in which the absolute power of the kings was limited. It was also a period in which significant continuities and some changes undertook on the nature of political practices of the preceding dynasties. Thus, a number of historical lessons can be drawn from the period. Primarily, it is possible to understand that an individual or a group from any ethnic or religious background can govern the country as long as they have the knowledge and skill to do so. Secondly, it is possible to deduce that a modern form of government identified as constitutional or limited monarchy was attempted to be practiced in Ethiopia several centuries ago.

Moreover, one can understand that the dynasty was the period in which the country was governed by individuals who were instead of being servants of an emperor but became appointees of the people. So, it was a period in which a political practice of “popular supremacy” was attempted. The other lesson that can be learnt from the period of Yejju Dynasty is the skill of compromise in a political system, how to negotiate with opponents or claimants of political power as well as how to treat war captives; “ሲቻለዉ መሃሪ ዓሊ ና ፈጣሪ”. It is also possible to understand from the period that peace and security could not be possible by force, rather by sharing political power or not by multiplying enemies rather by increasing the number of friends. The other lesson that can be drawn is that the period was the one in which religious equality prevailed in relative terms. Thus, it can be deduced that the dynasty was the period of neither Christian dominant nor Muslim dominant government. Rather individuals from both religious groups could serve in the rank and file of the politico-military system. As an extension of this, the then kings were not anointed by the Patriarch rather they were appointed by king makers who were theoretically the “representatives of the people”. So, it can be logical to say that a people’s representative can appoint the ceremonial head of the state.

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¹¹⁴ Tesfaye Akalu, p. 40.

¹¹⁵ Donald Crummey, “Family and Property...”, p. 218.

¹¹⁶ Tesfaye Akalu, p. 40.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

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