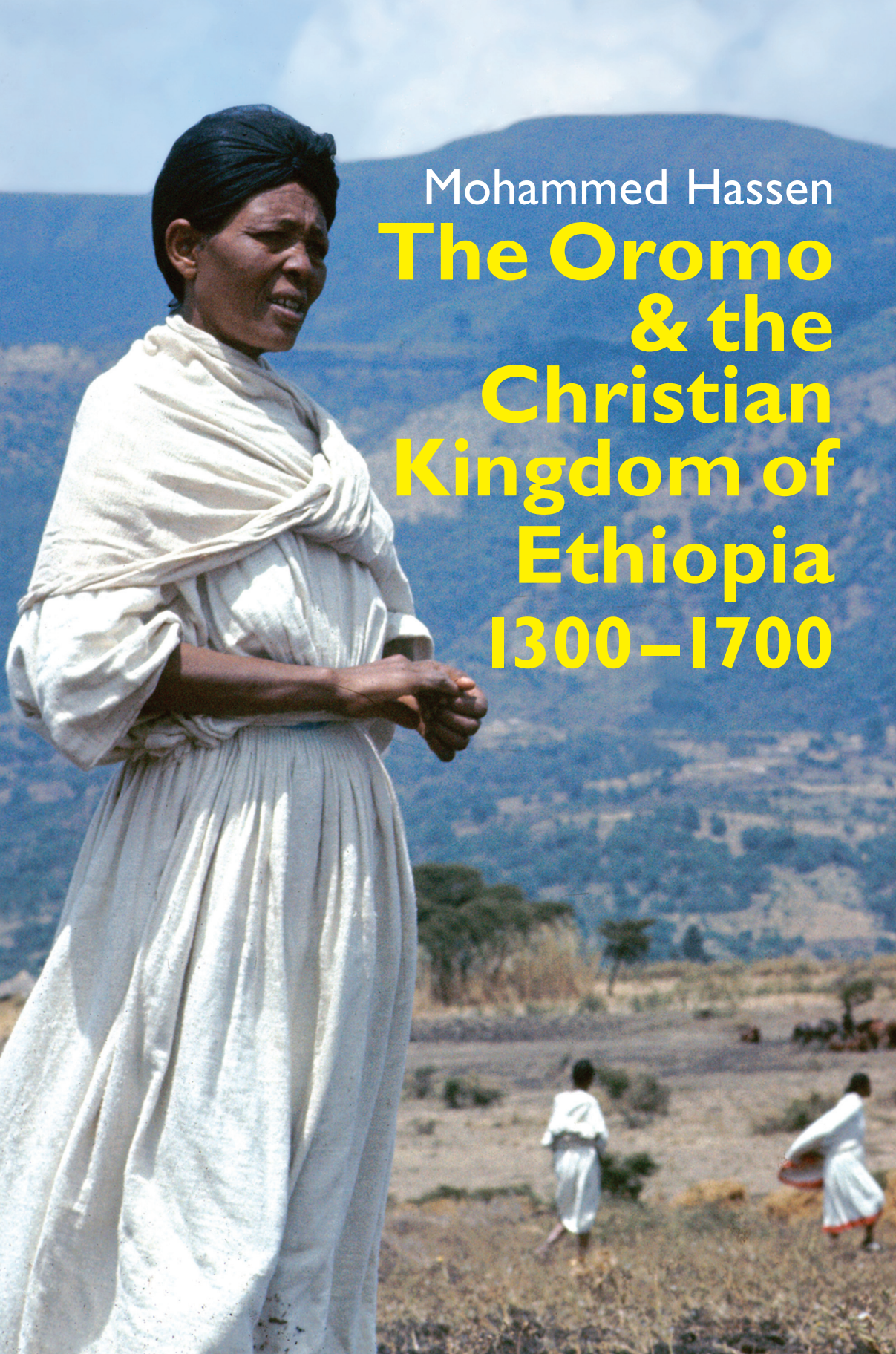

Mohammed Hassen

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Dedication

To Paul Baxter, Asmarom Legesse and Bonnie Holcomb for their commitment to Oromo studies at the time when it was actively discouraged in Ethiopia, and their contribution to its development, and to my wife, Aziza, and our sons, Birmaji and Robale.

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Preface and Acknowledgements

The Oromo and the Christian Kingdom 1300–1700 has had an unusually long gestation period. It was originally conceived as part of the Oromo democracy project, initiated by five scholars: Abas Haji Gnamo, Asmarom Legesse, Belletech Deressa, Lemmu Bassia and myself. The project expanded beyond the scope of a single edited volume. Asmarom Legesse's contribution developed into a magnificent book that, with remarkable erudition and eloquence, discusses the Oromo democratic heritage, 'a rich source of ideas that can inspire and inform constitutional makers in Africa'.[1] Belletech Deressa's exploratory essay developed into an important book on the role women played in Oromo and Ethiopian history. Belletech identifies Oromo women leaders 'who made significant contributions to the survival of the Oromo nation' as well as the survival of the imperial state.[2] My original exploratory essay on the Oromo in Ethiopian historiography developed into a book manuscript that will be published separately. *The Oromo and the Christian Kingdom, 1300–1700* is the fourth volume of the Oromo democracy project series. Its completion was hampered for years by other commitments coupled with a combination of factors beyond my control. Another volume in the Oromo democracy project series is in its final stage of completion.[3]

The single largest national group in Ethiopia, the Oromo constitute about 40 per cent of the population. Oromia, the Oromo regional state in central and southern Ethiopia, is the largest, most densely populated and richest part of Ethiopia. Oromia forms the backbone of the Ethiopian economy. More than 50 per cent of Ethiopia's export items and the Ethiopian government's annual revenue comes from Oromia. As a

[1] Asmarom Legesse, *Oromo Democracy: An Indigenous African Political System* (Trenton, NJ: The Red Sea Press, expanded edition 2006 [2000]), xiii.

[2] Belletech Deressa, *Oromtitti: The Forgotten Women in Ethiopian History* (Raleigh, NC: Ivy House, 2003), ix.

[3] The fifth edited volume in the Oromo democracy project series deals with the conquest of the Oromo by King Menelik of Shawa and later the emperor of Ethiopia (1889–1916), pending publication. Though the completion of the Oromo democracy project was delayed for a long time, the end result – the publication of five separate books – undoubtedly will add to the expansion of knowledge in the field of Oromo studies.

result, the survival of Ethiopia as a united and prosperous country will depend on integrating the history of the Oromo into Ethiopian historiography and treating the Oromo today as equal citizens of the country.

Considered as people without history, the Oromo were supposed not to have been in Ethiopia before the first half of the sixteenth century. However, this book will demonstrate the existence of a long-ignored relationship between the Christian Amhara society and the Oromo communities in and south of the region of Shawa at least since the fourteenth century. The presence of some Oromo groups within the medieval Christian kingdom is confirmed by a number of sources, including the Chronicle of Emperor Amda-Siyon (1314–44), which refers to a people in their own country, called Galla.[4] Galla was the old pejorative name for the Oromo. In the first three chapters, I will assemble evidence that reveal glimpses of the presence of Oromo groups within the medieval Christian kingdom. These sedentary Oromo groups that lived under the Christian administration were not part of the sixteenth-century pastoral Oromo population movement.

During the sixteenth century the Christian society confronted lightly armed, fast-moving and strategically sophisticated Oromo warriors. Because of the size of their population and the superiority of their weapons the Christian leaders at first did not take seriously the war against the Oromo. They were confident of conquering the Oromo as they had conquered their Muslim enemies. The Christian chroniclers, who articulated the views of the Christian leaders towards the Oromo, understood the new enemy faced by their society only through their Christian world view. Thus to the Christian chroniclers the Oromo appeared to be 'uncivilized' because they were not Christians, their society was not hierarchically organized like the Christian and Muslim societies, and they lacked the institution of monarchy. In short, the Oromo replaced the Muslims as the perceived enemy of the Christians.

The Oromo and the Christian Kingdom 1300–1700 has three major goals. The first is to establish the historical narrative by distilling evidence from royal chronicles, hagiographies, Amhara Christian written and oral traditions, local Muslim chronicles, Oromo oral traditions, anthropology, archaeology, linguistics, ethnonyms, toponyms and cultural texts. With these sources the book will explore the Oromo presence inside the borders of the medieval Christian kingdom from at least the beginning of the fourteenth century. While Christian and Muslim sources from that period mention such Oromo communities, these sources have been overlooked in Ethiopian historiography. They were de-emphasized partly because of the firmly entrenched theory claiming that the Oromo entered the medieval Christian kingdom around the middle of the sixteenth century following the disastrous jihad of Imam Ahmad (1529–43). There were two important reasons why historians did not suspect, much less discuss, the pre-sixteenth-

[4] Getatchew Haile, *The Works of Abba Bahriy and Other Documents Concerning the Oromo* (in Amharic, Avon, MN: self-published, 2002), 26.

century Oromo presence within the medieval Christian kingdom of Ethiopia. The first was the credence given to Abba Bahrey's 'Zenahu le Galla', a short manuscript written in 1593 that dates the arrival of pastoral Oromo on the border of the Christian state to the 1520s. The second was the scholarly assumption that placed the original homeland of the Oromo beyond the boundaries of modern Ethiopia, thus depicting them as 'alien invaders' entering the country as immigrants only during the first half of the sixteenth century. The representation of the Oromo as 'alien invaders' originates from confusing the territorial extent of the medieval Christian kingdom with modern-day Ethiopia. The former constituted only about one-third of the latter. In all their traditions the Oromo remember Ethiopia as their original homeland. Historical evidence confirms the validity of this widely agreed Oromo origins narrative. Beyond any doubt the Oromo did not originate from outside the boundaries of modern Ethiopia.

The second goal is to discuss the dynamics of Oromo migration within and beyond Ethiopia during the sixteenth century. Pastoral Oromo migrated from the southern to the northern regions of Ethiopia, including Gojjam, Begameder, Tigray and Wallo, all in the heartlands of the Christian kingdom. Though population movements were massive and well documented in African history, the sixteenth-century pastoral Oromo population movement had its distinct patterns both in the Horn and in Africa generally. The book will demonstrate that the basic dynamics of Ethiopian history were population movements, interactions and transformations. Sixteenth-century Oromo population movement revolutionized the contacts between the Christians and the Oromo. To a large measure, these new types of interactions were shaped by periods of long warfare interposed by times of peace between the two communities, merging their destinies and histories.

My third goal is to show that there is a general tendency in Ethiopian historiography to contextualize the study of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century pastoral Oromo population movement and settlement mainly in terms of the adverse impact on the Christian society. No study has delineated how the Oromo themselves were affected by the people they encountered, by the religions they embraced, and by the political institutions in which they actively participated. My more-inclusive narrative traces the intertwined history of the Amhara and Oromo communities in Christian society. The involvement of the Christianized Oromo in the military, political and cultural institutions of the Christian state impelled dynamic interactions between the two societies at various levels. A significant segment of the Oromo elite became defenders of the Christian state itself. During the eighteenth century, Oromo influence on the Christian kingdom was demonstrated by Christianized Oromo leaders' role in determining the royal sucession and royal policies.[5] Moreover, while the Christianized Oromo estab-

[5] For instance, Mordechai Abir, *Ethiopia: The Era of the Princes – The Challenge of Islam and the Re-Unification of the Christian Empire 1769–1855* (New York: Praeger, 1968), chapters 2, 5 and 6.

lished two regional dynasties in Gojjam, Islamized Oromo in the region of Wallo formed a number of states, two of which strongly challenged the Christian state itself.[6] In short, this book is a history of the Christian kingdom from 1300 to1700, as much as it is a history of the Oromo people in Ethiopia.

Writing a history of the interactions between the Christians and the Oromo across four centuries requires using various sources, including, but not limited to royal chronicles, hagiographies, Amhara and Oromo oral traditions, myths and legends, together with local Muslim and European missionary and travellers accounts. I have also drawn on some sections of my PhD dissertation.[7] Of the many royal chronicles, I relied heavily on the chronicles of Emperors Amda-Siyon (1314–44), Sarsa Dengel (1563–97)[8] and Susenyos (1607–32).[9] I used the Arabic, English and French versions of *Futuh Al-Habasha, the Conquest of Abyssinia*,[10] the classic book that deals with the epic drama of the jihad conducted by Imam Ahmad (1529–43). I have also used the recently translated two volumes of *Pedro Páez's History of Ethiopia, 1662*.[11] More importantly, I have made extensive use of Abba Bahrey's 1593 manuscript, *Zenahu le Galla*, relying on both versions of Huntingford's 1954 translation as well as Getatchew Haile's 2002 Amharic and English translations.[12] Abba Bahrey was a fascinating scholar of his age, and his manuscript is a major contribution to our understanding of Oromo social organization and migration and the class structure of the Christian society during the second half of the sixteenth century. As a researcher who seeks to understand the geographically intertwined existence between the Christian society and the Oromo, including the impact of the pastoral

[6] For instance, Hussein Ahmed, *Islam in Nineteenth-Century Wallo, Ethiopia: Revival, Reform and Reaction* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2001), chapters 4 and 6.

[7] Mohammed Hassen, 'The Oromo of Ethiopia, 1500–1850: With Special Emphasis on the Gibe Region' (PhD diss., University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies, 1983), chapter 1, 36–68, chapter 3, 135–75, and chapter 4.

[8] G.W.B. Huntingford, trans. and ed., 'The History of King Sarsa Dengel (Malak Sagad) 1563–1597' (unpublished manuscript, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1976).

[9] F.M.E. Pereira, *Chronica de Susenyos Rei de Ethiopia* (Lisbon: Impresa National, 1892–1900).

[10] Chihab Eddin B. Abdel Qadir, surname Arab Faqih, *Futuh Al-Habasha* (*Histoire de la conquête de l'Abyssinie XVI siècle*), trans. and ed. M.R. Basset (Paris: 1897); Sihab ad-Din Ahmad bin Abd al-Qader bin Salem bin Utman, also known as Arab Faqih, trans. Paul Lester Stenhouse, annotated Richard Pankhurst, *Futuh Al-Habasha: The Conquest of Abyssinia by* (Hollywood, CA: Tsehai, 2003); Arab Faqih, Arabic text of *Futuh Al-Habasha* (Cairo: 1974).

[11] Isabel Boavida, Hervé Pennec and Manuel João Ramos, eds, trans. Christopher J. Tribe, *Pedro Páez's History of Ethiopia, 1662*. 2 vols (Farnham: Ashgate/Hakluyt Society, 2011).

[12] Abba Bahrey, *Zenahu le Galla* 'History of the Galla', in *Some Records of Ethiopia, 1593–1646*, trans. and ed. C.F. Beckingham and G.W.B. Huntingford (London: Hakluyt Society, 1954), 111–29. I also relied heavily on Getatchew Haile, *The Works of Abba Bahriy and Other Documents Concerning the Oromo*.

Oromo population movements on the Christian kingdom as well as on the Oromo themselves up to 1700, I stand on the shoulders of Merid Wolde Aregay's meticulous scholarship aligning cultural transformations with shifting frontiers.[13]

This study is intended as a modest contribution towards the need for a paradigm shift in Ethiopian historiography, as suggested by Ayele Bekerie: 'Contrary to the popular belief that describes the Oromo as sixteenth-century immigrants and settlers in the Ethiopian highlands, the Oromo appeared to be as ancient and indigenous, just like the Amhara, the Tigreans, Agaws and the Bejas.'[14] As an integral part of the Cushitic-language-speaking family of peoples, the Oromo have been one of the original inhabitants of Ethiopia. Such a paradigm shift in Ethiopian historiography, it is hoped, will create an intellectual climate in which the young men and women of Ethiopia will be able to learn each other's authentic history, not grotesque distortions; truth, not falsehood; cultural achievements, not demeaning stereotypes; various religious traditions, not only Christianity; Cushitic-language speakers' achievements, not only those of the Semitic peoples. Such historical knowledge will enable the Oromo and other peoples of Ethiopia to be conscious of their dignity and unity in diversity, and promote respect for each other's cultural heritage and strengthen mutual understanding.[15]

Finally, if this study provokes more informed discussion about the pre-sixteenth-century Oromo presence within the medieval Christian kingdom and kindles enthusiasm for producing objective and dispassionate scholarship on the subject, its purpose of enriching and expanding the horizon of Ethiopian historiography will have been fulfilled.

It is not easy to acknowledge the full range of my indebtedness. I am grateful to my colleagues in the Department of History at Georgia State University for supporting this project, especially Professor David Sehat, for his technical assistance with the computer. I am also grateful to the chair people of the Department for supporting my scholarly endeavour. I am indebted to Dr Jill Anderson for her help with all library-related issues and much more. I am profoundly indebted to Dr Yael Fletcher for editing the manuscript with care and for her guidance.

I would like express my profound gratitude to the remarkable editing team at James Currey. I owe a huge debt of gratitude to Jaqueline Mitchell, Commissioning Editor, for her insightful comments and suggestions and for continuously encouraging me to complete the manuscript. I

[13] Merid Wolde Aregay, 'Southern Ethiopia and the Christian Kingdom, 1508–1708, With Special Reference to the Galla Migrations and Their Consequences', (PhD diss., University of London, 1971).

[14] Ayele Bekerie, 'Ethiopica: Some Historical Reflections on the Origin of the Word Ethiopia', *International Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 1, 2 (2004), 116.

[15] Mohammed Hassen, 'The Significance of Abba Bahrey in Oromo Studies: A Commentary on *The Works of Abba Bahriy and Other Documents Concerning the Oromo*', *The Journal of Oromo Studies* 14, 2 (July 2007), 153.

owe a debt of gratitude to Lynn Taylor for her gentle guidance in facilitating publication. I offer my profound gratitude to Nicholas Jewitt for his excellent copy-editing of the manuscript, graciously and patiently providing me with meticulous comments and insightful suggestions, all of which improved the quality of the manuscript in more ways than one. I am profoundly grateful to Bonnie Holcomb who sacrificed her own project to proofread the typeset manuscript at a short notice. I am honoured and touched by her generosity.

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I owe a debt of gratitude to the late Dr Paul Baxter, my mentor since 1977. His friendship and that of Pat Baxter have been the source of joy and inspiration for me for over three decades. I am deeply indebted to my departmental colleague, Professor Charles Steffen, for providing me with very helpful suggestions on the first four chapters of the manuscript. I am also deeply indebted to Professor Asmarom Legesse for his insightful comments on the exploratory essay that eventually developed into an unpublished book manuscript on the Oromo in Ethiopian historiography. I am indebted to the late Professor Merid Wolde Aregay for his excellent PhD dissertation, a path-breaking work in the field of medieval history of the Christian kingdom of Ethiopia.[16] I am also indebted to Professor Getatchew Haile, especially for his book on the works of Abba Bahrey.[17] I am grateful to my graduate student, Zachary Bates, for his generous help with index. Of the fourteen maps used in the manuscript, seven were adapted from other sources by kind permission. All efforts have been made to track copyright holders of source material and the author and publisher would be grateful of any additional information that can be provided.

I owe a profound debt of gratitude to my wife Aziza, who is my anchor and whose support and enthusiasm for my entire scholarly endeavour is the source of joy and inspiration for me. It was her love and the force of her personality that kept my focus on completing this book. Our sons, Birmaji and Robale, tirelessly encouraged me to finish this work and move onto my other long-overdue projects.

[16] Aregay, 'Southern Ethiopia and the Christian Kingdom'.
[17] Haile, *The Works of Abba Bahriy and Other Documents Concerning the Oromo.*

Oromo Glossary

Abba	father, owner of, or title of respect
Abba Bokku	father or keeper of the *bokku*, a leader of the *gada* in power
Abba Dula	father of war (i.e. commander of an Oromo army)
Abba Gada	father of the *gada* in power (i.e. a leader)
Abba Muudaa	the spiritual head of traditional Oromo religion (i.e. a holy person to whom pilgrimage is due)
Abbay	river
Angafa	first-born son
Awraja	sub-province
Ayyaanaa	a guardian angel or 'spirit double'
Bokku	wooden sceptre kept by the Abba Gada in power
Butta	a very joyous Oromo festival, celebrated by each member of a *gada* group in power by slaughtering a bull
Butta war	a war which followed a *butta* festival
Chaffee assembly	meadow assembly (the Oromo parliament)
Chibbra	traditional Oromo method of conducting warfare
Chiffra	an Amharic term for Oromo Chibbra
Dajazmach	commander of the vanguard
Dhalatta	'those who are born', i.e. those who are adopted into an Oromo clan
Gabbaro	conquered men who were required to serve
Galma	the sacred house of Abba Muudaa
Gosa	clan or descent group
Guddifacha	adoption or an adopted son
Ilma gosa	a son of a clan (i.e. one who is adopted into a clan)
Ilma Oromo	son of the Oromo, (i.e. the Oromo people)
Jila	pilgrim(s) to the Abba Muudaa
Moggaasaa	naming an individual or groups through adoption into an Oromo clan
Nagaa (*nagyaa*)	peace, moral code
Oda	the 'sacred' sycamore (tree)
Ogessa	the skilled ones

Qaalluu	a priest of traditional Oromo religion, who performed sacrifice
Tullu	hill
Wadaja	individual or group prayer
Waaqa	traditional Oromo god
Uumaa	creation
Yahabata	cavalry of *gabbaro* or conquered people

Standardization of the Spelling of Ethiopian Names

There are no standard spellings in English of Ethiopian names, nor of words in the Amharic and Oromo languages. As a result, there are variant spellings of the same name that a reader may find confusing. The following list shows the spellings which have been used in the study.

Variant spellings	**Version used**
Aba, Abbaa	Abba
Abba Bahriy	Abba Bahrey
Abba Muda, Abbaa Muuda	Abba Muudaa
Abay, Abai	Abbay
Abassa, Abessinia	Abyssinia
Amda Seyon, Amda Siyon	Amda-Siyon
Amaras	Amharas
Awsa	Awssa
Ayana, Ayaana	Ayyaanaa
Azzaj	Azaj
Azzaj Tinno	Azaj Tino
Bagemder, Begemder, Bagemdir (province)	Begameder
Barentuma, Barettuma, Barettum	Barentu
Boran, Booranna	Borana
Caffe, chafe	*Chaffee*
Dejazmach, Dedjazmatch, Djazmach	*Dajazmach*
Dembya, Dembia (province)	Dambiya
Dewaro, Doaro (province)	Dawaro
Enarya, Narea, Inarya (province)	Ennarya
Fetegar (province)	Fatagar
Gabaro	Gabbaro
Gala, Gaallaa	Galla
Gallaan	Galan
Geda	Gada
Gojam, Gozzam (province)	Gojjam
Harer, Herer	Harar

Hererge	Hararghe
Itu	Ittu
Jawe, Dawe, Jawwi	Jaawwii
Jele, Jelle	Jille
Koran, Kuran	Qur'an
Kushitic	Cushitic
Laalo, Laalloo	Lalo
Libina Dengel, Lebena Dengel	Libena Dengel
Macca, Matacha	Macha
Mada Walabu	Madda Waallaabuu
Qallu, Kallu	Qaalluu
Quereban	Qurban
Shew, Shoa, Showa (province)	Shawa
Tigre, Tigrai (province)	Tigray
Tigrean	Tigrayan
Tuloma, Tolama	Tulama
Waalagga, Wollaga, Wellaga (province)	Wallaga
Waka, Waqa	Waaqa
Walabu	Waallaabu
Warra Dhaayyee, Warr Dae, Wardai, Wardey	Warra Daya
Warra Himanu	Warra Himano
Wara Qallu	Warra Qaalluu
Wello, Wollo (province)	Wallo
Yaayyaa	Yaya

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14 Central and southern Wallo region 349

Chronology

c.1000	The archaeological work of David Phillipson suggests this as the date for the beginning of the Zagwe Dynasty in Ethiopian history
1270	The end of the Zagwe Dynasty in Ethiopian history
1270	The establishment of Shawan Amhara Dynasty
1329	The beginning of Emperor Amda-Siyon conquest of the Muslim states
1332	The completion of the conquest of all the Muslim states and their incorporation into the expanding powerful Christian empire
1441	The first report in a European source on the beginning of Oromo pressure on the southern parts of the Christian kingdom
1460	The appearance of the name of Galla River on the map made for Prince Henry the Navigator of Portugal
1490	The beginning of Amir Mahfuz' offensive against the Christian kingdom
1516	King Libna Dengel's victory over Amir Mahfuz
1522	A Major Oromo attack on the province of Bali
1529	The beginning of Imam Ahmad's destructive jihadic war
1535	Abba Bahrey is born in the province of Gamo, in the neighbourhood of the present town of Shashemene
1543	Emperor Galawedos' victory over Imam Ahmad
1559	Amir Nur's victory over Emperor Galawedos
1559	Oromo warriors' victory over Amir Nur
1559	The beginning of the balance power in favour of Oromo warriors
1572	The beginning of Emperor Sarsa Dengel's recruitment of Oromo warriors into his own army, followed by his policy of settling friendly Oromo groups among Christians both in Gojjam and Begameder
1576	Emperor Sarsa Dengel's victory over Sultan Muhammad of Harar
1579	Emperor Sarsa Dengel's victory over *Bahar Nagash* Yeshaq

1586–88	Susenyos lived in captivity among the Oromo and he becomes the first Amhara prince to be adopted by the Oromo
1593	Abba Bahrey writes his famous manuscript *Zenahu le Galla*
1603	Beginning of Emperor Za-Dengel's spirited campaign against the Oromo
1604	The death of Emperor Za-Dengel
1607	Susenyos makes himself an emperor with Oromo support and the intensifies the policy of settling friendly Oromo groups among the Christians
1622	Emperor Susenyos' official conversion to Catholicism and his attempt at imposing this on Ethiopian Orthodox Christians
1632	Emperor Fasilada's restoration of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church
1682	The beginning of Emperor Iyasu's spirited campaign against the Oromo
1706	The death of Emperor Iyasu I
1855	The beginning of Emperor Tewodros' punishing campaign in Wallo

Introduction

The history, way of life, political and religious institutions, and even the name of the Oromo is in large part ignored in Ethiopian historiography. The source of such widespread neglect is partly due to lack of accurate information from the Oromo perspective. Since the Oromo, as a preliterate people, did not write about their encounter with the Christian society, existing records reflect the views of Christian monks and court chroniclers. These perspectives presented the Oromo as enemies of the Amhara and the Christian state. The magnified enmity between the Amhara and the Oromo was compounded by religious and cultural differences, thus perpetuating the negative image of the Oromo in Ethiopian historiography. It is precisely for this reason that the scholar Richard Reid wrote:

> There can be few peoples in African history who have been as misunderstood, and indeed as misrepresented, as the Oromo – or pejoratively 'Galla' in the older literature. They have been, arguably, even more demonized by Ethiopian chroniclers of various hues and over a longer timeframe than the Somali, historically the other great rival 'bloc' confronting the Amhara in northeast Africa.[1]

European travellers and missionary accounts since the sixteenth century took on the anti-Oromo perceptions of Ethiopian Christian chroniclers. As a result, the Oromo were 'made scapegoats for much that was held to be "wrong" with highland state and society in the nineteenth century'.[2] In other words, no systematic account of the Oromo was written by a first-hand unprejudiced observer before the 1840s. Even the monk Abba Bahrey, whose manuscript of 1593 is examined in Chapter 6, was not free from prejudice in his presentation of Oromo history. Earlier accounts were most probably compiled from hearsay by individuals with little or no experience of southern Ethiopia;[3] by Portuguese missionaries[4] who knew little or nothing about the region;

[1] Richard J. Reid, *Frontiers of Violence in Northeast Africa: Genealogies of Conflict since c. 1800* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 30.
[2] Ibid., 31.
[3] See for instance, Conti-Rossini, 'Lauto Biografia de Pawlos Monaco Abissina del Secola XVI', Rendiconti della Reule Accademia dei Lincei 27 (1918), 285–6.
[4] See for instance, R.S. Whiteway, trans. and ed., *The Portuguese Expedition*

by royal chroniclers who exaggerated Christian victories against the Oromo; or by Christian monks who connected the sixteenth-century pastoral Oromo population movement with the contemporaneous religious wars that nearly destroyed the medieval Christian kingdom of Ethiopia. In other words, earlier accounts about the Oromo were compiled by individuals who did not know the Oromo language, who were not familiar with Oromo history, and who had no experience of the Oromo way of life, political processes, or religious institutions. As with the eighteenth-[5] and nineteenth-century[6] European travellers, these accounts were not only fragmentary but also biased and, as a consequence, the human qualities of the Oromo and their egalitarian culture were ignored.

Since the Oromo were not literate, what was written about them was mainly recorded by the Amhara and Tigrayan monks and court chroniclers. The Oromo had contact with the Amhara from at least the fourteenth century, and these interactions varied between peaceful co-existence and warfare. The warfare between the Amhara and the Oromo to no small extent influenced what the Christian monks and court chroniclers wrote about the Galla, the name by which they described the Oromo. From the fourteenth to the twentieth centuries, the local Christian and Muslim literature from the Horn of Africa and the Swahili city-states along the coast of East Africa, as well as the accounts of European missionaries, travellers, diplomats and merchants, make considerable reference to the 'Galla', the name by which the Oromo were officially called up to 1974.

Since the sixteenth century, a fundamental theme in the literature of the Christian kingdom of Ethiopia was the confrontation between the Amhara and the Oromo. According to Bairu Tafla, the result was that the Oromo were assumed to be enemies of the Amhara for all of their history.[7] As Bairu has indicated, the enmity between the two communities, magnified by religious and cultural differences, created an 'intense prejudice deeply rooted in the [Amhara]-Tigray society, a prejudice which, to the disadvantage of science and art, undermined the objective

(contd) *to Abyssinia in 1541–1543, as Narrated by Castanhoso with Some Contemporary Letters, The Short Account of Bermudez, and Certain Extracts from Correa* (London: Hakluyt Society/Kraus 1902/1967), 228–9; also, Manuel de Almeida, 'The History of High Ethiopia or Abassia Book IV', in *Some Records of Ethiopia 1593–1646*, trans. and ed. C.F. Beckingham and G.W.B. Huntingford (London: Hakluyt Society, 1954), 134–7.

[5] James Bruce, *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile in the Years 1768, 1769, 1770, 1771, 1772, and 1773* (London: J. Ruthwen for G.G.J. and J. Robinson, 1790), vol. 2, 403. See also C.R. Markham, *A History of the Abyssinian Expedition* (London: Macmillan, 1869), 39–40.

[6] W.C. Harris, *The Highlands of Ethiopia* (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1844), vol. 3: 72–73. See also S. Gobat, *Journal of Three Years' Residence in Abyssinia*, 2nd edn (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 52.

[7] Bairu Tafla, *Asma Giyorgis and His Work: History of the Galla and The Kingdom of Šawā*, (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1987), 48.

[recording of Oromo history]'.[8] Consequently, the term 'Galla' acquired crude stereotype to the extent that Kesete Berhan Tesema, in his 1970 Amharic dictionary, defines Galla as 'uncivilized, cruel, pagan, and the enemy of the Amhara'.[9] Gadaa Melbaa has noted that 'the Abyssinians attach a derogatory connotation to the Galla, namely "pagan, savage, uncivilized, uncultured, enemy, slave or inherently inferior"'.[10] These negative concepts have become permanent attributes of Galla. In short, in the Christian literature, the Amhara and the Galla are depicted in sets of interlocking images built up out of centuries of conflict. Where the Amhara are civilized, the Galla are 'barbarians'. Where the Amhara are indigenous to Ethiopia, the Galla are 'newcomers' to the same country. Thus the Oromo past was erased by the crude representations associated with Galla, which were so often repeated and embellished that the notion of the 'savage Oromo' took on a life of its own.[11]

In his 1960 classic work, *The Name 'Negro': Its Origin and Evil Use*, Richard Moore convincingly argued that 'it is the right and duty of free and self-respecting people to name themselves fittingly as a necessary condition for placing their relationship with all other people on the plane of human dignity and mutual self-respect'.[12] Up until 1974, the Oromo were denied the basic democratic right to name themselves and to define their own identity. 'The important thing about a name is the impression which it makes in the minds of others and the reactions which it invokes through . . . association [with vicious] ideas'.[13] According to Ayele Bekerie: 'Naming plays a critical dual role either in defining or distorting one's identity, in articulating or blunting the essence of being human, and in evoking respect or disrespect from the human community.'[14]

The Oromo did not and do not call themselves 'Galla' and resist being so called. Out of over two thousand and eight hundred named Oromo clans or *gosa*s (clans or descent groups), not a single one 'uses [Galla] as a self-identification'.[15] The Oromo generally used their *gosa* or clan names when referring to each other. The origin of the term Oromo is inextricably connected with the eponym Horo, who is supposed to have been 'born' at Madda Waallaabuu, the Oromo sacred land, where funda-

[8] Ibid., 49.
[9] Quoted in Toleeraa Tasmaa and Hundassa Waaqwayoo, *Seenaa Saba Oromoofi Sirna Gadaa Kitaaba Duraa* (Finfinnee: Pberna Printing, 1995), 17.
[10] Gadaa Melbaa, *Oromia: An Introduction to the History of the Oromo People* (Minneapolis, MN: Kirk House, 1999), 14.
[11] Teshale Tibebu, *The Making of Modern Ethiopia, 1896–1974* (Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 1995), 17–18.
[12] Richard B. Moore, ed. W. Burghardt Turner and Joyce Moore Turner, *The Name 'Negro': Its Origin and Evil Use* (Baltimore, MD: Black Classic Press, 1992 [1960]), 97.
[13] Ibid., 48.
[14] Ayele Bekerie, 'Ethiopica: Some Historical Reflections on the Origin of the Word Ethiopia', *International Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 1, 2 (2004), 110.
[15] Gene Gragg, *Oromo Dictionary* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1982), xiii.

mental Oromo institutions appear to have developed (see Chapter 3). Like most national or ethnic names, it appears that the Oromo first used the term to distinguish themselves from their non-Oromo neighbours. 'Name is surely the simplest, most literal, most obvious of all symbols of identity.'[16] As the core of their identity, Oromo has always been a collective name, 'the identifying mark' of their separate national identity. With the rise of modern political consciousness during and after the 1960s, the name Oromo has become the source of pride and hope: pride in past cultural achievements and hope for a democratic and prosperous future. Today the name Oromo 'evokes an atmosphere and drama that has power and meaning for those whom it includes'.[17] The 'magic power that has always been attributed to names'[18] is not limited only to the Oromo.

> Names keep turning up in one way or another in all the ongoing rediscoveries of group identities. The name of a country, of an individual, of a group, carries in it all the cargo of the past. A name will seldom itself be the heart of the matter of group identity, but it can often take us to where the heart can be found, leading us deep into the history, the relationships, and the emotions that lie at the center of any such affair.[19]

For the people it includes, the name Oromo represents the exact opposite of the name Galla. While Galla conveys all the negative connotations about the people and their institutions, Oromo encapsulates their positive attributes. As a collective name, Oromo is a sure sign and emblem 'of their separate identity ... by which they distinguish themselves and summarize their "essence" to themselves – as if in a name lay the magic of their existence and guarantee of their survival'.[20] According to Thomas Zitelmann, the name Oromo 'stresses the qualities of being human, free-born, a people'.[21] Zitelmann goes on to argue that 'Oromo is the ancient self-definition'.[22] It is this ancient self-definition that I employ in this book.

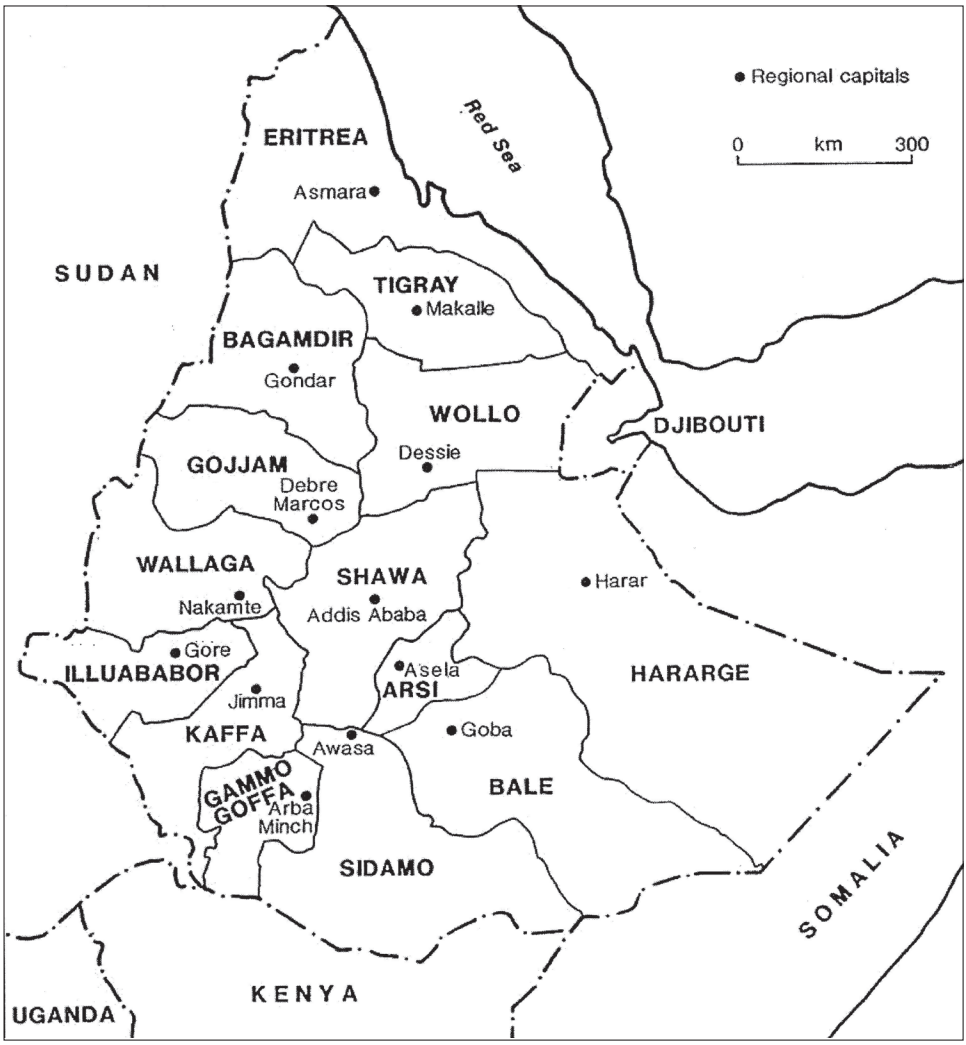
At the heart of Ethiopian historiography is what has been dubbed 'the sixteenth century sudden arrival of the Oromo'.[23] The underlying assumption is that the Oromo are 'newcomers to Ethiopia',

[16] Harold Isaacs, *Idols of the Tribe: Group Identity and Political Change* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 71.
[17] I have drawn on Anthony Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 23.
[18] Isaacs, *Idols of the Tribe*, 72.
[19] Ibid., 73.
[20] Smith, *Ethnic Origins of Nations*, 23.
[21] Thomas Zitelmann, 'Re-Examining the Galla/Oromo Relationship: The Stranger as a Structural Topic', in *Being and Becoming Oromo: Historical and Anthropological Enquiries*, ed. P.T.W. Baxter, Jan Hultin and Alessandro Truilzi (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1996), 106.
[22] Ibid., 106. See also Gene Gragg, 'Oromo of Wellegga', in *The Non-Semitic Languages of Ethiopia*, ed. M. Lionel Bender (East Lansing, MI: African Studies Center, Michigan State University Press, 1976), 166.
[23] Donald Levine, *Greater Ethiopia: The Evolution of a Multiethnic Society*, 2nd edn (Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 78.

a historical fallacy, itself a product of anti-Oromo prejudice, nourished by long warfare between the Oromo and the Amhara. This means that, although the Oromo have been an integral part of the Cushitic-language-speaking family of peoples who have lived in the Ethiopian region for thousands of years, they were not and are still not considered as one of the original inhabitants of the country in Ethiopian historiography. While focusing on the large pastoral Oromo population movement of the sixteenth century, Ethiopianist scholars have ignored the important dynamics of the history of the country: population movements, interactions and transformations. According to Richard Olaniyan, the 'stuff of history includes migrations, wars, triumphs and tragedies, the extinction and the emergence of ... kingdoms, and much else'.[24] In other words, population movement belongs in history, whether it was in Ethiopia, elsewhere in Africa or the rest of the world. As Paul Kennedy has noted, 'human history has always been shaped by the growth of and migration of population'.[25] Though unrecorded by historians, such is the case in the Ethiopian region. In fact, the fourteenth- and sixteenth-century Christian-Muslim conflicts in Ethiopia were partly a response to population movements.[26] Population movement, especially from the northern region to southern parts of Ethiopia still continues.

Oromo population movement followed patterns that were well established in the Horn of Africa. For instance, the Afar and the Somali migrated from southern Ethiopia to their present locations. A number of Semitic-speaking groups such as the Adare (Harari), the Gurage and the Amhara migrated early in their history. As the Amhara people slowly moved from their original homeland of Beta Amhara (in what is today the Wallo region) to what is today the Shawa region and beyond, a number of Oromo groups appear to have moved from the region of Bale to the region of Shawa. Though limited, we find references to Oromo groups already living in the medieval Christian kingdom during the fourteenth century, possibly earlier (see Chapter 2). Who is to say when their forefathers arrived there? 'Whole populations seldom suddenly arrive in regions. Migration is more often an ongoing process over decades and even centuries'.[27] What is certain is that while the Amhara communities moved from the north to the south, Oromo *gosa*s moved from the south to the north. Both groups were not moving at the same time. Nevertheless, it appears that they met most likely in what is today the Shawa region.

[24] Richard Olaniyan, ed., *African History and Culture* (Lagos: Longman, 1990 [1982]), 2.
[25] Paul Kennedy, *Preparing for the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Random House, 1993), cover page.
[26] See for instance, Merid Wolde Aregay, 'Population Movement as a Possible Factor in the Christian-Muslim Conflict of Medieval Ethiopia', in *Symposium Leo Frobenius* (Munich: Derlag Dokumentation, 1974), 261–81.
[27] Richard Greenfield and Mohammed Hassen, 'Interpretation of Oromo Nationality', *Horn of Africa* 3, 3 (1980), 6.



Map 1 Modern administrative regions of Ethiopia to 1974 (adapted from Hassen, *The Oromo of Ethiopia: a history 1570–1860*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

The Oromo, who constitute at least 40 per cent of the population of Ethiopia, are the single largest Cushitic-language-speaking national group in Africa: 'Cushitic is the third largest Afro-Asiatic language in the world after Arabic and Hausa.'[28] How did the Oromo achieve this distinction? I believe the answer to this question lies in the *gada* system, the dynamic institution that enabled the pastoral Oromo not only to expand over a wider territory within and beyond Ethiopia but also to absorb and assimilate a very large non-Oromo population. There is no doubt that the Oromo nation was shaped by the *gada* system. In fact, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to account for the rise of the Oromo into prominence in the Horn of Africa, their increase in population, and their impressive movement within and beyond Ethiopia without reference to the *gada* system.

In the first three chapters, I assemble evidence that demonstrates the presence of Oromo groups within the medieval Christian kingdom. Those sedentary Oromo-language-speaking groups that lived under the Christian administration since the fourteenth century were not part of the sixteenth-century pastoral Oromo population movement. This pre-sixteenth-century Oromo presence within the medieval Christian kingdom is generally ignored or overlooked in Ethiopian historiography.

In Chapter 1, I explore the pre-sixteenth-century Oromo interactions with Christian and Muslim peoples in and south of the region of Shawa and the influences those interactions had on the Oromo creation myth, the story of the Sacred Book of the Oromo, the Borana and Barentu moiety system and the Qaalluu institution. The influences may be direct or indirect, but their impact is visible. The Oromo creation myth shares with the Hebrew, Christian and Muslim myths of origin a single Creator, the elements of darkness and water, and the creation of the earth, sky and sun. In the Oromo cosmology it is Waaqa (God) who 'created heaven and earth and all that is found on and in them'.[29] Like the God of the 'Peoples of the Book' (Hebrews, Christians and Muslims), the Oromo God is universal. Although not one of the Peoples of the Book, through early interactions with their Christian and Muslim neighbours the Oromo may have realized that their neighbours' holy books provided significant guidance and wisdom. To overcome their lack of such a book, with its 'magic' of reading and writing, the Oromo invented a story of a lost sacred text. That and other legends appear to be highly influenced by Christian and Muslim concepts. For example, the explanation for the early division of the Oromo into the two moieties of Borana and Barentu (Barentuma) is 'caught up in a mytho-poetical past that is shared with the Peoples of the Book'.[30]

[28] Gragg, *Oromo Dictionary*, xvi.
[29] Gemetchu Megerssa, 'Knowledge, Identity and the Colonizing Structure: The Case of the Oromo in East and Northeast Africa' (PhD diss., University of London, 1994), 90, 146.
[30] Zitelmann, 'Re-Examining the Galla/Oromo Relationship', 106.

The Qaalluu institution was the core of traditional Oromo religion,[31] 'believed to have existed since mythical times'.[32] The Qaalluu was the person who performed ritual sacrifices, interpreted the laws of Waaqa, and served as a link between Waaqa and the Oromo. As the spiritual leader of traditional Oromo religion, the Qaalluu himself became the Abba Muudaa, which literally means the 'father' of the *muudaa* rituals. *Muudaa* refers to both the ceremony held every eight years to honour the holy person – the Qaalluu – and the pilgrimage to his shrine, which is a sacred site. Those who went on pilgrimage to honour the Qaalluu were known as *jila*. Just as Christian and Muslim pilgrims visited the birthplaces of their religions, for centuries Oromo pilgrims – *jila* – visited the land of Abba Muudaa located in what are today the regions of Bale and Sidamo in southern Ethiopia. For the Oromo the land of Abba Muudaa is said to be a place of righteousness, wisdom, harmony, peace and *gada* democracy. There is clear evidence that the highland Oromo calendar was influenced by Christian and Muslim concepts. However, this aspect cannot be discussed here. It should suffice to say that the measurement of time was important for the *gada* system: rituals, ceremonies, political, military and religious activities were regulated by an elaborate calendar, considered one of 'the highest cultural achievements of the Oromo society'.[33]

In Chapter 2, I present evidence that establishes the presence of Oromo-speaking groups in some parts of Shawa, Arsi, northern and southern Bale, and western Hararghe before the sixteenth century. The region of Shawa was the heartland of the fourteenth-century medieval Christian kingdom. It appears that the term Galla probably came into use during the Zagwe period, traditionally dated from 1137 to 1270. However, the recent archaeological work of David Phillipson suggests that the Zagwe Dynasty existed from 1000 to 1270.[34] These latter dates are followed in this study. By the time Yikunno Amlak established the Shawn Amhara dynasty (1270–85), there is a clear reference to a Galla group as 'trouble makers'.[35] This information is written in the hagiography of Bishop Zena-Markos, whose death was accompanied by a conflict between his disciples and the Oromo. The presence of some Oromo groups within the medieval Christian kingdom is also confirmed by the Chronicle of Emperor Amda-Siyon (1314–44), which refers to a people called Galla and their country, '*Hagara Galla*' (the country of the Galla).[36]

[31] In this section, I have heavily drawn on Mohammed Hassen, 'Pilgrimage to the Abba Muudaa', *Journal of Oromo Studies* 12, 1–2 (July 2005). 142–57.
[32] Karl Knutsson, *Authority and Change: A Study of the Kallu Institution among the Macha Galla of Ethiopia* (Gothenburg: Etnografiska Museet, 1967), 65.
[33] Asmarom Legesse, *Gada: Three Approaches to the Study of African Society* (New York: The Free Press, 1973), 282.
[34] David W. Phillipson, *Foundations of an African Civilisation: Aksum & The Northern Horn 1000 BC – AD 1300* (Woodbridge: James Currey, 2012), 228.
[35] Haile, *The Works of Abba Bahriy*, 27.
[36] Ibid., 26.

Map 2 Fra Mauro's map of 1460, showing the location of the Galla River (from Crawford, *Ethiopian Itineraries circa 1400–1524 including those collected by Alessandro Zorzi at Venice in the years 1519–1524*, Cambridge: Hakluyt Society / Cambridge University Press, 1858, reproduced by kind permission of Hakluyt Society).

The designation Galla appears for the first time in European sources on a map made for Prince Henry the Navigator of Portugal by Fra Maura (see Map 2), created in 1460.[37] The Galla River of Mauro's map is also at the very centre of an important Amhara tradition that deals with Galla Forest. The use of Galla in these sources indicates long historic contacts between the Amhara and at least some Oromo groups. Christian hagiographies also refer to Oromo clans or putative descent groups, such as the Galan, Yaya, Liban and Lalo, living in and around the region of Shawa during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.[38] Arab Faqih, a historian of the sixteenth-century jihad, refers to a number of sedentary Oromo groups who lived under the Christian administration, including the Warra Qaalluu.[39] This further confirms the pre-sixteenth-century Oromo presence in the kingdom.

The sixteenth-century pastoral Oromo population originated in the southern regions of Ethiopia. However, as an integral part of the Cushitic-language-speaking family of peoples, who is to say that the Oromo did not live centuries earlier in the northern parts of what is today Ethiopia? Christopher Ehret states that the movement of 'proto-Cushitic language speakers' was 'initially along the roughly north/south axis through the middle of the Ethiopian highlands'.[40] Most likely the Oromo developed their separate identity in the southern region of Ethiopia. What is not in doubt is the fact that the Oromo lived within central and southern regions of present-day Ethiopia. What some Ethiopianist scholars do not realize is that while the Oromo migrated within Ethiopia before, during and after the sixteenth century, they did not come into Ethiopia from outside the country. Indeed, Oromo internal migration within Ethiopia is a fact beyond dispute; their immigration into Ethiopia is a myth perpetuated by confusing historical Abyssinia and modern Ethiopia. Historical Abyssinia was no more than one-third of modern Ethiopia, the boundaries of which were determined in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. The claim that the Oromo

[37] O.G.S. Crawford, ed., *Ethiopian Itineraries circa 1400–1524 including those collected by Alessandro Zorzi at Venice in the years 1519–1524* (Cambridge: Hakluyt Society / Cambridge University Press, 1958), 16.

[38] Among others, see Tadesse Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia, 1270–1527* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 184. See also Negaso Gidada, *History of the Sayyoo Oromoo of Southwestern Wallaga, Ethiopia from about 1730 to 1886* (Addis Ababa: Mega Printing Enterprise, 2001), chapter 2; Alemayehu Haile et al., eds., *History of the Oromo to the Sixteenth Century*, 2nd ed. (Finfinnee: Oromia Culture and Tourism Bureau, 2006), 42–76; Mekuria Bulcha, *Contours of the Emergent and Ancient Oromo Nation: Dilemmas in the Ethiopian Politics of State and Nation-Building* (Cape Town: Centre for Advanced Studies of African Society, 2011), chapter 4.

[39] Arab Faqih (Chihab Eddin B. Abdel Qadir), *Futuh Al-Habasha* (*Histoire de la conquête de l'Abyssinie XVI siècle*), trans. and ed. M.R. Basset (Paris, 1897), 135–7, 269, 298. See also Arab Faqih, Futuh *Al-Habasha*, Arabic text, (Cairo: 1974), 254–5.

[40] Christopher Ehret, 'Cushitic Prehistory', in *The Non-Semitic Languages of Ethiopia*, ed. M. Lionel Bender (African Studies Center, East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1976), 88.

migrated into Ethiopia is based on an inaccurate historical premise that seeks to establish their homeland outside the contemporary borders of the modern state, thus making them 'newcomers to the country'[41] rather than indigenous inhabitants.

In Chapter 3, I explore various theories about the origins of the Oromo, followed by discussion of the homelands of pastoral Oromo on the eve of the sixteenth century. Some writers claimed that the Oromo originated from beyond Africa,[42] while others speculated that they came from central Africa.[43] Still others assumed that they originated in northern Somalia[44] or northern Kenya.[45] The pastoral Oromo themselves, the protagonists of the massive sixteenth-century migrations, have never claimed any homeland other than the regions of Bale, Sidamo and Gamu Gofa. Yet very few writers have paid attention to what the pastoral Oromo oral tradition had to say about their homelands. Careful interpretation of such narratives provides insight into the political economy of their different homelands on the eve of their epoch-making migrations. I try to establish the area in which the Oromo first appear to have become conscious of their distinct identity, separate from their neighbours, with their own political, cultural and religious institutions, and to designate their six homelands. Among the major factors that led to the large pastoral Oromo population movement were increases in the human and animal populations and the militarization of the *gada* system, which was most likely a response to the pressure from the southward-expanding Christian kingdom.

In Chapters 4 and 5, I discuss the factors that facilitated the rapid spread of pastoral Oromo from southern to northern and western regions of Ethiopia. These included the destructive jihads of 1529–43 and of 1559, civil war that created instability within the Christian kingdom, and effective guerrilla tactics with which Oromo warriors unnerved the unarmed Christian peasantry. In fact, 1559 was a landmark in the history of the Christian kingdom, the Muslim state of Harar, and pastoral Oromo population movements. The power of both Chris-

[41] Mohammed Hassen, *The Oromo of Ethiopia: A History 1570–1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), xii–xiii.

[42] Asma Giyorgis, followed by others, claimed that the Oromo originated in Asia and came to Ethiopia via Madagscar. See Tafla, *The Works of Asma Giyorgis*, 137, note 166. Martial de Salviac connected the Oromo with ancient Gauls in France. See Martial de Salviac, *An Ancient People, a Great African Nation: The Oromo*, ed. and trans. Ayalew Kanno (Self-published, 2005), 367–9.

[43] Charles Beke believed that the Oromo came from Central Africa. See his 'On the Origin of the Galla', *Report to the 1847 meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science* (London, 1848), 6–7. See also Antoine d'Abbadie, 'On the Oromo: Great African Nation Often Designated under the Name "Galla",' trans. Ayalew Kanno, *Journal of Oromo Studies* 14, 1 (March 2007), 119.

[44] I.M. Lewis, 'The Galla in Northern Somaliland', *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici* 15 (1959), 21–38.

[45] Richard Pankhurst, *The Ethiopian Borderlands: Essays in Regional History from Ancient Times to the End of the 18th Century* (Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press, 1997), 279.

tians and Muslims dramatically decreased after the jihad of 1559, while the power of the pastoral Oromo substantially increased. The sudden and radical transformation in the balance of power quickly brought to an end two centuries of struggle between Muslims and Christians, replacing it by the struggle of both against the Oromo for the next three centuries.

Chapter 6 is devoted to Abba Bahrey, the famous sixteenth-century historian and poet, and his campaign against the Oromo. Among other works, Abba Bahrey authored *Zenahu le Galla*, which is can be translated as 'News of the Galla', 'Ethnography of the Galla' or 'History of the Galla'. It was *Zenahu le Galla* that in so many ways shaped the presentation of Oromo history in Ethiopian historiography. Bahrey's manuscript is an invaluable eye-witness account about the warfare between the Oromo and his Christian society. As the first detailed description of Oromo social organization, their clan or sectional names and their population movements, it is a major contribution to our understanding of the pastoral Oromo population movements of the second half of the sixteenth century and their impact on both the Christian and Muslim communities. His manuscript also contains detailed explanations of how the class structure of the Christian society severely weakened its defences against Oromo attacks. As an eye-witness account, Abba Bahrey's manuscript has been celebrated as an original text. Nevertheless, such status does not mean that the manuscript is free from inaccuracies and prejudices. Surprisingly there is not a single critical analysis of Bahrey's manuscript. Rather, modern Ethiopianist scholars display a willingness, even an eagerness, to endorse Bahrey's anti-Oromo prejudice. Abba Bahrey wrote *Zenahu le Galla* not to emphasize the human qualities of the Oromo, but to exaggerate their brutality. However, the brutality that Bahrey attributes exclusively to Oromo warriors was also shared by Christian soldiers (see Chapters 5, 7 and 8). Abba Bahrey could understand the Oromo society of his time only from the viewpoint of his culture. Therefore his work must be interpreted with caution; he was a man of his time, a product of his Christian society, and its anti-Oromo prejudice was shaped by the experience of long warfare between the Amhara Christians and the Oromo, of which Bahrey himself was a victim. He had a concrete purpose in writing about Oromo military strength as well as their alien customs. styling them as less human than members of his own Christian society. If we ignore the anti-Oromo prejudice of Bahrey's Christian society that coloured his views about the Oromo, we run the risk of accepting everything he wrote as an objective work of a neutral scholar, thus canonizing all his negative views of the Oromo. His writings must be analysed within the background of knowledge production in an environment of conflict, i.e. the warfare between the Christians and the Oromo during the second half of the sixteenth century. Finally, Abba Bahrey's *Zenahu le Galla* appears to have inspired at least three Amhara emperors to conduct aggressive campaigns against the Oromo. Of those three emperors, I examine in Chapter 6 the impact that Bahrey's manuscript had on Emperor Za-Dengel (1603–04).

Chapter 7 deals with the Oromo and the Christian kingdom *c.* 1600–18 during the first part of the reign of Emperor Susenyos (1607–32). As a young man, he lived in captivity for two years among the Oromo. He was adopted and became the 'son' of a Borana[46] Oromo clan, thus becoming the first Amhara prince to have been adopted by the Oromo. For the Oromo, once adopted, Susenyos was one of them. According to his chronicle, 'the [Oromo] who captured him liked and treated him as [his own] child'.[47] He was the first Amhara prince who had command of the Oromo language, learned their manners and acquired their fighting skill. He was also the first Amhara prince to marry an Oromo woman, a daughter of an influential *gada* official.[48] In the process, Susenyos initiated a tradition of an Amhara prince marrying a woman from an influential Oromo clan, the process by which enterprising Oromo leaders came to dominate the Christian kingdom itself by the middle of the eighteenth century. Above all, Susenyos was the first Amhara prince who discovered the secret of Oromo strength – their effective fighting method. He made it an integral part of his own war strategy. It was with Oromo warriors and Oromo tactics that he made himself the Christian emperor. In gratitude for their support, Susenyos settled several friendly Oromo groups in regions under his control. However, the presence of a sizable contingent of Oromo in his army intensified Christian suspicion. In order to allay their fears and dilute opposition, Susenyos had to demonstrate his concern for defending the country by a relentless attack on non-Christian Oromo. Few Amhara kings of the century had been more driven by the desire to gain back lost territory or, at the very least, to make the Oromo into loyal subjects, than Susenyos.[49] Although he was not able to turn the tide militarily against the Oromo, Susenyos was very successful in settling numerous Oromo groups in Gojjam and Begameder, where they were converted to Christianity and adopted Amharic language and culture, thus becoming an integral part of the dominant Amhara society. In other words, Susenyos was able to cause irreparable damage to Oromo unity by permanently alienating a significant part of the Oromo from their nation and integrating them into Amhara Christian society.

Chapter 8 examines Oromo Christianization and the beginning of the breakdown of Oromo social organization, their deeper involvement in the seventeenth-century religious conflicts within the Christian kingdom, the conflation of Oromo interests with those of the people they wanted to conquer, and their assimilation into Amhara society. Like Susenyos,

[46] The adoption ceremony was undertaken by the Abba Gada on behalf of his *gosa* or clan or confederacy. Once adopted, Susenyos became the 'son' of the Borana group that adopted him. By their adoption criteria, Susenyos was the first Oromo 'son' to be the emperor of the Christian kingdom. On adoption see pp. 156–8.

[47] Esteves Pereira, ed., *Chronica de Susenyos, Rei d'Ethiopia* (Lisbon: Impresa Nacional, 1892–1900), 4.

[48] Harold Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1994), 39.

[49] Philip Caraman, *The Lost Empire: The Story of the Jesuits in Ethiopia, 1555–1634* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), 59.

Emperor Iyasu (1681–1706) conducted aggressive wars against the Oromo. His objective was to reverse the tide of Oromo victory and force them into submission. The strategy and tactics of Iyasu's campaigns reveal the influence on him of Bahrey's *Zenahu le Galla*. What is more, Iyasu was the most powerful Christian emperor since the time of Susenyos; he was able to marshal and make effective use of a significant number of firearms.[50] He was therefore militarily in a much better position than the Oromo, 'many of whom he sought to assimilate or bring under his control'.[51] It was during Iyasu's reign that the Christianized Oromo elite first attempted to influence the royal succession, albeit unsuccessfully.[52] To integrate Christianized Oromo into his administration, Iyasu elevated the famous Christianized Oromo Tullu to the rank of *dajazmach* (commander of the vanguard) and appointed him as the governor of the region of Damot in Gojjam. Emperor Iyasu gave in marriage his own daughter to Tullu, reflecting the undeniable rise of the power of Christianized Oromo elite.[53] He thus began the practice of integrating powerful individuals of Oromo origin into the royal family. Iyasu also promoted the Dajazmach Tige, an enterprising warrior, 'to the prestigious rank of Behtwadad, or "Beloved" of the king, apparently the first Oromo to enjoy the highly esteemed status'.[54] Despite his aggressive campaigns against the Oromo east of the Abby River (Blue Nile), Iyasu was not able to achieve the desired victories. Instead, by 1700, a Christianized Oromo elite had emerged as a major force in the political landscape of the Christian kingdom itself. In the Epilogue I discuss how in the following century Christianized Oromo gained substantial behind-the-throne influence on royal successions and imperial decisions.

The Oromo and the Christian Kingdom, 1300–1700 is as much history of the Christian kingdom itself as it is history of the Oromo and their interaction with Christians, which ultimately shaped and transformed the destiny of both communities.

[50] Pankhurst, *The Ethiopian Borderlands*, 315.
[51] Ibid., 309.
[52] Merid Wolde Aregay, 'Southern Ethiopia and the Christian Kingdom, 1508–1708, with special reference to the Galla migrations and their Consequences' (PhD diss., University of London, 1971), 578–9.
[53] Tafla, *Asma Giyorgis and His Work*, 415.
[54] Pankhurst, *The Ethiopian Borderlands*, 317.

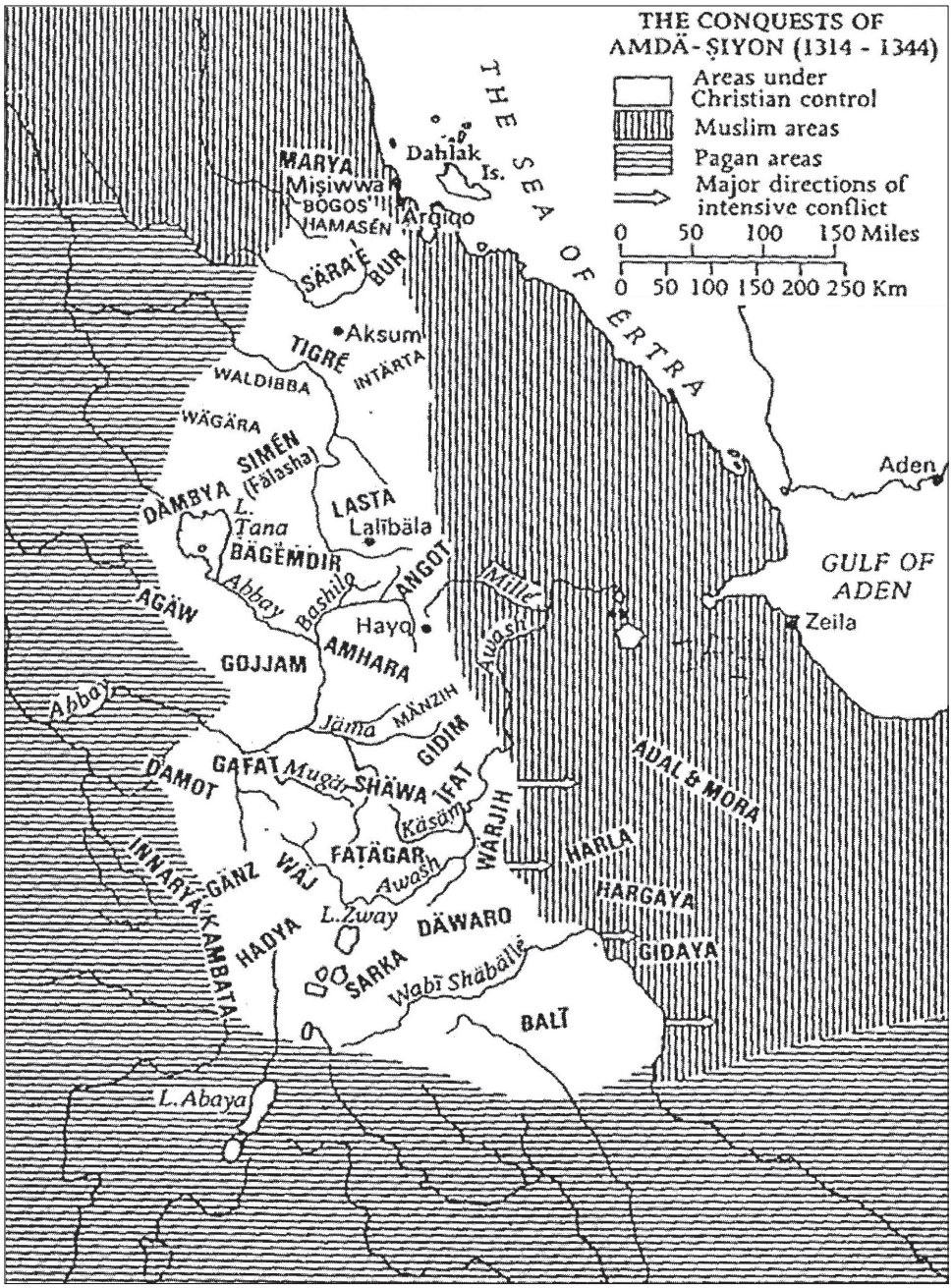
1

Early Interactions among the Oromo, Christian and Muslim Peoples: Traditions and Institutions

There is a long history of interactions among the Oromo, Christian, and Muslim communities in and south of the region of Shawa. These interactions influenced how the Oromo constructed their uniquely enriched African cosmology. History of interactions among the three communities goes back to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. However, the topic of early Christian and Muslim influences on some Oromo institutions has hardly been imagined, much less covered, in the Ethiopian scholarly discourse. Established historical wisdom asserts that neither Christian nor Muslim ideas influenced Oromo institutions and, if there ever were any such influence, it must have happened after 1522. Why after 1522? In his 1593 manuscript, *Zenahu le Galla*, Abba Bahrey suggested 1522 as the time when the Oromo attacked the province of Bali for first time during the reign of King Libna Dengel (1508–40). Bali was one of the most-important Muslim states that was conquered by Emperor Amda-Siyon and incorporated into the southward-expanding Christian kingdom between 1330–32 (see Map 3). The state of Bali was located in the northern most part of the current regions of Arsi/ Bale. Though 1522 is a misleading date, it has become accepted as marking the arrival of the Oromo as 'newcomers' on the border of the Christian Kingdom of Abyssinia. It also marks the popularization of the name of Galla in Ethiopian historiography. The untenability of 1522 as the date of the 'Oromo arrival' will be examined in Chapters 2 and 3.

The main argument of this chapter is that the Oromo had long maintained interactions with Christian and Muslim peoples in the region of what is today Shawa and southern Ethiopia and, consequently, were exposed to the Christian and Muslim ideas that influenced aspects of Oromo traditions and institutions. This argument is based partly on previously untapped sources and partly on fresh interpretation of existing data coupled with an examination of some Oromo oral traditions that have been ignored in Ethiopian historiography. Some scholars continue to assert that 1522 marks the beginning of documented Oromo history[1] and that re-examining earlier data is 'inventing

[1] Ulrich Braukämper, 'Oromo Country of Origin: A Reconsideration of Hypotheses', *Ethiopian Studies: Proceedings of the Sixth International Conference, 14–17 April 1980*, ed. Gideon Goldenberg (Boston: A.A. Balkema, 1986), 35.



Map 3 Territorial expansion of the Christian kingdom 1314–1344 (adapted from Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia, 1270–1527*, Los Angeles: Tsehai Publishers, reprinted 2009, adapted by kind permission of Tsehai Publishers).

history'.[2] I, however, agree with Jan Vansina that 'The discipline of history evolves as much through reconsideration of older evidence as through the adduction of new evidence, and oral data should be part of this process.'[3] Furthermore, Vansina emphasizes the importance of oral tradition in the reconstruction of the past.

> Oral traditions have a part to play in the reconstruction of the past. The importance of this part varies according to place and time. It is a part similar to that played by written sources because both are messages from the past to the present, and messages are key elements in historical reconstruction. When writing fails tradition comes on stage. This is wrong. Wherever oral traditions are extant they remain an indispensable source for reconstruction. They correct other perspectives just as much as other perspectives correct them.[4]

This chapter and the next one will examine the existing data from a new perspective and establish that the Oromo were exposed to both Christian and Muslim ideas that, in turn, may have influenced their traditions and some key institutions. Let me make one point very clear. By discussing the Christian and Muslim influence on some aspects of Oromo institutions, I am not suggesting that the Oromo borrowed their idea of one God from their Christian and Muslim neighbours. Far from it: the Oromo belief in one God was rooted in the Cushitic-speaking peoples' belief in Waaqa (this being an ancient Cushitic name for God). Christopher Ehret argues that the Cushitic-language-speaking peoples' concept of Waaqa 'is the earliest instance of religious syncretism yet known in world history'.[5] This, according to Ehret, had occurred 'sometime in the eighth or seventh millennium BCE' when the early Cushitic-speaking peoples, living in what are today eastern parts of northern Sudan and northern parts of Ethiopia, adopted the eastern Saharo-Sahelian peoples' concept of divinity. 'They chose their own word for the new concept of spirit, expanding the meaning of the old Cushitic root word *waaq'a* for "sky" to apply to both "sky" and "Divinity."'[6] Though Oromo belief in one God predates those of their Christian and Muslim neighbours, their basic institutions appear to have been influenced by ideas radiating from these at least since the twelfth century. Even Mekuria Bulcha, who appears to reject the thesis of Christian and Islamic influences on Oromo institutions, admits that 'the traditional Oromo religion contains many concepts which are similar in meaning to Semitic religious concepts'.[7] As indicated below, striking similarities among the

[2] See for instance, Harold Marcus, 'Does the Past Have any Authority in Ethiopia?' *The Ethiopian Review* (April 1992), 18–21.
[3] Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 200.
[4] Ibid., 199.
[5] Christopher Ehret, *The Civilizations of Africa: A History To 1800* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 2002), 91.
[6] Ibid., 79.
[7] Mekuria Bulcha, *Contours of the Emergent and Ancient Oromo Nation: Dilemmas in the Ethiopian Politics of State and Nation-Building* (Cape Town, South Africa: The Centre for Advanced Studies of African Society, 2011), 238.

Christian, Muslim and Oromo religious ideas reflect the long interaction among the three communities.

Christian traditions show the existence of contact between the Oromo and the Amhara during the thirteenth century, and possibly earlier. Muslim narratives, as reported by Arthur Starkie, show that some Oromo groups may have had contact with the people of the City of Harar 'since the thirteenth century'.[8] What is more, a Muslim source from Harar mentions an Oromo presence in the Ramis River Valley during the fourteenth century. This was the earliest reference in a Muslim source to the name Oromo, which indicates that the name was an ancient self-designation. Somali narratives also mention an Oromo presence within the Muslim states of southern Ethiopia during the fourteenth century. The hagiographical traditions that mention early interaction between some Oromo groups and the Christian society are believed to have been written during the thirteenth century.[9] Professor Getatchew Haile's book also mentions the contact between Christians and some Oromo groups during the thirteenth century.[10]

The narratives that deal with increasing contacts between the Amhara and some Oromo groups during the fourteenth century were written down during the sixteenth century and possibly earlier.[11] The Muslim stories from the city of Harar were written during the eighteenth century,[12] while the Somali tradition that dealt with the subject was collected over the centuries but published only in 1974.[13] Oromo oral narratives that reflect Christian and Muslim influence upon their institutions were recorded during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[14] The recorded Amhara and Muslim traditions that deal with early Oromo history will be examined in this and the following chapters.

This chapter focuses primarily on the Oromo traditions. We have to allow a measure of validity to these traditions for three obvious reasons. These narratives provide an Oromo perspective that deserves scholarly investigation. Jan Vansina writes: 'such sources are irreplaceable, not

[8] Enid Starkie, *Arthur Rimbaud in Abyssinia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937), 8.

[9] See for instance, E.A.W. Budge, trans. and ed., *The Book of the Mysteries of Heaven and Earth, and other works of Bakhayla Mîkâ'êl,-Zôsîmâs* (London: Oxford University Press 1935), xix.

[10] Getachew Haile, *The Works of Abba Bahriy and Other Documents Concerning the Oromo*, in Amharic (Avon, MN: self-published, 2002), 27.

[11] Mohammed Hassen, 'The Pre-Sixteenth Century Oromo Presence Within the Medieval Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia', in *A River of Blessings: Essays in Honor of Paul Baxter*, ed. David Brokensha (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University, 1994), 47.

[12] E. Wagner, trans. and ed., *Legende und Geschichte: der Fatah Madinat Harar von Yahya Nasrallah* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1978), 120–1.

[13] Sheikh Ahmad Abdullahi Rirash, *Kashf as Sudul Can Tarikhas-Sumal: Wahamalikahumas-Sabca* (Uncovering the Somali History and their Seven Kingdoms) (Mogadishu: 1974), 36–37.

[14] A. Cecchi, *Da Zeila alle Frontiere del Caffa* (Rome: Ermanno Loescher, 1886–1887), vol. 2, 30, translation in K.E. Knutsson, *Authority and Change: A Study of the Kallu Institution Among the Macha Galla of Ethiopia* (Gothenburg: Etnografiska Museet, 1967), 148.

only because information would otherwise be lost, but because they are sources "from the inside"'.[15] Inside sources not only provide insight into the Oromo world-view but also facilitate the construction of a broader and more accurate picture of early Oromo history. What is more, Oromo oral traditions provide us with a source of information that has not been previously tapped. Vansina underlines the importance of oral tradition in recording the past of non-literate societies.

> It follows that oral traditions are not just a source about the past, but a historiology (one dare not write historiography!) of the past, an account of how people have interpreted it. As such oral tradition is not only a raw source. It is a hypothesis, similar to the historian's own interpretation of the past. Therefore oral traditions should be treated as hypotheses, and as the first hypothesis the modern scholar must test before he or she considers others. To consider them first means not to accept them literally, uncritically. It means to give them the attention they deserve, to take pains to prove or disprove them systematically for each case on its own merits.[16]

Additionally, like other traditions, Oromo oral traditions have messages that are sometimes direct, at other times indirect, sometimes clear and at other times ambiguous. They are presented in the form of legends and myths, which, on closer inspection, show Christian and Muslim influence on Oromo traditions and on some of their basic institutions. This chapter explores four examples, starting with the simple and yet interesting Oromo creation myth and the 'Sacred Book of the Oromo', which will be followed by a detailed discussion of the Oromo moiety system and the Qaalluu institution.

THE OROMO CREATION MYTH

The Oromo creation myth shares many elements with the cosmology of other African peoples. However, unlike some Africans, such as the Dogon of Mali who produced a highly complex creation myth, the Oromo creation story is not elaborate. Father Lambert Bartels' book shows that the Oromo do not have 'impressive creation myths as there are to be found with the Jews and other peoples'.[17] Additional information about the Oromo creation myth will be discussed in Chapter 3. In this section I will attempt to show shared elements with Biblical tradition, monotheism, God, creation, while pointing out significant differences revealing originality of Oromo concepts.

The Oromo creation myth appears to have been influenced either by Christian or Muslim ideas or a combination of both. The influence may be direct or indirect. But the impact is visible. To show that influence, let me start by quoting from the Hebrew/ Christian creation myth.

[15] Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History*, 197.
[16] Ibid., 196.
[17] Lambert Bartels, *Oromo Religion: Myths and Rites of the Western Oromo of Ethiopia: An Attempt to Understand* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1983), 360.

> In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, 'Let there be light', and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light 'day', and the darkness he called 'night'. And there was evening, and there was morning – the first day. And God said, 'Let there be an expanse between the waters to separate water from water.' So God made the expanse and separated the water under the expanse from the water above it. And it was so. God called the expanse 'sky'. And there was evening, and there was morning – the second day.[18]

The Muslim creation myth is not as elaborate as the Hebrew/Christian one. The Qur'an states that it is 'Allah who created the heavens and the earth in six days', and 'made the darkness and the light'. The Qur'an adds that it is Allah 'who created the heavens and the earth in true (proportions): the day He saith, "Be," behold it is: His word is the truth'.[19]

For the Oromo creation is *uumaa*. The term refers 'to the entire physical world and the living things and divine beings contained within it ... The term *uumaa* is derived from the verb *uumu* meaning literally "to create". The nominal form of *uumaa* therefore refers to everything that is created, in short, to *Waaqa's* (God's) creation.'[20] Though limited in its scope, the Oromo creation myth does have an order of creation that it shares with the above Hebrew/Christian myth, including the Creator, indirectly the Spirit of the Creator, the elements of darkness and water, and creation of the earth and the sky and the sun. In the Oromo cosmology it is Waaqa, who 'created heaven and earth and all that is found on and in them'.[21] The Oromo creation myth according to Dabasssa Guyyo's account as presented by Gemechtu Megerssa states:

> In the beginning there was nothing but water. The Creator divided the water into that of the *gubba* or 'above' and into that of *goola* or 'below.' This Waaqa created in the dim light, resembling that of *boru* [first light]. Then Waaqa created the sky (*qollo*) out of the upper water, separating from the sky. In the sky, Waaqa placed *bakkalcha*, the morning star. Waaqa then brought forth dry land out of the water of below. This was followed by the rising sun. Before this time, the sun did not exist ... Once the sun was set in motion, its movement created day and night. Then using *bakkalcha*, the morning star, Waaqa created all the numerous stars of heaven, the animals and plants of the dry land and all the creatures that float in the air and those that swim in water.[22]

In the creation myths of the Hebrews, Christians and Muslims, the Creator 'is an infinitely perfect spiritual being that creates a physical

[18] International Bible Society, *The Holy Bible: New International Version* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1986), Genesis 1: 1–8.
[19] Abdallah Yusuf Ali, new edn and rev. trans. *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an* (Beltsville, MD: Amana Publications, 1996), 294, 313, 359.
[20] Gemetchu Megerssa, 'The Oromo World View', *Journal of Oromo Studies* 12, 1–2 (July 2005), 70.
[21] Gemetchu Megerssa, 'Knowledge, Identity and the Colonizing Structure: The Case of the Oromo in East and Northeast Africa' (PhD diss., University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies, 1994), 90, 146.
[22] Ibid., 91.