

Expansion and Settlement of the Limmu Oromo Clan “In East Wollega” Ca,17th Century

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Abstract: The effort of this paper mainly depends on the critical analysis of archival sources, manuscripts and oral tradition. The name Limmu in this paper represents both the place name and the Oromo groups settled in the area after the 16th century Oromo population expansion. There are various clans of the Oromo group: Saphera, Guto, Warra Iggu (Bariso, Manni and Hanno), Kube, Warra Da’imo (Dimma, Warsuu, Harru, Ibso and Sirba) and Indibo. I favored to indicate them all Limmu Oromo, because the topic of my paper is fully focused on Limmu Oromo. In this context it represents largely the Oromo of Limmu, Haro Limmu and Western part of Gidda districts. Following settlement in the area, Limmu Oromo clans have occupied the whole fertile and suitable highland areas and had exercised their own democratic gadaa system for a long period of time. This system continued, until Menelik conquered the region.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

This study has been carried out on Limmu Oromo of East Wallaga zone. The paper deals with “**Expansion and Settlement of the Limmu Oromo “In East Wollega” Ca,17th century.**’ The Limmu Oromo were subdivided in to the following major and sub-clans. These are: Saglan Saphera (Babboo, Harelee, Igiroo, Amboo, Faxxoo, Ilaamuu, Jaggaa, Laloo and Anuu), Guuto, Sadan Iggu (Barisoo, Manni and Hanno), Torban Kube *Sanqallan[Gumuz] saddeeti* (Bidaaruu, Booraa, Kanbuu, Innaacino, Innaangoo, Innisaayii, Amaaraa and Gumuz (adoptive), Warra Da’imoo (Warsuu, Dimma, Harru, Sirba, Ibsoo and Kebbo) and IndiboAs depicted in the figure, Limmu (the founding fathers) had the abovementioned sons who later diversified into clans which in their turn multiplied into lineages (*balbalas*). These clans belong to the Limmu-Jawi, one of the Macca sub groups. In addition, these Limmu sons were in turn their own son’s. According to tradition, Manni, Hanno and Bariisoo were from one father and were clustered into *Sadan Iggu*, the three *Iggu*’s. Likewise, Warsuu, Dimma, Sirbaa, Harru, Ibso and Kebbo were shared a common origin and are termed together as *Warra Da’imoo*, the *Da’imo*’s family. Babboo (*angafa*/elder), Harelee, Igiroo, Amboo, Faxxoo, Ilaamuu, Jaggaa, Laloo and Anuu are said to have one ancestor and known as *Saglan Saphera*, the Nine *Saphera*’s. Among them Babboo are elder of all. In addition, Bidaruu, Booraa, Kanbuu, Innaacino, Innaangoo, Innisaayii Amaaraa and *Sanqalla* (adoptive) are known as *Torban kubes Sanqallan[Gumuz] saddeeti*, the seven Kube including Gumuz eight. At the beginning the *Kube torba* were originated from different families. But they were organized as one clan by a person known as Rasee Sanyii (*abba duula* of the Bidaruu clan) around the mid 19th century.² *Warra Guutoo* also belong to one father and divided in to: Jorga, Corree, Gosu, Danbii, Innisanoo, Hebanoo, Qoratii and Masoo groups. From among the aforementioned clans, Saphera was the eldest son of Limmu. The Saphera clan members enjoy respect and special social status among the Limmu Oromo. For instance, in blessing, praying and other social occasions. During journey no one crosses rivers before an individual who belonged to the Saphera clan. The *angaffummaa* (eldest position) reserved for the Saphera clan today among the Limmu Oromo clans.³ Each of the Limmu Oromo clan is divided into numerous sub-clans or lineages (*balbala*). Below the *balbala* we find the *aanaa*, which comprises of several *warras* or extended families, the smallest kingship units. These clans had their own specific settlement areas according to families. Accordingly, Limmu Oromo settled in the whole of Limmu, Haro- Limmu and Gidda districts western part in East Wallaga

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The historical data used in the paper consists of three kinds of sources. The first category is secondary literature both (published and unpublished). These works are general or do not explore the history of Limmu Oromo specifically. However, under the general survey of the Oromo in Ethiopia, different scholars directly or indirectly touched upon the Macca Oromo at large to which the Limmu Oromo belongs. The second categories of sources used in this thesis are primary sources. These include manuscripts and archival documents. The archival documents used in the thesis were collected from different institutions of Limmu district, East Wallagga Zone Administration Office and from possession of different individuals. The third source I used in this paper was collected from oral informants. There are prominent informants, who have good memory and experience about the events they passed on. Their information is helpful; in this regard I interviewed prominent oral informants from different ethnic groups to reconstruct the history of Limmu Oromo. The oral sources were collected during my seminar research of 2012 and fieldwork from January-March 2013.

EXPANSION AND SETTLEMENT OF THE LIMMU OROMO IN EAST WOLLEGA

According to different written literature, the Oromo expansion was undertaken by different groups, sub-groups, clans and families which were already separated or in the process of separation ever since the advent of Oromo movement.⁴ Since the first half of the 16th century, the Oromo began to move in mass to different directions and most of the clans reached and occupied their present settlement areas relatively within short period of time. As a result, it is important to investigate the expansion and patterns of the Macca Oromo settlement in various districts of East Wallaga. Key elders claim that the Limmu Oromo immigrated to the present area from the eastern direction of the region. *Horten keenya Walali dhufe jedhu*, it literally means, “our ancestors had come from Walal.” Today Walal is located in two regions in Oromiya: one is in southern Borana and the other is found in Qellem Wallagga region. In my own analysis, the Walal region of the Qellem Wallaga was the area which the Limmu Oromo referred to.⁵

It is important to trace the pattern of the Borana Oromo confederacy. That is the Tulama-Macca to which the Limmu Oromo belongs. According to Mohammed Hassen:

...the Borana section of the Oromo was divided into three confederacies, namely Tulama-Macca (the northern Borana), the southern Borana and Guji. The Tulama and Macca lived together under one Caffee assembly at Horro Walabu located some 48 to 64km east of Lake Abbay. Their expansion was in two stages. During the first stage, they migrated in small numbers, while during the second stage they migrated in very large numbers. After their migration from Horro Walabu the two groups had a common caffee in Fatagar at a place called Odaa Nabi (Nabee) in Dukam, about 30km southeast of Addis Ababa....⁶

Odaa Nabi served as a permanent base for the Tulama and Macca Oromo for a long period of time. *Odaa Nabi* was an important landmark in the expansion of the Tulama –Macca Oromo. It was at *Odaa Nabi* that the Tulama and Macca separated and became independent groups.⁷ Then the Macca Oromo crossed Mugar and Guder rivers in the 1570s and formed their own independent *caffee* at *Odaa Bisil*, in the present day Gedo district of West Shawa. The groups which had their center at *Odaa Bisil* were: the Limmu, Chaliya, Liban Jawi, Sob, Guduru, Leeqa and Sibuu branches of the Macca Oromo.⁸

After they stayed for more than five generations at *Tute Bisil* and finally divided into two confederacies (*Arfe* and *Sadacha*) separated.⁹ The *Arfe* (four) confederacies consist of: Horro, Guduru, Liban and Chaliya. They took the western direction and settled in the vast territory to the south of Abbay including Limmu region.¹⁰ The Sa-

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dacha (three) confederacy namely: Akako, Obo and Suba were united and moved to the southwest Gibe region.¹¹ Tesema indicated that, all the Oromo groups inhabit in today's south of Abbay region are all descendents of the Jawi- Macca Oromo groups, which is believed to have been the ancestor of Limmu, Horro, Guduru, Amuru, Jimma and Gidda.¹²

In addition to this, Boshi indicated that, all the Oromo groups inhabited around Horro- Guduru were all descendents of the Jawi-Macca Oromo. According to him, Jawi had six sons (the Six Jawis: Limmu Jawi, Jimma Jawi, Horro Jawi, Liban Jawi, Amuru Jawi, and Hebantu Jawi).¹³ After their migration from Bisil, these sons of Jawi had established their own socio-political center at *Odaa* Bulluq, which is located at about 10km west of Shambu town, between 1616 to 1618. Each clan of Jawi had sent their representatives from different classes to the *gadaa* center of *caffee* Bulluq for many years.¹⁴ Due to distance of *Odaa* Bulluq from their settlement areas, the Jawi sons beyond Angar River: Limmu, Amuru, Gidda and Hebantu established their own socio-political center at Wasti/ Darba, this *caffee* is located in present day Gidda District. They left *caffee* Darba to search center for all these Oromo beyond Anger River and they established their *caffee* at Sirba Alaba, in Limmu Distirct. *Caffee* Sirba Alaba was selected as a center for all of them during that time till they again changed to *caffee* Awad and *caffee* Harbu Tuma.¹⁵

According to Boshera Jerbo, the first clans which arrived and claimed land in Limmu were: from *Torban* Kube (Bidaaruu), *sadan* Iggu (Bariisoo, Manni and Hanno), from *Warra* Da'imoo (Dimma) and Guuto clans. He also further illustrate, this by narrating an old story of how these clans claimed land in Limmu and finally settled in the area. To minimize conflicts on land between each clan, they represent their own elders based on their *gada* system. They needed by their own elders advice. Because their elders were responsible to decide the plan and settlements in suitable lands. Primarily an investigation group *ellaltu/simbirtu*, literally investigator, was sent to assess the nature of the pre-Oromo people, the climate and the fertility of the land. Accordingly, if it seems suitable land; both in terms of fertility and climatic condition they occupied the area. To avoid future conflicts with the late arrivals, each clan made a distinguishing signs on his *qabiyye* land putting symbol.¹⁶

Advised by their elders, the Kuube clan moved west and occupied the areas south of the Gaddibeen Mountain and west of the Qile River in present Harro-Limmu district, which means, they occupied all south western high-land part of the region. The Bariisoo clan also moved towards the west and made their *qabiyye* the area north of the present day Bariisoo town up to the surrounding areas of the Abbay River valley in present Haro-Limmu. The Manni clan occupied the areas between the present day Haro town and *Tullu* Dingar (they occupied the area along the bank of the river *Qoqoffee*). Likewise, the Hanno and Guuto pioneers first settled in the area along the southern bank of Qile River. As the number of their clans increased, they expanded to the areas just north of the river and spread all over the right and left bank of the Welmal River. The Warra Da'imoo clans occupied an area south of Galiilaa town across the present day Galiilaa-Nekemte road and northeastern part of Limmu district. Other clans such as Sirbaa, Halabaa, Sapheera, Warsuu, Harruu, and Kebbo also occupied the southeast and eastern parts of Limmu district and western part of Gidda district. Today, these Limmu Oromo clans lived widely in: Limmu district, Haro-Limmu district and Gidda district western part. As a result of population movement in later days and intermingling of people over the whole of these regions, today one could not find these clans in their historical settlement once.¹⁷

Once the *dagal saqis* led their clans and settled in the area, they apportioned the land among their sons. Every male member of the community or the lineage group had the right to get a share of land called *dhoqqe*, a land on which one had the right to keep and raise his herds of cattle, sheep and goats and which he could cultivate as well. In the beginning land was relatively abundant and the clans' exercised communal rights under the regulation of the *dagal saqi*. Later, however, increasing in the local population numbers limited land. This led to competition for their territory among Limmu Oromo clans. This competition of land brought about the decline of *gadaa* system in Limmu.¹⁸

THE DECLINE OF THE GADAA SYSTEM AMONG THE LIMMU OROMO

For centuries the Oromo had an egalitarian socio-political institution called the *gadaa* system, by which they, governed themselves. They lived under the banner of this system in unity and developed their own social, political, cultural and economic aspects. The *gadaa* system was quite egalitarian and the head of the *caffee* was elected democratically from among the *gadaa* age-grade. The *gadaa* leader known as the *abba bokku*, literally father of the scepter, who was elected every eight years. For eight years, he would serve as the spokesperson of the assembly, the *caffee*. When their term of office ended, they would handover the power to next *gadaa* class, which would elect new officials for the next eight years.¹⁹

A ceremony in a *gadaa* system was celebrated at the end of every eight year. This ceremony was known as the *butta*. The “democratically” elected *abba bokku* and his *gadaa* officials maintained legislative, judiciary and executive power in the society. Thus, they played an important role in decision making process, i. e. ever aspects of their live was decided by their *gadaa* system.²⁰

According to my informants, Limmu Oromo had they own socio-political center at Awad and Harbu Tuma earlier. There were found in the present day Limmu district at a place called Lemati Gotu peasant association and Bolalee peasant association respectively.²¹ The exact period when the Limmu Oromo selected *caffee* Awad and *caffee* Harbu Tuma as their *gadaa* center was unknown. But, it is believed that, it was established with the coming of the Limmu Oromo to the area. At *caffee* Awad the whole set of *gadaa* political activities including *gadaa* rituals, the handover of power ceremony, revising and enacting customary laws and judiciary practices were held. Besides, the *gadaa* system transmitted their past history to the new generation.. The Oromo transmitted their past historical and cultural knowledge through oral tradition to the new generation. The Oromo oral tradition is rich in folklore such as songs, tales, legend, myth, proverbs and etc.²²

On return from *caffee* Awad, the representatives of the Limmu Oromo clans would held meeting at *Caffee* Harbu Tuma. At *caffee* Harbu Tuma the representative of each clan in Limmu blessed by elders and they prayed in unity to their *Waaqaa*. In their prayer, they would ask the creator for peace, rain, prosperity, health, crop, children and cattle. They would curse disease, hunger, war and theft. At this *caffee* they would also deal with socio-political and socio-economic matters and would resolve disputes and restore peace.²³

However, by the second half of the 19th century internal and external challenges began. Written sources indicate internally, the emergence of a new political system that was alien to the existing social and political institution of the *gadaa* system was the main cause. This was a time when various kingdoms evolved by breaking away from the collective leadership and abandoning the *gadaa* system and its institution. This change weakened the Oromo socio-political institution. Externally, the Gojjame rulers expanded their rule in the 1870s to the area and followed by Menelik’s conquest in the early1880s.these two external conquests was the major causes for the decline of the *gadaa* system in Limmu.²⁴ In the second decade of the 19th century in particular, the *gadaa* system was weakened among the western Oromo in general and that of Limmu Oromo in particular. Moreover, when the Shawan ruler Menelik conquered the area and created his new administration system the *gadaa* system was bit harder than else in any time

CONCLUSION

This paper has attempted to reconstruct the history of Limmu Oromo of East Wallaga Zone, focusing on the period between Shawan conquests of the area upto the downfall of the *Derg* regime. The production of this thesis depends mainly on the critical analysis of literature on the Oromo’s social, political, economic and cultural history, archival materials and manuscripts. Oral has also been used extensively. According to these sources, the Limmu Oromo clans settled in the area after the 16th century Oromo population expansion.

According to different written materials and oral sources, during the expansion of Limmu Oromo into their current regions, the area was inhabited by the pre-Oromo communities, Gumuz, Sinasha and Damot. Their expansion brought about a cultural assimilation of these different non-Oromo ethnic groups and also expulsion

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of some pre-Oromo communities. Limmu Oromo have occupied the whole fertile and suitable highland areas of Limmu, Haro-Limmu and Gidda districts western part. Following the occupation of the area, Limmu Oromo clans had exercised their own democratic *gadaa* system for a long period of time. Established *caffee* centers at Awad and Harbu Tuma. *Caffee* Awad had served as a socio-political center of the Limmu Oromo and the surrounding Oromo communities. Each clan had sent their representatives from different classes to the *gadaa* center of *caffee* Awad and *caffee* Harbu Tuma. The Limmu Oromo governed by political and social system of their own for a long period. But it was interrupted in the second half of 19th century due to internal and external factors. Internally, the dynamism within the Oromo themselves and externally, the Gojjame conquest in the 1870s, which was followed by Menelik’s conquest of the 1880s. These were the major causes for the decline of the *gadaa* system among the Limmu Oromo.

The Limmu Oromo resisted the Gojjame conquest bravely. However, they could not gain the fruit of their resistance against the Gojjam army due to different reasons. The disunity among the Limmu Oromo clan leaders was the factor for Gojjame’s expansion into the area and the neighboring regions. Following the Battle of Embabo where the Gojjame and Shawans fought for supremacy in the southwest, the position of Takla- Haymanot in the Limmu Oromo lands and neighboring regions was doomed. In fact, the outcome of the battle had no significance for the Limmu Oromo communities, except it was the change of overlord ship. Following the defeat of the Gojjame forces at the Battle of Embabo, the administrative position of the region was taken by Shawan rulers. After they annexed the region various military garrison towns for *naftagna* administrators and soldiers were established in Limmu at Dhakka-Waaree (the present day Galilaa town), Ilaalaa and Dagam-Sillase. *Shal-laqaa* Tassew Mesfin and *Shambaal* Ingidaa Meshasha were directly appointed by *Ras* Dammisow of Arjo to administer Limmu one after the other. As soon as the Shawan rule had been established in the region, the local peasants’ houses were divided among the Shawan settlers and soldiers, according to their ranks. These settlers and soldiers were superimposed on the local peasants and all necessities were provided by the local Oromo people. For instance, the obligation of the community included: constructing houses and fences; fetching water, collecting fire-woods, repairing bridges, building churches and other obligation given by the Shawan officials and soldiers.

The Limmu Oromo, as the incident of taxation and other obligations were so heavy they had no choice but run-away from their village and took refuge in the areas where the Shawan *naftagna* were not settled. There is proverb that expressed this issue of the Limmu Oromo; *Dagamiin dhaquu manna badanii Dangabiin dhaquu wayya*”, which means instead of going to Dagam (garrison center of the Shawan in Limmu), it is better to go (escape) to Dangab (a district in Wanbara). Among the notables individual who left because of harsh treatment and land alienation were; *Fitawrari* Dhugumaa Jaldeessoo, *Fitawrari* kitti Neenno, *Fitawrari* Abose Desso and many others. Most of them returned to Limmu during the Italian occupation and more recently after the outbreak of the Ethiopian revolution of 1974. The earlier burden administration of the Shawan *naftagna* brought hostility between the Limmu Oromo and the *naftagna* settlers in the region during the Italian Occupation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This work has various significances; I hope it could create better understanding of the social, cultural, economic and political history of the Oromo people in general and that of Limmu Oromo in particularly. It also helps understand the change during the period under study as a result of continuous interaction between the Limmu Oromo and other Oromo groups and non- Oromo communities and the state. Therefore, I believe that my study account of Limmu Oromo will pave the way for further historical research by adding a brick to Oromo and regional historical studies.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to express my deepest gratitude and heartfelt thanks to my previous MA thesis advisor, Dr. Ketebo Abdiyo, for his timely and scholarly help in reading and correcting my paper. His corrections and critical com-

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ments from the preparation of the proposal to the completion of my paper have been very useful and constructive. It is my pleasure to acknowledge also Dr. Kefyalew Mekonnen for his financial support to publish my paper. I am also greatly indebted to all my informants, who have devoted their time and shared with me their experience and knowledge, without their contribution providing this paper could not have been possible (their names are listed towards the end of this study).

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5. Mohammed Hassen (1994). *The Oromo of Ethiopia: History 1570-1860*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University press), pp.18-19; Informants: Abbabaa, Bogalee, Qana’a and Amanuu. Even they claim as their ancestors were found around in today Ghimbi and Qellem of West Wallagga zone. According to knowledgeable informants; Limmu Oromo at first inhabited around *Tullu Walal* (Mount Walal) in Qellem Wallagga after they evacuated from *Oda Bisil* with other Macca Oromo clans. After a while, they turn their face to the western direction to search fertile land and enough pasture for their cattle. Based on my informant view, after they stayed for unknown period at *Tullu Walal*, Limmu Oromo moved to the west direction and occupied in their present settlement areas of Limmu, Haro-Limmu and Gidda district (western part) of east Wallagga Zone.
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Citation: Fekede Sileshi Fufa. “AExpansion and Settlement of the Limmu Oromo Clan “In East Wollega” Ca,17th Century”. *American Research Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, vol 6, no. 1, 2020, pp. 1-7.

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