

Islam in the Gibe States of Ethiopia; Its Introduction, Expansion, and Consequences from c. 17th to Early 20th Century

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Abstract

The introduction and expansion of religion as all and Islam specifically had a different path in our world. In some areas, the process of expansion was not taken peacefully, while in other parts it was totally peaceful. After the introduction and expansion of Islam, the consequences were also different, in some areas the expansion of Islam changed the entire socio-political life of the people. While in some areas it changed partially or not significantly the socio-political life of the host people. This article will aim to assess the introduction, the processes of expansion and the consequences of Islam in the Gibe States of Ethiopia from the 17th Century to the early 20th Century.

Keywords: Islam, Trade, State Formation, *Jabarti*, *Afkala*

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Islam was introduced and expanded to the Horn of Africa respectively to Ethiopia into two main gateways. The first gateway was through the northern coastal areas. In the last two centuries of Aksumite kingdom, Islam has got a good condition to penetrate in the interior areas of the kingdom, due to the strong foundation of Christianity, earlier than the introduction of Islam, the penetration could not be successful.¹ The second and the most successful attempt were through the eastern coastal areas of the Horn of Africa. Because of the absence of dominant religion and intermingling of Muslim merchants with the local leaders of Oromo and Somali people, made this gateway of Islam successful.²

There is no exact year and reason behind the formation of those Gibe States by Oromo's after or during the collapse of the *Geda* system. Mainly in the first half of nineteenth-century weather, the Gibe Oromo States were formed or became well known.³ Even if there is no exact reason for their formation, there is some assumption concerning their foundation. It is believed that they were formed by their war lord's weather to control rich natural resources and trade of the region or by the contribution of both introduction and expansion of Islam to the region and the treating pressure of Amhara to the region.⁴

After the treaty between Yohannes IV and Menilek of shewa, Menilek was agreed to pay great tribute to Emperor Yohannes, in order to pay this huge tribute to the Emperor, administrating only Shewa and Wollo was not enough.⁵ The good choice to get more profit and pay the tribute was getting new means of income. The Ethiopian Caravan Trade [Long Distance with the initial place Southwest] was full of resources compared with other Sharan Caravan Trades.⁶ Then mainly in the last quarter of the nineteenth century Menilek controlled the southwest areas.⁷ The domination of Menilek to the region marked in one way other the collapses of the Gibe States.

According to my understanding, the books of Ketebo Abdiyo⁸ Mohammed Hassen⁹ the introduction and expansion of Islam to the Gibe region was not a single phenomenon, it goes step by step. Initially, the *Jabarti* ('originally the word referred to the place near to Zeila')¹⁰ created a mutual beneficiary trade with the warlords of the Gibe region.¹¹ This good relationship laid to the conversation of the small groups of the population and the coming of Muslim teachers to the region.¹²

Then those newcomers' teachers (*ulama* from Gonder and refugees due to the pressure of the Christian king on Muslims mainly from wollo)¹³ to the region started their wide preaching in the first half of the nineteenth

¹ J. Spencer Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, London, New York, Toronto, 1952, P. 60.

² Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, . . . et al, 2002, PP.35, 37.

³ Mohammed Hassen, *The Oromo of Ethiopia: A History 1570-1860*, Cambridge, 1994, P. 86.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Harold G. Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1974, P. 76. ; Sergew Hable Selassie, *Atse Menelik ('Emperor Menelik')*, Munich, 1997, P. 184.

⁶ J.D. Fage and Roland Oliver, eds, *The Cambridge History of Africa: From 1870 to 1905*, Vol VI, Cambridge, 1985, PP. 17-18.

⁷ Sergew . . . , P. 188.

⁸ He received his doctorate in History from Addis Ababa University, he is also the author of *Abba Jifar II of Jimma Kingdom 1861-1934: A biography*.

⁹ He received his doctorate in African history from London university, he is also the author of *The Oromo of Ethiopia: A History 1570-1860*.

¹⁰ Hussein Ahmed, *Islam in Nineteenth-Century Wallo, Ethiopia: Revival, Reforms and Reaction*, Leiden, 2001, P. 61.

¹¹ Mohammed, P. 151.

¹² Ketebo Abdiyo, *Abba Jifar II of Jimma Kingdom 1861-1934: A Biography*, Jimma, 2012, P. 72. ; Mohammed, P. 151.

¹³ Ketebo, P. 72-73; Mohammed, P. 158.

century.¹The effort of *Jabarti* and religious teachers shaped strong Muslim King like Abba Bagibo of Limmu-Enariya and Abba Jiffar II of Jimma.² Finally, the *jabarti*, religious teachers and Muslim kings of the region like Abba Jiffar II of Jimma, made southwest specifically Jimma kingdom the center of Islamic learning in the nineteenth century.³ But we can't neglect the efforts of each Muslim to the introduction and expansion of Islam to the Horn of Africa. Every Muslim had been [and still has] gave priority to the religion (expansion of Islam).⁴

The peoples of the Arabian Peninsula were volatilized before the rise of Islam in the seventh century,⁵ after the rise and expansion of Islam into the region, the peoples became one of the most cohesive people's ever in the history of the human being.⁶ This event also happened in the Gibe States. Some Kings of the Gibe states accepted Islam for the ideological and political purposes⁷ (its characters of both unifying the peoples and to make loyal to their kings). The kings of the Gibe region have protected the interest of the traders⁸ (both the *jabarti* from the north and the *Afkala* which was emerged after the expansion of Islam to the region). In other cases after the introduction and expansion of Islam, and the processes of the kings to protect the interest of the traders laid the region became more peaceful than ever.

The other consequence of Islam to this region was the emergence of the new class in the community. After the first Muslim *Jabarti* traders settled and intermingled with the Oromo women in Sappa the capital of Limmu-Enariya, *Afkala* (Oromo merchants of the Gibe region) emerged, and when the emergence of *Afkala* joined the fertile land of the Gibe region, it facilitated the growth of the states in the region.⁹

Because of the good relationship between the kings of the region like Abba Jifar II and the Arab World, Abba Jifar II was guaranteed land in the Holy Place of Mecca and concentrated building.¹⁰ Once it was a sign of honor to both the region and even to Ethiopia.

Moreover, the introduction and expansion of Islam to the region had a positive impact on both the social life of the people and to the formation and growth of states. What makes Islamization in Ethiopia respectively in the Gibe region unique was that due to the long-rooted tradition of Oromo people it was not succeeded by Arabization. As the region became the center of Islamic religious center and the presence of other religions, the people live together without such devastating conflicts.

Conclusion

The processes of the expansion of Islam in the Gibe States were not followed by Arabizing the people as like the case of the Northern African states. The host people preserved the culture while accepting religion. The absence of a high level of Arab migration could be taken as one of the reasons behind the absence of Arabizing in the region. The other consequence of the expansion of Islam in the region was it facilitated the state formation and fire the last bullet in the *Gada* system to the region. After the high level of expansion of the state, the *Gada* system was abolished in the region.

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¹ Mohammed, P. 151.

² Ketebo, PP. 74-75.

³ Ketebo, P. 74; Mohammed, P. 159.

⁴ Ira M., P. 22.

⁵ S.A. Nigosian, *Islam: Its History, Teaching, and Practices*, Indiana, 2004, P.4.

⁶ Laura Etheredge, Ed, *Islamic History*, New York, 2001, P. 61.

⁷ Mohammed, PP. 153-154.

⁸ *Ibid*, P.135

⁹ *Ibid*, PP. 135,101.

¹⁰ Ketebo, PP. 76,77.