



Dandii Boru School

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History Handout for Grade 9 Students

Unit Six

The Christian Kingdom and Peoples and States in the Rest of the Ethiopian Region

(1543-1855)

6.1. Catholicism and the Christian Kingdom

- ❖ The Portuguese soldiers, who helped the Christian kingdom to gain victory over the Adal Muslim Sultanate, remained in Ethiopia.
- ❖ Other Portuguese Catholic missionaries who know under the name **Jesuits or the Society of Jesus** came to preach Catholicism in Ethiopia in 1557.
 - The aim of the Jesuits was to convert the people into Catholicism.
 - As a preliminary to this, they strove to convert the Christian kings into Catholicism.
 - It was at first emperor Gelawdewos whom the Jesuits tried to convert but they failed to do so due to the emperor's unwillingness.
 - Nevertheless, they were successful in getting the conversion of king **Susenyos** (1607-1632) in 1612.
 - King Susenyos embraced Catholicism with the hope of gaining military support from Portugal in return for his conversion.
 - The declaration of Catholicism as the official state religion in 1622 triggered a widespread opposition among the peasantry, the nobility and the Orthodox clergy.
 - The king at first was able to suppress the revolts and some major changes began to introduce in the Orthodox Church practices.
 - The peasants, the nobility and the Orthodox clergy made an alliance against the Catholics so as to save their orthodox faith.

- As a result, a bloody civil war that perished about eight thousand peasant's brokeout between the Catholics lead by the king and the coalitional force of the peasants, the nobility and the Orthodox clergy.
- The civil war became so catastrophic that the king decided to abdicate his throne in favor of his son **Fasiladas or Fasil** (1632-1667) in order to avert further bloodshed.
- Shortly after he came to power, Fasilades restored the Orthodox faith and expelled the Jesuits from Ethiopia.
- He went on to the extent of pursuing a policy that restricted Europeans entry into Ethiopia.
- However, Fasilades established a friendly relationship with adjoining Muslim states like Swakin and Yemen.

6.2. The Gondar Period

- ❖ The Gonder period is a period in Ethiopian history in which the rulers of Ethiopia ruled their kingdom from a capital called Gondar.
- Emperor Fasiladas was credited for founding Gondar in 1636.
- Gondar had a strategic importance as it was found on the long distance trade route that linked the southwestern regions with Massawa on the Red sea and Mettema on the Ethio-Sudanese border.
- The founding of Gondar as a permanent capital marked the termination of mobile capitals.
- ❖ Gondar was a capital which well known for its architectural achievements and building technology.
- There had been kings in Gondar who built very beautiful castles as palaces in different times.
- Gondar was also a city where churches, bridges, traditional schools and swimming pools were found.
- The golden age of Gondar was witnessed during the reigns of king **Fasiladas** (1632-1667), king **Yohannis I** (1667-1682) and king **Iyasu I** (1682-1706).

- ❖ Although it is not identically the same with that of modern urban centers, Gondar had certain characteristics of urban areas.
 - Gondar was inhabited by about 70,000 people.
 - Gondar had a heterogeneous population.
 - It also served as a market center for merchants, crafts and rural people who came up with their respective products.
 - The merchants who frequently visited Gondar were Ethiopian Muslims called **Jeberti**.
 - There were also the **Bete Israel (Felasha)** who engaged in craft works such as masonry, pottery, basketry and iron works.
 - The residence place of the Muslim communities in Gondar was known as **Addis Alem**.
 - The Felasha and other foreign communities had also their own separate living quarters in Gondar.
 - Laborers in Gondar received cash payments.

- ❖ There were several factors that attributed to the decline in importance of Gondar.
 - There was political instability and social riots in the city.
 - The last years of Gondar was characterized by the poisoning and assassinating of kings and princes.
 - Owing to their military incapability, the kings could not bring stability in Gondar.
 - The rise of regional warlords and their pressure on the kings in Gondar led to the decline in importance of the city.

Etege Mentewab

- Mentewab was born in **Quara** and as a wife of king **Bakafa** (1721-30) she became powerful towards the end of the Gondarian period.
- She got the opportunity to participate in the Gondarian politics when her husband died and became a regent for her son **Iyasu II** (1720-55).
- She ruled Ethiopia with the cover of regent for more than forty years.
- The assistance she received from her brother, **Welde Leul**, led her to give him the then powerful title of **Ras Bitwedded**.

- Mentewab's political importance was declined with the came into the scene of a powerful lord of Tigray known as **Ras Michael Sehul**.

6.3. The Zemene Mesafint or the Era of Warlords or Princes (1769-1855)

- ❖ On the eve of the advent of the Zemen Mesafint, there was an intense power struggle between the **Wollo Oromo** and **Quara** parties from 1767 until 1769.
- The Wallo faction was led by the wife of king Iyasu II and mother of **Iyoas** (son and successor of Iyasu II and was ruled from 1755-1769), **Wabi** (in some books she is also called **Wubit**).
- The Quara group was spearheaded by Etege Mentewab, mother in law of Wabi (Wubit) and grandmother of Iyoas
- The death of Ras Bitwedde Welde Leul (brother of Itege Mentewab) in 1769 blow the starting whistle of the power struggle between these two groups.
- It was Mentewab who arranged the marriage between Wabi (Wubit) and her son, Iyasu II so as to gain the military support of the Wollo Oromo.
- The increase of the power of the Wollo Oromo in the Gondarian politics, however, threatened the power of Mentewab and she began to look another strong ally.
- Mentewab then resorted to the then powerful governor of Tigray, Ras Michael Sehul who had a well-equipped and strong army.
- Mentewab persuaded Michael Sehul to come to Gondar and to pacify oppositions that endangered here role in the Gondarian politics.
- Ras Michael shell came up with his strong army and suppressed all oppositions.
- The prestigious title of Ras Bitwaddad was given to Michael Sehul but he wanted more than that.
- In the meantime, Michael Sehul got Iyoas killed in 1769 and this enabled him to exercise really power on behalf of the late king.
- Michael Sehul appeared to become a king maker (enthroned and dethroned kings) since 1769 and this event heralded the beginning in Ethiopian history of the Zemene Mesafint which covered the period from 1769 until 1855.

- Later in 1771 at the battle of Sabrakussa, Michael Sehul suffered a defeat by the coalitional force of Wollo and Quara.
- ❖ The departure of Michael Sehul was followed by political instability but the ascendancy to power of a Yejju Oromo known as **Ali Gwangul (Ali I)** and his founding of a new ruling dynasty called the **Yejju or the Warra Sheh** dynasty, brought stability.
- The Yejju dynasty was able to exercise power on behalf of the puppet kings from 1786 to 1853.
- The rulers of Gojjam, Tigris and Semein accepted the suzerainty of the Yejju lords.
- ❖ The powerful lord among the Yejju rulers was **Ras Gugsu** (r.1803-1825).
- Gugsu was able to overcome the challenges he encountered from Tigris. Semein and Gojjam by diplomatic and military means.
- There was relative peace and stability during Gugsu's rule.
- He was died in 1825.
- ❖ The death of Gugsu brought about political instability and power struggle.
- The ruler of Semien, **Dejazmach Haile Mariam**, fought against **Ras Yimam** (1825-1828), son and successor of Ras Gugsu, but was defeated in 1826.
- Ras Yimam met his death in 1828 and succeeded by his brother Ras Marye.
- ❖ Following his brother victory over **Dejazmach Goshu of Gojjam** and **Dejazmach Maru of Fenja** at the battle of **Kosso Ber** in October 1827, Marye decided to put an end to the Tigrean threat.
- Ras Marye of the Yejju dynasty and **Sebagadis** (1822-1831) of Tigris fought against each other at the battle of **Mai Isma, (May Aslamay)**, near Debra Abbai in the beginning of 1831.
- The victory went to Ras Marye but he was killed during the battle.
- Soon after this victory, Sebagadis was also notoriously executed in retaliation for the death of Marye.
- At this military engagement, Wube who succeeded Haile Mariam of Semein, fought on the side of Ras Marye.

- ❖ The Yejju lords were able to be dominant until **Dejazmach Kassa Hailu**, the future **Tewodros II**, defeated the last lord of the Yejju dynasty, **Ras Ali Alula (Ali II)** at the battle of **Ayeshal** in 1853.
- ❖ The successive Yejju rulers names and their period of rule listed hereunder:-
 1. **Ras Ali Gwangul (Ali I) (r.1786-1788)**
 2. **Ras Aligaz (r.1788-1803)**
 3. **Ras Gugsa (r.1803-1825)**
 4. **Ras Yimam (r.1825-1828)**
 5. **Ras Marye (r.1828-1831)**
 6. **Ras Ali Alula (Ali II), (r.1831-1853)**
- ❖ There were several factors that instigated the warlords of the Zemene mesafint to wage war against each other.
 - The competition to assume the powerful title of Ras Bitweded and then to become king maker.
 - The need for large human and material resources.
 - The attractive tribute that could be gain for exercising power on behalf of the weak kings.
- ❖ The Zemene Mesafint was also witnessed religious controversy within the Orthodox Church.
 - There were different doctrines such as **Tsega Lij or Sost Lidet, Wold Qib or Karra Haymanot** and **Hulet Lidet or Qibat**.
 - The doctrine of Sost Lidet was professed in Shewa, whereas, the theories of Karra Hymanot, and Hulet Lidet were advocated in Tigray and Gojjam respectively.
 - The doctrinal controversy had a paramount significance in the weakening of the Ethiopian state during the Zemene Mesafint.
- ❖ The consequences of the Zemene Mesafint
 - The wars of the Zemene Mesafint had a direct impact on the local peasantry in that it forced them to feed the big armies of the warlords.
 - There was a sharp decline in trade during the Zemene Mesafint due to the insecurity of the trade routes.

6.4. Peoples and states in the Southern, Western, Central and Eastern

Ethiopian Region

6.4.1. Southern States

❖ Kaffa

- As we have seen in unit three, kaffa was one of the polities that emerged in the southern part of Ethiopia.
- Kaffa was able to defend itself from the Oromo expansion and movement of the 16th century.
- The ruling dynasty of Kaffa was called the **Minjo dynasty**.
- The kingdom of Kaffa became powerful and well known in the Ethiopian region in the 17th century.
- The kings of Kaffa had a title known as **Tato**.
- The introduction of Christianity into Kaffa was attributed to the influence of the neighboring state of Enareya
- Although Christianity introduced into Kaffa, it was confined to the royal family and the majority of the people perpetuated the practice of traditional religions.
- Kaffa had a council of advisors called **Mikrecho** who responsible for consulting the king, involved in the administration and the maintenance of law and order in the kingdom.
- The kingdom of Kaffa's economy was heavily depended on agriculture and trade.
- Kaffa was a resourceful kingdom that contributed trading items such as ivory, mask, honey, coffee, slaves and gold to the Ethiopian trade.
- The independent status of Kaffa came to an end in 1897 whene emperor Menelik II incorporated the state into the Ethiopian empire.

Wolayta

- Walayta was a kingdom that appeared in the southern part of Ethiopia.
- The kingdom of Walayta had continued to be tributary state to the Christian Kingdom until probably the outbreak of the wars of Ahmed Grag.

- Like the kingdom of Kaffa, Walayta was able to secure its kingdom from the Oromo advance.
 - Walayta was successful in exerting massive influence on the Omotic and Cushitic peoples of the south.
 - The title of the kings of Walayta was known as **Kawo**.
 - The main economic activity of the kingdom of Walayta was agriculture.
 - The kingdom of Walayta's products comprises Ensat(false banana), wheat, maize, barely, coffee, tobacco and cotton.
 - The force of the last king of Walayta, **Kawo Tona** fought a disastrous war against emperor Menelik's army and suffered a defeat in 1894.
 - After its defeat, Walayta became part of the Ethiopian empire under emperor Menelik II.
- ❖ There were also other states that flourished in southern Ethiopia, namently, Yem, Dawro, Konta, Gamo, Gota and Hadiya.

The Gibe Oromo States

- ❖ There were five small Oromo states that emerged in the Gibe region, namely, **Lemmu-Enareya, Jimma, Gumma, Gomma and Gera**.
- ❖ The Gibe River was the birth place of these small Oromo states.
- ❖ The early state that emerged in the Gibe region was the state of Limmu Enarya.
- The state of Limmu Gnarya appeared in an area where the former kingdom of Enarya had been existed.
 - The state was located in a strategic position and thereby it was able to possess the long distance trade.
 - The center or capital of the state of Limmu Emarya was known as **Saqa**.
 - The formative years of Limmu Enarya was witnessed in the first half of the 19th c.
 - **Abba Bagibo or Ibsa** (r.1825-1861) was an outstanding ruler or Limmu Enarya.
- ❖ Another powerful Oromo state that had appeared on the Giber River was the state of Jimma.

- Jimma was so powerful during its ruler **Sanna or Aba Jifar I** (r.1830-1855) that it became well known.
 - The state of Jimma's power was emanated from the unity Islam gave to it and the income it acquired from the coffee and slave trade.
 - Jimma was one of those states who peacefully submitted to the overlordship of emperor Menelik II in 1881.
 - Although Jimma incorporated into Menelik's empire, it continued to enjoy internal autonomy.
- ❖ Among the other Gibe Oromo states the state of Gumma can be mentioned.
- It was believed that the state of Gumma was founded in the first decade of the 19th c.
 - The state of Gumma became political vital when its powerful ruler **Oncho Jilcha** came to power.
 - Gumma was able to score victories after victories during its war against neighboring states.
- ❖ The state of Gomma was a state that emerged on the Gibe River.
- Gomma was believed to be well known since 1820.
 - The state of Gomma had a powerful ruler known as **Abba Mano**.
 - Gomma was the first among the Gibe Oromo states to embrace Islam.
- ❖ Finally, we have the Gibe Oromo state of Gera which became popular since around 1835.
- The powerful ruler of Gera was called **Tullu Gunji**.
 - Tullu Gunji was known for his military and administrative skills.
 - The state of Gera had engaged in war against Jimma.

Western States

- ❖ There were two Oromo states that flourished in the Wallaga region. They were **Leqa Naqamte and Leqa Qellem**.

❖ **Leqa Naqamte**

- The state of Lega Naqame was a state founded by an Oromo chief known as **Bakare Godana**
- Bakare was succeeded by **Moroda** and **Kumsa** respectively.

❖ **Leqa Qellem**

- Lega Qellem was believed to have formed by a Qellem chief called **Tullu**.
- The son and successor of Tullu, **Jote** was able to make the state of Lega Qellem powerful
- The cores of the state of Lega Qellem economy were agriculture and trade.

- ❖ The Muslim states of **Aqoldi (Asosa), Benishangul and Khomosha** were among the states that established on the Ethio- Sudanese Border.

Eastern States

❖ **Harar**

- Harar had been center of Islamic studies and the sultanate of Adal for more than two centuries.
- The Harari dynasty played a pivotal role in the formation of the emirate (state) of Harar.
- **Emir Ali Ibn Dawd** (r.1647-1662) was the ruler of Harar who founded the Harari dynasty.
- As in the past, Harar continued to be the center of Islamic culture and political power.
- The emirate of Harar was prospered by the trade routes of the Gulf of Aden and the coastal areas of the Indian Ocean.
- Harar put under the yoke of Egyptian occupation from 1875 until 1885.
- Although the former Harari dynasty restored to the Harar throne after the Egyptian evacuation in 1885, it was defeated and Harar was added to the Ethiopian empire by emperor Menelik II in 1887.

❖ **Awsa**

- Another Muslim Sultanate that established in the eastern part of Ethiopian was the state of Awsa.
- The Muslim Sultanate of Awsa was ruled by the **Walasma dynasty** which formed by Adal.
- The Oromo expansion and movement drove the Adal rulers out of Harar in 1577 and they placed in Awasa where they continued their rule.
- The Walasma rulers at first were strong enough to control Harar from Awsa but with the establishment of a new local dynasty by Emir Ali Ibn Dawd, the walasma lost control over Harar.
- The kings of Awasa were known under the title **Sultan**.

Central State

❖ **The Shewan Kingdom**

- Shewa was a kingdom that founded in the central highlands of Ethiopia.
- It had been part and center of the Christian kingdom.
- Shewa was able to isolate itself from the Christian kingdom.
- The kingdom of Shewa was founded by a local chief known as **Negasi Kristos** in a place called **Menz** in the 17th c or early 18th c.
- Shewa was neutral during the wars of the Zemene Mesafint and thereby it had the chance to build its kingdom.
- The Shewan kings used to have capitals such as **Ankober** and **Doqaqit**.
- During its gifted leader, **Sahle Selassie** (r.1813-1847), Shewa was able to expand its territory into several regions of Ethiopia.
- Shewa was so stable that it attracted foreign countries such as **Britain** and **France** to start diplomatic relations with it.