

# Depredation of Socio-Culture in Abbaychoman Oromo Undergojame Rule, North East Wallaga, Ethiopia (1870's-1882)



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## Abstract

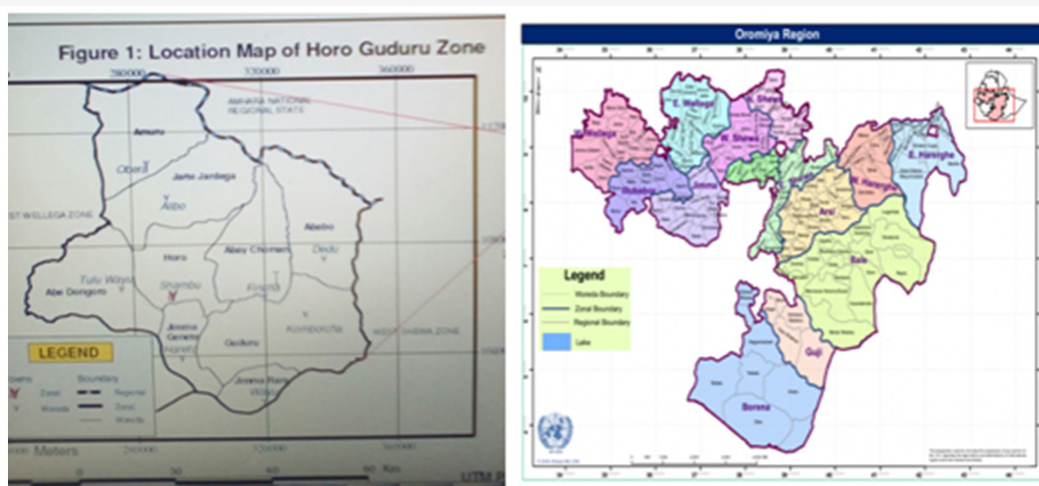
This study deals with the socio- cultural change of the Oromo of AbbayiChoman district from 1870's-1882. The year 1870's was a turning point in the history of the Oromo of AbbayiChoman because it was a period when the system was transformed into semi- monarchical administration. While the year 1882 was the period when HoroGuduru in general AbbayiChoman in particularly came under Menelik Empire. This paper focused on reconstructing the socio-cultural change of Oromo of AbbayChoman from 1870's-1882. In short, the main objective of the thesis is to show the socio- cultural condition of the peoples in the context of change in policy and administration system of Gojjame. The thesis showed how the indigenous socio-cultural system of the Oromo of AbbayiChoman has been affected by invasion of Gojjame. Thus this paper states that the socio-economic changes made by the alien rulers who were arrived there from Gojjam.

**Keywords:** Gadaa; AbbayChoman; Macha oromo; Gojjame

## Introduction

Abbayi Choman district is one of the districts found in HoroGuduru zone. The district is located 48 km East of Shambu town, the capital of Horro Guduru Wallaga zone, Oromiya regional state, Ethiopia and 98km north of Gedo town, which is found in western Shewa zone along Addis Abeba-Nekemte road. The district shared boundaries with Hababo Guduru and Jardega Jarte district in the north, Horro district in the west, Hababo Guduru and Guduru in the east. Major rivers such as Nashe,

Amarti and Fincha meet in the northern margin of the district Figure 1. The district has a total area of about 79,126km<sup>2</sup> out of which cultivated land covers 28.4%, forest 13%, grass lands 6.1%, bush and shrubs 17.4%, wet land water bodies 17.5%, cultivable land 16.6% and bare land together with built up area covered 3.1% of the district land [1]. AbbaChoman district in its Zone setting HoroGuduru in its regional setting Oromiya Region in its national setting [2].



**Figure 1:** The location of Abbay Choman district in the map of Horo Guduru Zone.

The inhabitants of HoroGuduru in general and Abbayi Choman district in particular belongs to the Macha Oromo, Borana Oromo branch who were separated from the Barentu probably long before the 16th c [3,4]. Historically, the Oromo had homogenous culture, common socio-political and economic

organizations embodied in the Gada system. Practically, the Gada system has been an egalitarian socio- political, economic and religious system. Essentially, the system has been the constitution of the Oromo society through which the people administered themselves, defended their territory, maintained and developed their economy [5-9]. Like other clans of Oromo, Jawwi Oromo of HorroGuduru were ruled by Gada system and had established their Gada center at Odaa Bulluq, about 10km west of Shambu town which its foundation can be traced to the early 17th century [10-11]. This Gada system continued until the 1850's when the system was transformed in to semi-monarchical administration [6].

Nevertheless, all these laws of Gada system regarding different crime were declined later on. As the Gada system declined and the power of the AbbabBokku was taken over by the Mootii (kings) and later by the Gojjame conquerors, the use of Kallacha was diminished. The appeal for peace to the Gada officials Abbab Kallacha was turned to the chiefs and later to the established court [12-15]. Therefore, with the arrival of the Gojjame to the Macha land in general AbbayChoman Oromo in particular the indigenous socio- cultural system such as indigenous religion and burial practices of the peoples were changed. In addition the property of Oromo was confiscated and they were forced to feed Gojjame settlers.

## Materials and Method

In this research, the researchers used both primary and secondary data sources. Secondary data sources were collected by assessing published and unpublished materials. To collect primary data, the researchers employed individual interviews as well as discussions with the key informants. Historical reconstruction on a certain topic of oral community requires a close assessment of oral traditions using the available written sources for cross-checking [16] argues that, "All human history is oral in origin." Since the 1960s in Africa in general and in Ethiopia in particular significant uses of oral traditions have made the reconstruction of people's past possible. Therefore, the current importance of oral traditions in the studies of African peoples in general and the Oromo in particular attests the relevance of oral sources. In this research, the available oral traditions were used as sources of data in reconstructing the socio-cultural change in Oromo of Abbay Choman under Gojjame rule. After that, the data would be described, expressed and articulated qualitatively. All the data would be analyzed carefully and interpreted in accordance with the standardized canons of the social science disciplines based on the nature of information obtained.

## Socio-cultural change under gojjame rule in 1870's

Expansion of christianity in place of indigenous religion: The Oromo of AbbayiChoman had good working habits before the arrival of Gojjame and introduction of Orthodox Church. Formerly the peasants of the area had worked throughout the week except on Sundays, the day of reconciliation for the quarreled persons and visiting sick persons. Before the introduction of Orthodox religion to the area the Oromo people had their own religion. The Oromo under Gada system believed in single Supreme Being called Waaqa or Uma. Waaqa for all Oromo behaviors was one and the same. The Supreme Being Waaqa governed the daily life of an individual [17,7-8].

MakooBilli was a person who drafted laws for the Oromo people of Wallagga for the first time. MakoBilli was then said to have come to the forum and declared laws for the people. Some of these laws were as follows:

- i. Market must be once in a week.
- ii. The feast of the holy cross should be done once a year.

Buttaa must be once in eight years in accordance with the tradition. The court must be held in a field rather than on the top of the gorge. A bull must be used for breeding. An ox must be used for ploughing Livestock must be the property of those who raised them. Qabiyyee must be for the one who draw it first Forest honey must be exploited by the one who first got it [18], this person drafts laws of religion, social, cultural and economy. For a long period of time Oromo of AbbayChoman were lived with this indigenous religion, culture and the others. However, the conquest of the region by Gojjame abolished the indigenous religion of Wallaga Oromo in general AbbayiChoman Oromo in particular.

## Destruction of oromo indigenous working habits

However, the introduction of Orthodox Christianity affected this working habit in the region while the peasants were prevented from working on numerous religious days observed by Orthodox Christianity in the name of different Arks of covenant even not established in the area. Before the conquest of the 1870s it is not clear how much Christianity was strong south of Abay. But it is said that many Christians and Muslim had existed in Guduru since 1840s. Initially it was introduced to the neighbor district Guduru from Gojjam. Thus Guduru became the first to abandon Gada. Many people converted to Christianity at this time. From Guduru the people who abandon Gada got the land and position. But those who refused were evicted and fled to neighboring area of AbbayiChoman from Guduru.

However, for those who accept Christianity and abandon Gada got additional land and extend their former territory. Christianity then spread to Horo and other areas from there. Before the battle of Embabo in 1882, the Gojjame succeeded in building five churches in Guduru and one in Jimma Rare.

These churches were EmbaboTekle Haymanot, Qawo Maryam, QawoGiorgis, Ichara Abu, IlamuSillasie and Loya Maryam. The priests who followed the Gojjame troops to provide religious services began evangelization. The merchants are also said to have served the clergy as spy. The clergy men soon after the occupation began propagating Christianity and evangelization. At the beginning it was obligatory for the chiefs and other people to attend church ceremonies and to bury the dead at the distant churches since only three churches were built during earlier Gojjame rule in HorroGuduru.

The first three Orthodox Churches established in Horro were AbboTarii at the area called Daragoti on the land of Amanu Abiishe, AbboD ongoro at AbeeDongoro and Barjii Maryam on TulluuBarjii. Instead of learning Gada rules and regulations with different rights and duties at OdaaBulluq which was the usual practice before the conquest, people were forced to attend Church education. As the influence of Orthodox Christianity strengthened and its dogma was deeply rooted the Oromo themselves became the agents for the further expansion of the religion. Particularly the Oromo chiefs played an important role in the expansion of the church building. Initially when the number of churches were few the converts were obliged to make a long trip of a day or more to attend church ceremonies or to bury the dead. However, to reduce this hard ship the Oromo chiefs began to bring new Arks of covenant from Gojjam with priests, who gave Church education to the servants of the Oromo chiefs. In addition whenever the Oromo captives were carried to Gojjam they were converted in to Orthodox Christianity and some of them who happened to live in the homesteads of influential families were able to join the traditional Church education.

Such individuals later on become important agents in the expansion of the religion in HorroGuduru. According to tradition after the battle of Kokor (1876/77) Gojjame established different churches in the district to abolish Gada system. These Churches were established at Gada center. Though, they established Michael Church at Birbirsaboru. Birbirsaboru was a Gada centre of Akako clan. Therefore the people shifted the Gadacenter to Achane. However, the Gojjame established St. Marry Church at Achane. At Birbirsaboru they took two Qalad of land in the form of Itanazur. Their army also stationed near to the Church and the place today known as Godo Amara. However, the people continued to resist the establishment of the Church there and refused to accept the religion. Some people burnt down the church and killed the priests.

These peoples were: SanbataGanjii, ImamaGashe, Kasasa, Dhibba Fayyisa, Dheresa Hordofa and Abbashu Bushan. These people burnt the church, killed the priests and put the arks of covenant to the road. These peoples were unable to live in the area after they take the above measures. These harsh measures took by the local people unable to stop the construction of the Church in the district. As revenge the Gojjame soldiers took harsh measure on the local people. They burnt down the house,

property and killed many people. For instance the families of DagaHorro were burnt at whole in their house. The attending of Gada system was strictly restricted. They forced the local people to be baptized their families and accept Orthodox Christianity.

### **Destruction of indigenous oromo burial practice**

On the other hand, the Oromo in the area had their own burial places prior to the introduction of the new religions. It was took place neither Churchly nor in Mosque. Each tribe or village or single family had their own burial place in common that was very near their homestead (qee'e). The burial places were named after either the first person buried or the elder member of the family. For example the land at which the hand of BayyanBoja buried was named today lafabiiyooBayyan (the soil place of Bayyan). The person known as Dajo (AbbaGada) of the district told to the people not to mix his dead body with the Amhara's and not to be buried at the Church when he was died. For this reason the people buried him on his own lands. The indicated how much the Oromo peoples of AbbayiChoman were against and strongly hated the new religion.

However, the culture was abandoned when TekleHaymanot declared that dead bodies not to be buried under trees. If the dead person was more than one year, they were forced to bury at the Church. The declaration created hard ship for the local people because there were only one or two churches throughout a district or a clan territory. In Horro ingeneral only three Churchs have been built which are very far apart. These are AbboTarii at Daragoti in the area of AbbayiChoman, AbboDongoro at AbeeDongoro and Barjii Maryam in Jarte.

Once the Oromo people have been denied their traditional burial places due to the declaration made by TekleHaymanot, they were forced to make a long trip of a day or more to bury the dead or to attend the church ceremonies. Such hard ships encouraged the people to develop hatred for the new religion on one hand and had encouraged the local chiefs and peoples to build more churches on the other. The Church was started to be constructed near to all clans in the area. For half of the Ganjiiclan one church was established, for the Achane Abboo Church established at Barto, for Gobayya clan they established Tekle Haymanot church at the seat of Abiishee Garba.

### **Confiscation of property and forceful quartering of Gojjame settlers**

The type of food provided to them was another point of conflict between the local peasants and the Gojjame soldiers. An important cultural food and favorable food for HorroGuduru Oromo is called Cumbo. In other words of the local people: combo on isalaatukan kabachiisu, isanyaatu kangammachii sunyaataa adaati (lit. Cumbo is a cultural food that gives respect for the provider and satisfaction for the feeder). This cultural food is never free from daily products (butter and sour milk or baaduu). This was due to the fact that there was no food restriction among the society throughout the year.

However, the already arrived Gojjame soldiers who adopted to fast two days every week and long fasting days, which varied from fifteen days to two months, faced great challenge while the local peasants provided them food with milk and butter including those days. They appealed to the Meslane demanding compensation for the days that they had already passed without food. The Meslane in turn reported to the balab bats through which the peasants punished for the days that the Gojjame soldiers did not feed. The payment was either in cattle or a number of soogidda (bar salt).

Cuumboothe cultural food which prepared for the Gojjame was very thick. If not they faced punishment. To eat food from the dish the Gojjame were paid. The Oromo people took the Gojjame chiefs by mule in to their house turn by turn. When they reach in front of the house they took money from Oromo people before they dismount the mule. They got one Xagaraa (Maria Theresa taler) on the mule, two Xagaraa when they stand from the back of the mule, three Xagaraa when they dismount, to get in to the house take five Xagaraa. At this time money was paid for every activity of Gojjame chiefs. Next day he appeals the service he got from the Oromo people (house) to their master. If they were not satisfied with what they get, the people were punished.

There is a poem by Oromo peoples of AbbayiChoman which expressed how much they were oppressed the feudalist ruler:

Oromo

Kansareennyattunyaanne We ate what dogs eat  
KanHarreenbaattubaanne

Gloss

We carried what the donkey carries.

The defeat of Gojjame at Embabo ended their further expansion to south and south west. It seems three years after the battle that the Gojjame increased the number of army to maintain the political and economic control in HorroGuduru.

They arrived under the system called Mirit, which allowed quartering fixed number of soldiers to a given house holds. However, they preferred strategic and unoccupied areas than settling the Oromo villages. This was due to the fact that opposition from the local people was not yet ended as clearly seen during the battle of Embabo. Thus, Tekle Haymanot gave the Oromo of HorroGuduru to his armed settlers. The soldiers were neither paid salary nor engaged in productive activities. Rather they were given Oromo peasants in lieu of salary. During the early period of their settlement, the army garrisons in one center were getting their daily food from the house of their hosts. They took the property of the peasants and even ordered them to bring what they wish to eat or drink that might not available in the circumstances that the Oromo of the region expressed the settler's behavior through their best saying:

Oromo

Amaarrikanijaanargitedhuunfaaisheeti  
taken as their private property

Kanijaanhinargiinimmoqixceedha

regarded as kept in reserve for future grabbing

Gloss

All things Amhara saw with their eyes is

However, which they could not see is

In addition to confiscation of their valuable properties in and around homestead, the unruly behaviors of Gojjame soldiers manifested through raping the daughters and wives of the peasants. Thus the peasants appealed the case to the local balabats and proposed to change the system. Apparently, this caused the introduction of new system through which the host carried the necessary supply to where his soldier's quartered soldiers were garrisoned. The loss of both their cattle and its product as punishment and ration respectively forced the local peasants to take serious measure over the soldiers and running away from the areas to LeqaNaqamte and LeqaQelam where relatively free from the system. Their defeat at the battle of Embabo and the arrival of Mahadist army at Gondar in the late 1880's were the factor that took the attention of TekleHaymanot from strengthening his power in the region. This two events added to local opposition hindered effective rule of Gojjame in the region [9].

## Conclusion

I have attempted to document in this paper the socio-political change of Abbayi Choman Oromo from 1870's-1882. Abbayi Choman Oromo's are one of the Macha Oromo branch found in HoroGuduru Wallagga zone, Oromiya regional state, Ethiopia. A history of the Oromo of HorroGuduru begins with their separation from the larger Macha Oromo and departure from Tute Bisil (Gadacenter of Macha Oromo) before they were separated and made their center Odaa Bulluq.

Even though the socio-cultural significance of Gada centers in region began to decline by the local Oromo chiefs themselves, the institution was influential in different aspects until the year 1870's. The power of the Abbaa Bokkuu was taken over by the Mootii (kings) and later by the Gojjame conquerors and the use of Kallacha was diminished in 1850's and 1870's respectively. Systematic efforts were made by the Gojjame to destroy the indigenous socio-culture of the peoples. Thus the Gojjame purposefully camped at near the Gada centers seeking the gradual destruction of it and become successful in destroying indigenous Oromo socio-cultural system. Therefore, with the arrival of the Gojjame to the Macha land in general AbbayChoman Oromo in particular the indigenous socio- cultural system such as indigenous religion and indigenous burial places of the peoples were changed. In addition the property of Oromo was



confiscated and they were forced to feed Gojjame settlers at the time of occupation.

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