

ISLAM STATE AND SOCIETY IN ETHIOPIA: A BIBLIOGRAPHIC ESSAY

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Abstract

This study examines selected works on Islam, Muslim communities, and the Ethiopian state from early times to twentieth centuries. It is evident that Islam and Muslim communities have been an integral part of the Ethiopian societies since its introduction to the country, but it is one of the less studied thematic areas in the Ethiopian historiography. Although there is steadily increment of research on Islam, Muslim communities and Muslim spaces in Ethiopia, the historical lacuna is still apparent in studying and understanding Islam and Muslims in Ethiopian history and culture, especially in northwest provinces of the country such as Gondar. The study applies survey of the available sources on the topic under consideration. It examines both available primary and secondary sources. The examined sources show the significance of Islamic culture and its adherents in the Ethiopian state.

Key words: Muslim Spaces, Muslim communities, Islam, Ethiopian state

Introduction

Islam in Ethiopia is as ancient as the Arab peninsula itself. It reached Ethiopia before it was a religion of much of Arabia, its birth place.¹ It

1 Hussein Ahmed , "Reflections on Historical and Contemporary Islam in Ethiopia and Somalia: A Comparative and Contrastive Overview", *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 1and 2 2007, p. 263-276; Idem, "Coexistence and/or Confrontation?: towards reappraisal of the

has rich history and culture for Ethiopia and its people. Although Islam and Muslim communities are endowed with rich history, it is one of the least studied themes in the Ethiopian historiography. The late Islamic historian Hussein Ahmed in his article, "Historiography of Islam in Ethiopia," *Journal of Islamic Studies*, VI, I (1992), pp.15-46, emphasizes that Islam has not been studied well to understand Ethiopia fully or partially. Over the past few years, both Ethiopianists and Ethiopian scholars essentially have been interested in court politics, state, the history of great men and the church. Ethiopia is identified by many scholars as a religiously homogenous Christian entity.² However, in the words of Hussein "in spite of the preponderance of Christianity as a state religion ... Ethiopia had historically been a heterogeneous society ... and Muslim elements of equal historical standing."³ Likewise, Abdussamad argues that "it is true that the Ethiopian highlands were dominated by Christianity, it is equally right that the highlands possessed a permanent indigenous Muslim minorities."⁴

What is lacking in the existing literature on Islam is the study of internal developments and reversing the preconceived perspectives and generalizations. There is a need to explore local history based on

Christian Muslim encounter in contemporary Ethiopia" , *Journal of region in Africa* , Vol.36,2006,p.5; S. Trimmingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, London: Frank Cass (1952), 1954, p.44-46; see also Shaalini L.V.Ranasinghe, "The castle of Emperor Fasiladas: Missionaries, Muslims, and architecture in Gondar, Ethiopia", PhD Dissertation, Columbia University, 2001, p.1; since ancient times thanks to its location along the Red Sea , the middle east , the Mediterranean world and Indian Ocean , the Ethiopian region has long been considered one of the world's most fascinating cross roads.

- 2 Patrick Desplat and Terje Østebø, *Muslim Ethiopia The Christian Legacy, Identity Politics, and Islamic Reformism* (Edited)by Patrick Desplat and Terje Østebø , Palgrave Macmillan , 2013 ,pp.1-5.
- 3 Hussein Ahmed, "Historiography of Islam in Ethiopia", *Journal of Islamic Studies* (VI.3. No.1, 1992), p.16.
- 4 Abdussamad H. Ahmad, "Muslims of Gondar 1864-1941: In: *Annales d'Ethiopie*. Volume 16, 2000. p. 162.

indigenous sources. The significance of Islam as a cohesive factor in Ethiopian society has been overlooked, and thus, needs redressing the issue.

Some Works on Islam in Ethiopia

Hussein's book, *Islam in Nineteenth Century Wallo, Ethiopia: Revival, Reform and Reaction*, (Brill: Leiden, 2001) is an insightful work on regional Islam. Even though the book focuses on Wallo, one of the central provinces of Ethiopia, it has considerable relevance to understand how Islam introduced into the coast and the interior such as east, southeast, central and the northern provinces. In his book, Hussein also emphasized the role of the Ethiopian Muslim merchant clerics for the introduction and expansion of the religion into different part of the country. The evolution of Islam, the nature, characteristics, and its relationship with Orthodox Christianity, the state and indigenous belief systems are painstakingly discussed. For Hussein, Ethiopia is a county, where Muslims and Christians enjoyed co-existence and interdependence. From such perspective Hussein's book is unequivocally essential to understand Islam and Ethiopian culture and the nature of religious co-existence and interdependence with Christian community in the country.

Hussein has also produced good quality academic works such as "History of Islam in Ethiopia", *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, 2007, Vol.3, pp. 204-206; Hussein Ahmed and Alexandro Gori, "Islam" *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica* edited by Siegbert Uhlig, Harrassowitz Verlag Wiesbaden, 2007, Vol. 3, pp.198-202; "Aksum in Muslim Historical Tradition", *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol. 29, No.2.(1996), pp.48-49; "Coexistence and/or Confrontation?: Towards a Reappraisal of Christian Muslim Encounter in Contemporary Ethiopia", *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol, 36, no. 1, (2006), pp. 4-22. They all have considerable relevance to understand the evolution of Islam and Muslims in Ethiopia and adjacent areas. Jonathan Miran, "Historical overview of Islam in Eritrea" *Die Welt des Islams*, New Series, Vol. 45, Issue 2 (2005), pp. 177-215 is invaluable study to understand the centrality of the location of

Ethiopia adjacent to the Red Sea region that is responsible for the prevalence of continuous cultural diffusion in both side of the Sea. Though, the introduction of Islam in Ethiopia was attributed to missionary work and commercial factors, it was also highly influenced by geography and age-old cultural contacts.

Another earlier major work on the early introduction and spread of Islam is by S. Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, London: Frank Cass (1952), pp.42-46. It is one of the earliest scholarly contributions on Islam in Ethiopia. The book is comprehensive and surveys the various aspects of the history and institutions of the Islamic people of northeast Africa as a whole. In Ethiopia the early history of Islam, the role of Muslim traders, clerics in the introduction and spread of Islam in the country is markedly explored.

Kassim Shehim, in his unpublished PhD thesis "The Influence of Islam on the Afar", University of Washington, (1982), explored the richness of Islamic culture and history in the Ethiopian region with particular emphasis on the Afar people. Although his study is primarily designated to deal with Islam among the Afars, it throws light on the nature and characteristics of Islam as a whole in the country, its introduction, as well as the role of the merchant clerics and early settlements of the Muslim communities. The study is, therefore, a good example of regional study of Islam

Sergew Hablessilassie, in his *Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History to 1270* Addis Ababa: United printers, (1972), surveys peaceful introduction and expansion of Islam into the Ethiopia and the Red Sea coast through cleric works and commercial contacts. Although his work lacks in-depth analysis, it shades some light to understand the earlier contacts of Ethiopia with Arabian Peninsula. In Sergew's work early history of prophet Mohamed, his relation with Ethiopia and Ethiopians has been highlighted. Likewise, in his article and two monographs, Richard Pankhurst indicates the peaceful introduction and spread of Islam in Ethiopian regions. Both native and foreign merchant clerics were important in this regard. In his two other works, *Introduction to the economic History of Ethiopia from early times to 1800*, (1961) *Ethiopian Borderlands Regional History*

from *Ancient Times to the End of the 18th century*, Red Sea Press, (1997), Richard Pankhurst has devoted some space in discussing the introduction and expansion of Islam in Ethiopia.

Travelers in Ethiopia (1965), a book edited by Richard Pankhurst also gives a summary of the early contacts of Islam and Ethiopia. Similarly, Alexandro Gori's article, "Islamic Cultural Traditions of Medieval Ethiopia and Eritrea," that appeared in *A Companion to Medieval Ethiopia and Eritrea* (2020) highlights the early history of Islam in Ethiopia emphasizing on the arrival of the first refugees in Christian Axum which became a pride for Muslims in Ethiopia and the Horn. Eloi Ficquet's book chapter, "Flesh Soaked in a Faith: Meat as a Marker of the Boundary the Christians and Muslims in Ethiopia", in *Muslim Christian Encounters in Africa* (2006), contains good information on the relation of Chirstainity and Islam: "Ethiopia offers and ideal place to study encounters between Christians and Muslims in Africa, located as it is at cross roads of the Nile basin, the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean." This is to emphasize on the cultural, social, political and economic configurations of Ethiopia with the neighboring regions of the other side of the sea. Islam introduced in the country as early as its birthplace Hijaz.

Andreas Wetter, "Rhetoric Means of a Didactic Amharic Poem from Wärrä Babbo" *Aethiopica, International Journal of Ethiopian and Eritrean Studies*, 15, (2012), 176–203; describes that Ethiopia is one of the witnesses of earliest Islamic presence in African continent. It also reports the importance of *ajam*⁵ in the study of Islam in the Ethiopia.

François-Xavier Fauvelle-Aymar and Bertrand Hirsch, "Muslim Historical Spaces in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa: A Reassessment," *Northeast African Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (2004-2010), pp. 25-53; is an invaluable recent study on the early routes where Islam entered Eastern and south eastern Ethiopia. The study is based

5 *Ajam* (non-Arab) refers to the writing culture of texts by the *ullama* in local languages by using Arabic alphabets. It can be Amharic, Harari, Affaan Oromo or any other Ethiopian languages.

on new archeological and epigraphic date to highlight Muslim spaces deep to the interior of the region.

Tadesse Tamirat's works, "Ethiopia, the Red Sea and the Horn" in Roland Oliver (ed.), *Cambridge History of Africa*, vol 3 (Cambridge, 1977), pp.105-144; *Church and State in Ethiopia 1270-1527* (Oxford University Press, 1972), 23-35; "Islam and trade in Ethiopia, CA 900-1332" (University of East Africa Social Science Conference, Dar es Salaam, 1970), pp.1-2, are some of the valuable studies on the introduction and spread of Islam in Ethiopia. His analysis on how Islam was introduced in Ethiopia is quite superb. In his words: "Axum was one of the first places where Islam was preached by the early companions of Mohamed, the prophet peace upon him."⁶ He also noted that the introduction and establishment of Islam in Ethiopia is associated with trade and commerce. He further outlines the earliest history of Islam in Ethiopian regions: in the north, east, and the south.

The other pertinent works worth mentioning are those of M. Abir. His monograph grows out of his PhD dissertation, *Ethiopia the Era of Princes the Challenge of Islam and the Reunification of the Christian Empire 1769-1855*, (London: Longman: 1968). They are valuable documents on the trends of the introduction and expansion of Islam in Ethiopia. While discussing trade as a dominant occupation of Muslim communities in the country, he emphasized the role of Muslim clerics for both trade and missionary work.

Seifuddin Adem's contribution, "Islam, Christianity and Ethiopia's Foreign policy," *Journal of Minority Affairs*, Vol 17, No.1 (1997), pp.123-139; is an important piece on the subject. The article has made very good remark on the early peaceful introduction of Islam in Ethiopia through Muslim cleric works. However, statements made by the author "6th C.AD Islamic faith was also successfully spreading specially in southern part of the present-day Ethiopia where local population attracted to Islam" is mistakenly

6 Tadesse Tamrat "Islam and trade in Ethiopia, Ca 900-1332" (University of East Africa Social Science Conference, Dares salaam, 1970), p.1.

recorded. It was in the seventh C.AD that Islam introduced both in Hijaz and Ethiopia. It was later probably in the middle of eighth century that Islam assumed footing in the Ethiopian interior along trade routes by Muslim cleric and merchants.⁷ The other important scholarship relevant to mention here is Abraham Demoz's "Moslims and Islam in Ethiopian Literature" *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol. 10, Number 1, (1992). Based on chronicles and some travel accounts he noted the spread of Islam in earlier times to Ethiopia. The arrival of the first *suhaba* (Prophet Mohamed's companions, first converts of Islam) to Aksum fearing persecution in Arabia has been addressed thoroughly. He termed the Prophet's message to his followers "Leave the Ethiopians in Peace" as a "happy beginning". The later medieval peaceful expansion of Islam in eastern and southern Ethiopia is also highlighted.

Muslim Sultanates: Competition and Cooperation with the Christian Kingdom

There are a fairly good number of studies on the earlier contacts of the highland Christian kingdom and the Muslim principalities in the Ethiopian regions to the east and the southwest.⁸ Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia* (1952), the author of the earliest standard work on the

7 Taddesse Tamrat, *Church and State*, p.43.

8 See, Getachew Haile, "The Unity and Territorial Integrity of Ethiopia", *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Sep., 1986, Vol. 24, No. 3 (Sep., 1986), pp. 465-469 ; indicate that the present day horn of Africa "had been under the control of Emperors of Ethiopia from about the begging of the Christian era" ... on until the sixteenth century civil wars and consequent population movements those significantly changed the demographic and settlement pattern of the people of the country even further to the north and elsewhere. Such development also affected for long to reestablish strong reunite central government to bring together the semi-independent principalities in the region. The nineteenth century external development over the region complicated further situations, specially the coming and eventual European colonial interest and division of the region among themselves brought about far reaching consequences.

subject emphasized on the medieval conflicts and competitions between the Christian highland kingdom and the Muslim sultanates in Ethiopia. Nevertheless, his analysis of the conflicts of Christian kingdom and Muslim principalities in the medieval Ethiopia lacks depth and insider perspectives since his argument built almost entirely based more on outside sources about Ethiopia than locally produced sources such as oral traditions and others.

Amélie Chekroun and Bertrand Hirsch, "The Sultanates of Medieval Ethiopia" in *A Companion to Medieval Ethiopia and Eritrea*, (2020), is a study quite relevant for the issue at hand. The book chapter fairly synthesizes the relation between the Christian highland kingdom and Muslim sultanates specially with the well-known Islamic dynasty in Ethiopian eastern province, Walasma. The study further illuminates the extent of competition and collaboration between the two powers of the region. The collaboration of Ifat as tributary to the Christian highland kingdom can be mentioned as one from many instances of the encounters. Seven sultanates had been paying their annual tribute to the Ethiopian Christian kings. In the contrary there were wars to ensure loyalty and to control trade and trade routes.

Idem, "The Muslim-Christian Wars and the Oromo Expansion: Transformations at the end of the Middle Ages (ca. 1500–ca. 1560)", in *A Companion to Medieval Ethiopia and Eritrea*, (2020), pp. 454-477, is a prolific synthesis of the climax competition of the two forces: Christian kingdom and Muslim principalities. The competition was mainly to control politics and the economy of the country. The study further implicates the final showdown of the two forces due to prolonged wars that in turn eventually gave rise to Oromo and Somali population movements and expansions that simultaneously transformed the regions sociocultural and political landscape.

Éloi Ficquet, "The Ethiopian Muslims: historical Processes and Ongoing Controversies," in *Understanding Contemporary Ethiopia: Monarchy, Revolution and the Legacy of Meles Zenawi*, (2015), is a historical synthesis of the long history of Islam the state and the society combined. The medieval competition between Christian

kingdom and the Muslim sultanates in one side and coexistence, recognition and cooperation on the other side also highlighted. It also further discusses the change and continuities in the history of Muslim spaces in Ethiopia.

The other piece of work was produced by François-Xavier Fauvelle-Aymar and Bertrand Hirsch which appeared in the journal of *Northeast African Studies* with a title: "Muslim Historical Spaces in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa: A Reassessment." The study is indispensable to understand in-depth medieval Muslim sultanates and polities in the Ethiopian regions in the east and south east.

M. Abir's work, *Ethiopia and the Red Sea: The Rise and Decline of the Solomonic dynasty and Muslim European rivalry in the region*, Great Britain: Frank Cass, (1980), thoroughly explores the medieval conflicts of the Christian kingdom and Muslims principalities in Ethiopia specially in the east and southeast. Abir also discusses in considerable detail the important role played by Ethiopian Muslims in trade sector and religious dynamics of the period between the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. The chronicle of Atse Amade Seyon translated by G.W.B Huntingford, as, *The Glorious Victories of Amde Seyon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965) is quite interesting document on the expansion and the attempt made by Emperor Amde Seyon to subdue Muslim principalities in the east and the south under his effective rule.

A pioneer historical study was produced by Tadesse Tamrat who has given due credit to earlier periods of contacts between Christian highland kingdom and vassal Muslim sultanates in the east and southeast direction. His works include *Church and State in Ethiopia 1270-1527* (London, clarendon press, 1972), "Ethiopia, the Red Sea and the Horn" in Roland Oliver (ed.), *Cambridge History of Africa*, Vol. 3 (Cambridge, 1977), pp.105-144; and "Islam and Trade in Ethiopia, Ca 900- 1332" (University of East Africa Social Science Conference, Dar es Salaam, 1970), pp.1-10. Based on hitherto untapped sources such as chronicles, hagiographies and Arabic biographies, geographers and travelers, the author made substantial analysis on the medieval conflicts and cooperation as well as

interactions of the Christian highland kingdom and the Muslim sultanates of Ethiopia.

Another valuable study on the medieval Christian kingdom and Muslim sultanates is Merid Welde Aregay's Unpublished PhD dissertation, "Southern Ethiopia and the Christian Kingdom 1508-1708, with Special Reference to the Galla Migrations and Their Consequences", School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), (University of London, 1971). The work gives a detailed analysis of the military organization of the Christian kingdom as well as those of the tributary Muslim principalities. The climax of the sporadic conflict of the Muslim sultanates in the east and that of the Christian kingdom in the sixteenth century, the weakness of emperors due to internal strife, Ahmed Ibn Ibrahim's able leadership and determination in the contrary are discussed at length. Merd's special treatment of this period is interesting. He attempts to show the competition of the states as the result of internal dynamics. It was political and economic rivalry within than foreign inspired conflict such as the Turks or the Portuguese.

Another huge contribution to the medieval Christian-Muslim relation in Ethiopia is Ulrich Braukamper's *Islamic History and Culture in Southern Ethiopia: Collected Essays*, (LIT Verlag: Munester, 2004), pp.1- 185; "Islamic Principalities in Southeastern Ethiopia between the Thirteenth and Sixteenth Centuries" in *Ethiopianist note*, Vol. 1, No. 1. (1977), pp.17- 56. It is one of the best contributions and collections on Islam and Muslim spaces in the southern and eastern part of Ethiopia. Nevertheless, the analysis on the significance of internal dynamism of Islam, the state and society is missing out from major studies so far.

Patrick Desplate and Terje Østebo's (ed.) *Muslim Ethiopia: The Christian Legacy Identity Politics and Islamic Reformism*, Palgrave Macmillan, (2013), pp. 1-5; is one of the welcoming additions in the growing scholarly literatures on Muslim spaces in Ethiopia. The study probes the long Christian Muslim relations especially in medieval Ethiopia as, consensual, peaceful, shared, and coexisted. It also explores the experience of conflict.

Interaction of Muslim Communities with the rest of the society.

Trade

Muslims and Christians have shared for several centuries many aspects of the overall Ethiopian culture, such as belonging to a common shared ethnic, linguistic, cultural, historical group and to the same political system. In most areas they have lived mixed with each other and side by side in the same localities. In addition, the two communities have been in quite regular contact through trade.⁹ Economic interaction in many ways such as trade allowed each religious community to build bridge heads towards common goods in all parts of the Ethiopian highlands even where the Christian culture had been dominant. It also helps to maintain peaceful and friendly gestures among the various religious communities that in turn keep abet the entire region from any form rendering violent quarrels.

The social and economic impact and contribution to setting the Christians and Muslims together are overlooked. Two books by Richard Pankhurst (1996 and 1997) made some sort of highlight on the early history of Islam in Ethiopia, which includes early settlements of Muslim societies along the trade routes and royal residences.

As a matter of fact, Ethiopian Muslims both in the lowland and in the highland have had indispensable interaction in the daily life of the rest of Ethiopian society. Trade specially as an occupation of Muslims have long been the national brand for Muslims in Ethiopia. Taddesse Tamrat "Islam and Trade in Ethiopia, Ca 900- 1332" (University of East Africa Social Science Conference, Dar es Salaam, 1970), pp.1-3, emphasized the general pattern of trade and caravan routes to the highlands where sizable Muslim Ethiopian communities were cropping up mainly along the trade routes. He also capitalized Ethiopian merchants' role as the volume of trade increased in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. These traders exported Ethiopian commodities of various kind to the outside world and in turn brought commodities with high demand in

9 Hussein, "Historiography...." p. 20.

Ethiopian society. For the trade items both from home and abroad the Muslim traders' role in the whole system in the Red sea and the Gulf of Aden was pivotal.

The earliest scholarly work in this regard is Conti Rossini's "Sungli Habasha" in *RRA*, Ser. 5, Vol. XV 1906, pp.39-59. Rossini quoted one of the leading Arab historian and Geographer, Al-Yaqubi (872-889) on the role of international trade in Ethiopia specially with Arabs: "The Arabs go to the land of al Habasha for trading and they, the Ethiopians, have mighty cities." He termed Dahlak as an "Island of the Negus." The port of Zaila is also mentioned as an alternative gateway for trade and Islam to Ethiopian regions.

The chronicles of Emperor Zara Yacob and Emperor Bae'de Marian as translated by Alemu Haile (translation), *The chronicle of Emperor Zarayacob and Emperor Bae'de Marian* (ND), Sirak Printing Press, list some goods among imported items to Ethiopia from abroad. See also for the continuity of the tradition, Alemu Haile's translation, *The Chronicle of Emperor Zara Yaco and Emperor Bae'deMarian* (ND) pp. 133-148.

The role of Muslims in Ethiopian society specially in the commercial sector is also reported in considerable detail in the writings of the Jesuits in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. De Almeida for instance, pointed out the reasons for Muslims predominance in trade. He further noted that in the Red Sea port, Muslim merchants were better received and more welcomed than their Christians compatriots.

Based on the Jesuit sources F. Bathazer Teller, *The Travel of the Jesuits in Ethiopia*, London, 1710, noted that "Mohametans lived throughout the empire intermixed with Christians almost the third of the population of Ethiopia. Some of them lived by tillage, others are factors they are sole masters of all the great trade and carry gold to the Sea, whence in return they bring silk and stuffs" (p.39). Another invaluable Jesuit source on the subject is the one by Jerome Lobo who noted that despite Christianity as the reigning religion

“the Abyssinian provinces are inhabited by Moors,¹⁰ pagans and Jews.” See Samuel Johnson, *A voyage to Abyssinia*, London: Cassell and Company limited, 2007, p.30. Abir on the other hand reported that Muslims monopolized commerce in Ethiopia. Another important source on the subject is Donald Crummey, *Land and Society in the Christian kingdom of Ethiopia: From the Thirteenth to the Twentieth century*, University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign, 2000, pp.164-166. Crummey discussed the role of trade in bringing communities as a family group and close social intercourse beyond the economic milieu. Trade supports communities to hold together their varied life as nobles, artisans, peasants, warriors, and courtiers. One is dependent on the other for mutual benefit.

Had it not been for the Jesuit period accounts and later documents of European travelers, a lesser extent chronicles much of the history and culture of Ethiopia in the medieval and the nineteenth century would have been remained unknown. Though focused on their fellow Christians, royal politics and Ethiopia relation with the rest of the world, for instance, the numerous accounts of the Jesuits in Ethiopia have tremendous importance to understand state and society in the history of Ethiopia. Similarly, the role of Islam and Muslim traders and their interaction with local and international community clearly presented by many of the accounts of the Jesuits. The book by father Alvarez as translated and annotated by C. F. Beckingham and G. W. B. Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies: A True Relation to the Lands of the Prester John Being the Narrative of the Portuguese Embassy to Ethiopia in 1520*, Cambridge University Press, 1958, Vol. I, is one of such great contributions. Alvarez stated that commercial centers and Muslim settlements described as the most important place of cultural intercourse beyond commercial initiatives. It was the scene of “great intercourse between moors and Christians.” Here the close interaction and shared identities of Muslims and Christians in Ambassel area for Alvarez, was so unique in that he did not hide his

10 This term is to mean Muslim probably pejorative towards Islam in Europe.

confusion. In his words: "The Christian women carry water to the Moors and wash their clothes." Items of trade exported from Ethiopia and those of imported were vividly mentioned in Francisco Alvarez's account, *Narrative of the Portuguese Embassy to Abyssinia During the Years of 1520-1527* (London, no year), pp.117-489. Alvarez reported that some merchants might have been Christians too. Nevertheless, the principal traders of high-quality goods were Muslims. Jerome Lobo's account, *Voyage to Abyssinia* translated from the French by Samuel Johnson, (London: Cassell 1887) also discusses similar developments with regard to Islam and trade. Similar accounts are found in M. Almeida, in C. F. Beckinghara and G. W. B. Huntingford (trans./eds.), *Some Records of Ethiopia 1593-1646* (London, 1954), pp.55-56. Almeida was a Portuguese missionary in the seventeenth century who reported his observation on Ethiopian Muslims in the entire part of the country. He noted duly the important role Muslims played in commerce. He was also overwhelmed by the peaceful interaction and understanding exhibited between Christians and Muslims.

Richard Pankhurst "Indian Trade with Ethiopia, the Gulf of Aden and the Horn of Africa in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries", *Congreso international distudi Etiopici*, Roma, 1974, p. 485; Idem, "Ethiopia and the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden Ports in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries", *Ethiopian Observer*, Vol. VIII, No.1, 1964, pp.37-15 are good sources of for the understanding of Muslim and Christian interactions and commercial activities. According to Richard Pankhurst "Indian trade with Ethiopia, the Gulf of Aden and the Horn of Africa in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries" (*Congreso International distudi Etiopici*, 1974: 485). Market places, usually traditional settlement of Muslims, had no small importance for interaction for commercial networking with the surrounding community and beyond. Muslim settlements perhaps served as commercial networking throughout the highlands. Without these centers it proved difficult to talk about effective trade.

Sihabad-Din Ahmed bin Abdel Qadir, *Futuh al-Habesha: The Conquest of Abyssinia Sixteenth Century*, translated by Paul Lester Stenhouse and annotated by Richard Pankhurst, (USA: Tsehail Publisher, 2003); provides detailed accounts on the role of Muslims in trade in the entire country both in the high land and the lowland. The earliest translation appeared in French by Rene Nasset, ed. and translation *Histoire dela conquete del'abbysinie* (Whitefish, Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 2010). Pedro-Paez's volumes translated by Christopher Tribe *Pedro Paez's History of Ethiopia* (London: The Hakluyt society 2011) Vol. II., pp.216-265. The volume is valuable document on Pedro Paez's career as Jesuit missionary priest between 1564 and 1622. He worked in the Portuguese mission in India and Ethiopia. Paez left rich documents valuable for many aspects of the history and culture of Ethiopia. His account is quite relevant particularly for studying state-society interactions in local and international commerce. At the time of his visit to Ethiopia, the country had many ports along the Red Sea. He also remarked at the time of his visit, there were plenty of trade in slaves, Ivory, gold, salt, wax, musk and many others. Paez also told the Emperor at Gondar region rented those many ports to any one responsible to pay or present gifts and govern them.

The chronicle of *atse* Gelawdiwos reproduced in many copies of various languages from the Gee'z original is also vital to understand Islam, trade, society and the Ethiopian state. The first translation seems to have been made from Ge'ez to French by W. E. Conzelman, ed. *Chronique de Galawdewos* (Claudius, roid' Ethiopie, Paris: Bouilloes, 1895). A German edition of this chronicle was prepared by Manfred Kroop, ed., *Die Gescichtede Lebne-Dengel, Claudius and Minas* (France: Louvain, 1983). J. Perruchon "Notes Pour l' histoire d' ethiopie, leregne de Galawdewos (Claudius) ou Atinaf Seged (1540-1559)," *Revue Semitique*, II (1894). Alemu Haile has translated from Ge'ez to Amharic this important work as: *Yaa tse Galawdewos zena Mawaa [the Chronicle of Atse Gelawdiwos]* Addis Ababa: Authority for research and conservation of Cultural Heritage, 1998 E.C).

The other invaluable document concerning the subject is the chronicle of Atse Susiniyos translated from Geez to Amharic by Alemu Haile *The History of Ethiopia 1597-1625 AM: The Chronicle of Atse Susnyos*, (Addis Ababa: Sirak Printing Press, 2005 A. M). The chronicle of Emperor Susnyos is indispensable for the study of the role of Muslim traders in the society in general and the state in particular. The Emperor was in good terms with Muslims as his predecessors in his realm. He had Muslim trade and diplomatic agents both male and female as circumstance. He even made rewards for Muslim rulers and appointees in the western border lands such as Gedarif, Metema Gallabat and even further inland to Sinnar.

The chronicle of Sarsa Dengel as presented by many authors found to be invaluable. Alemu Haile translated (ed.) *Yaate Sertse Dengel Zena Mawael [The Chronicle of Aste Sertse Dengel]*, (Addis Abeba: Authority for Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritages , 1999 A.M). The Tarik Negest (History of Kings), by J. Perruchon “Notes Pour l’histoire d’ethiopie, leregne desarsa Delgel or Malak Seged (1563-1597)”, *Revue Semitique*, IV (1896), pp. 606-613, is also very good source on the subject. The other valuable chronicle translated from Ge’ez to Italia by Carlo Rossini, trans. “Historia Regis Sersa Dengele (Malak Sagad)”, *corpus scriptorium Christianorum Orientalium, scriptoves Atethiopici*, XX (Louvain: Secretariat ducorpus, 1962). Rene Basset’s *Etudes Sur L’Histoire d’Eythiopie* (Paris 1882) are all invaluable documents to understand state, society, and Islam. For the summary of chronicle see G.W.B. Huntingford “Indices to Five Ethiopian Chronicles” *incorpus scriptorium christianorum Oreintalium*, vol 20-25, *Annali Dell istitutoorienta Napoli V*, XXIX (1969), pp. 281-320. One can note from the chronicle that Enfranz/Gobae as the town of the Emperor and the Muslims. It is reported that the town was important for commerce and industrial productivity such as tent making, weaving and so on. The chronicle has also extensive data on the wars of medieval Ethiopia between Muslim Sultanates and Christian high land kingdom over resources and political supremacy.

Muslim traders' role in the public and commercial centers of convergence were reported by seventeenth century state agent Alhaymi leader of the Yemeni embassy who visited Gondar, the then Ethiopian capital in 1648. It is uniquely presented to us by Van Donzel, *Foreign Relation of Ethiopia 1642-700 Documents Related to the Journeys of Khodja Murad*. Netherlands: Historisch-Archeologi shintitutete Istanbul, 1979, pp.54-60. Pankhurst Richard, "Muslim Commercial Towns, Villages and Markets of Christian Ethiopia prior to the rise of Tewodros", *Athiopistiischeforschungen Franzsteuner* (Verlag Wiesbaden, Stuttgart, 1988), p.118, noted that the chronicle of Emperor Iyasu (1682-1706) confirmed the presence of wider market places with sizable Muslim population of commercial importance that shows reciprocated influence of either communities in the highland Christian kingdom. As it is clearly highlighted the previous century places of commercial importance, the seventeenth century reality indicates the continuities of Muslim traders' importance in towns and market settlements. As to Van Donzel annotated and translated invaluable document by Alhayimi, Van Donzel, Emeri Johannes. *The Yemenite Embassy to Ethiopia 1642-1649 (AlHaimi'ssiratal Habesha)* newly introduced, translated and annotated, Stuttgart, 1986, pp. 54-60, further west one day journey from Gondar along the caravan that run to Massawa, there were huge settlements of Muslims probably near to Kossoye. Such a place had a Qur'anic school and a mosque. Gondar itself which by then had been the royal capital for nearly over a decade also had sizable Muslim population. Despite the exaggerated claims by Ethiopian and foreign scholars that Muslims were "segregated" to live in a separate quarter during the reign of Yohannes I (1667-1682), Islam bet in the lower district of Gondar city was mentioned by al-hayimi as a permanent and commercially vibrant town where Muslims predominantly resided even before the decree. This means that before the decree of emperor Yohannes I Islange/Islam bet as Muslim quarter and market center for potential interaction and diffusion of communities. See Solomon Addis Getahun, "Addis Alem: The Nucleus of Gondar", in *Ethiopia in Broader Perspective*, V.I

(1994), pp. 1-16. The period of Fasiledes is also covered in J. Perruchon "Notes Pour l'histoire D' Ethiopie, Regne de Fasiladesou Alam Sagad (16321667)" *Revue Semitique*, V. (1897/98), pp.350-373. On the importance of commerce in the economy of the state and the society of Ethiopia in Gonderine time is also summarized in Alemu Haile's translated chronicle of one of the Gonderine emperors: *Yatse Bakafa Tarika Nagast [The Chronicle of Emperor Bakafa]* 2006 E.C, ARCCCH, Addis Ababa. The other volume indispensable to understand Islam, state and society is Barry's dissertation on "Solomonic Ethiopia at Gondar, 1630-1755 an Institutional Analysis of Kinship in the Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia." (Boston University, PhD Dissertation in History, 1976). The author explored the historical dynamics of the empire and its diversity in terms of religion, language and other cultural elements. He noted that Muslims and Christians lived in mixed village in and around Gondar region as true elsewhere in the country.

Two European travelers reported the existence of extensive commercial network of trade and interaction in the eighteenth century. These were the French physician Poncet and the Scottish explorer James Bruce: James Bruce, *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile*. Vol. III. (Edinburgh) and Charles J. Poncet, "C. Jacques Poncet the Journey from Cairo in to Abyssinia and Back" in *The Red Sea and Adjacent Countries: At the Close of the Seventeenth Century*, ed. W. Foster, (London, 1949), pp. 104-14. A consortium of chronicles translated by Guidi, I "Annales Iohannes I, Iyasu I, Et Bakkafa". *Corpus scriptorium Christianorum Orientalium. Scriptores Aethiopici* (V. Louvain: secretariat du Corpus, 1955) is also invaluable on commerce in which Muslims dominant remarkable role in the state and the society. V. Nersesseian and Richard Pankhurst, "The Visit to Ethiopia of Yohanes T'ovmocean an Armenian Jeweler, in 1764-17", *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol.15. (1982), pp. 79-104, is another valuable material on the eighteenth-century Ethiopia recorded and left by Armenian jeweler and merchant, Yohanes Tovmocean. He was a good example of the presence of foreigners in Ethiopia working as craftsmen, traders or agents of the Ethiopian

government. His arrival was certainly to make business with Ethiopian royalty at Gondar. However, beyond imagined objective, he was later appointed as treasury officer by the Queen, Mentwab. Tovmocean left quite impressive insight on trade and public interaction in the capital, Gondar.

The extent of Muslim commercial domination impressed most observers of the nineteenth century. Henry Salt, the British traveler of the first decade of the century noted Ethiopian trade was “almost entirely” in Muslim hands. A generation later the Swiss protestant missionary Samuel Gobat reported in his account, *Journal of three years Residence in Abyssinia*, (New York, 1850), Pp. 389-489 that Muslims were more extensively engaged in trade and commercial concerns than the Christians. On his part, Henry Blanc describes in his work, *A Narrative of Captivity in Abyssinia with Some Account of the Late Emperor Theodore His Country People*, (2005, <http://www.manbooks.org>), pp 38-46, the social role of trade between Muslims, Christians and other member of the society. Other works include Charles Beke, *The British captive in Abyssinia* (London, 1867), pp 1-22; Mansfield Parkyns, *Life in Abyssinia Notes Collected During Three Years Resistance and Travels in That Country*, Vol. (London: John Murray, 1853); and John Lewis Burckhardt, *Travels in Nubia*, (London. Second edition, John Murray, Albemarle street, 1822). Burckhardt remarked that Muslim traders were influential in the long-distance trade crossing Gondar-Sennar to Cairo and beyond as such interact across borders and with the local community very closely. Henry Salt, *Voyage to Abyssinia and Travels into the Interior of the Country 1809-1810* (London: 1814), was the first traveler to describe the country since the time of James Bruce. He provided vital information on the commercial network between regions of Ethiopia and abroad. He told us about the continuation of the importance of Muslim merchants in Ethiopian commercial sector at the time. Pearce Nathaniel, *A Residence in Abyssinia from 1810-1891*, Vol. I, (London: Hennery Colburnan Drecharld Bentley, 1831), pp. 198-248. Other works which contain invaluable accounts on Muslim traders and their local interaction include W. F. Frideaux, *Illustrated*

Travels Record of Discovery, Geography and Adventure: A Journey through the Sudan and Western Abyssinia, edited by H.W Bates (London, 1869); Henry Dufton, *Narrative of a Journey through Abyssinia in 1862-3*, (London: Chapman and Hall, 193, Picadilly, 1867); W. Winstanley, *A Visit to Abyssinia an Account of Travel in Modern Ethiopia*, (London: Hurst and Black publishers, 1881); G.A. Hoskins, *Travels in Ethiopia : Above the second cataract of the Nile* (London: Rees, Orme, Brown ,Green and Longman, 1835); J. Lewis Krapf, *Travels, Researches and Missionary Labours*, (London: Trubner And Co, paternosterRow, 1860); Henry Stern, *Wondering among the Falasha in Abyssinia*, (London: Wertheim, Makintosh and Hunt, 1862); and E.A. Decosson, *The cradle of the Blue Nile :A Visit to the Country of King John of Ethiopia*, Vol. II, (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1877).

The French travelers Ferret and Galiner asserted that Ethiopian merchants were in general Muslims. The British consul Walter Plowden, *Travel in Abyssinia and the [Oromo] Country with an Account of a Mission to Ras Ali in 1848*, (London, 1868), claimed that the Muslim in fact “rarely followed any other pursuit” (pp.179-180) than trade, that three fourth of all commerce was in their possession. This argument has great support from recent studies and field works.

The British explorer Winstanley who visited Ethiopia in the nineteenth century fairly described the trade routes and the caravan around north, northwest and central of Ethiopia to the Red Sea coast and Sennar. He also gave detail accounts of local trade and market days as well where Ethiopian Muslims emerged as the main actors of commerce in bringing commodities and taking it both in local and international markets. Another important source is Theophilus Waldmeier (1886) mentioned in the previous section.

Antoine D’Abbadie, *Geographiede L’Ethiopie, Paris: Gustave Mesnil*, 1890, pp. 234-278; and Edmond Combes and Maurice Tamisier, *Voyage en Abyssinied ans le pays des [Oromo] de Choa et d’lfat*, II (Paris, 1838), recognizes the commercial role Muslims played in Ethiopian society. In his interesting volume Harmuzd Rassam, *Narrative of the British Mission to Theodore, King of Abyssinia*, Vol. I. (London: John

Murry, Albemarle Street, 1869), pp.10-185, the British envoy to the court of Emperor Tewodros (1855-1868), reported his impression on the interaction of Ethiopian society through trade in which Muslim merchants showed their capability in the whole process.

Marriage

Societal interaction and integration through marriage was hardly made the subject of wider historiography in Ethiopia,¹¹ although, some royal chronicles, travel accounts, oral traditions and scholars have long indicated the significance of marriage that transcend ethnic and religious boundaries to blend together communities and families. Richard Pankhurst, "Ethiopian Dynastic Marriage and the Béta Esra'él (or Falashas)," *Africa: Rivista trimestrale di studi e documentazione dell'Istituto italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente*, Settembre 1997, Anno 52, No. 3 (Settembre 1997), pp. 445-446; explored interesting insights on royal marriage irrespective of ethnic and religious difference that usually followed the suit by the lower-class communities even in a more pronounced way. Pankhurst argues that "dynastic marriage for at least the last half millennium, for which relatively good documentation is available, played a major, and well-attested, role in Ethiopian political life. Imperial rulers effected a number of important dynastic and other unions which freely transcended divisions of religion, ethnicity and class"

Father Francisco Alvarez as annotated by C. F. Beckingham and G. W. B, *Prester John of the Indies*, Cambridge, 1961; in the early sixteenth century shows that the Ethiopian monarchs in the medieval period had been making marriage relations with the family of Muslims kings. Such far reaching inter religious and inter-ethnic marriage to mention was the one that took place in the reign

11 See Getachew Haile, *Yaba Bahirey Dirsetoch: Oromowochin kemimeleketu leloch senedoch gar(The manuscripts of Abba Bahriy together with those about the Oromo)*, Avon Mennesota,2002 P.166 ("የያዳቶቻችን የጋብቻ ታሪክ ያልተጻፈው በኢትዮጵያውያን መካከል ጋብቻ ጉድ ወይም ብርቅ ስላልሆነ ነው":: marriage among diverse Ethiopia society is not something unique since it has been a phenomenon of everyday life . As such it is documented well.

of Bäädä Maryam (1468-1478), who effected a dynastic marriage with the daughter Gärad Mohamed a Muslim ruler of Hadiya who eventually converted to Christianity. She later became better known as Empress Eleni, the author of two Ge'ez works of theology and the regent of her grandson Emperor Lebnä Dengel.¹² See also J. Perruchon, *Les chroniques de Zar' a Ya'eqob et de Ba'eda Maryam, rois d'Ethiopie de 1434 à 1478*, Paris, 1893, pp. 16, 59, 176-7.

I. Guidi, *Annales Regum Iyasu II et Iyo'as*, CSCO, 1912, mentions the continuation of such tradition inter religious and inter-ethnic union in the time of Empress Mintwab who arranged for her son Emperor Iyasu II 1730-1755 to marry Wobit, the daughter of an Oromo Yeju Muslim background dynasty. J. BRUCE, *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile*, Edinburgh, 1790, II, p. 662, provides insights on the marriage pattern and arrangement of both dynastic and those of the lesser nobilities and peasantries across religious and ethnic boundaries.

Brian J. Yates, *The Other Abyssinians: The Northern Oromo and the Creation of Modern Ethiopia, 1855-1913*, University of Rochester Press, 2020, provides detailed note on the tradition of intermarriage alliance of Muslim with Christian ruling dynasties (pp.102-104). For instance, Shawa –Wallo, Wallo-Gondar, Yeju-Gojjam, Jeju - Tigray in so many parts of the history and culture of Ethiopia. Ethiopian rulers were as much Christians as they were Muslims. Such cultural make up is emblematic of Ethiopian identity.¹³

12 CF. Rey, *The Romance of the Portuguese in Abyssinia*, London, 1929, p. 31; see also Tadesse Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia 1270-1527*, Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1972, pp.283-8; the wife of ZäraYa'iqob queen Illeni one of the foremost remarkable woman in the political history Ethiopia was daughter of Muslim governor of the province of Hadiya, Grad Mohamad. It seemed clear that the marriage was politically motivated. The king of Hadiya had obliged Emperor Dawit the father of emperor ZäraYa'iqob by his loyal services against his co-religionists Sa'adadin ruler of Adal. Tadesse further suggests less notable princess may have followed Illeni to the Christian court.

13 Getachew Haile, *Yaba Bahirey Dirsetoch ...*, pp.29-30.

Muslim Spaces in the Northwest Region of Ethiopia

Hussein Ahmed, "Reflections on Historical and Contemporary Islam in Ethiopia and Somalia: A Comparative and Contrastive Overview", *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 1 & 2, 2007, provides the earlier trends and patterns of the introduction of Islam in the northern and central highlands from at least the eighth century on. It was mostly introduced peacefully through the works of the *ulama* via the process of trade and commercial activities. "The emergence of Muslim political entities and the evolution of distinct, highly assimilated and tolerant Islam" (p. 263) responsible for the success of Islam to establish itself as an important cultural, social and economic component of the Ethiopian society especially deep to the Christian dominated high land kingdom.

Abdusemed H. Ahmed in one of his articles "The Gondar Muslim Minority in Ethiopia: The Story up to 1935", *Institute of Minority Affairs Journal*, Volume 9, Number 1, 1988, pp.76-85; discusses about the indigenous Muslim minority at the midst of dominantly Christian population. He further insists that Muslims were predominantly involved in trade and craftsmanship of Gondar society, those of the northwest Ethiopia and further southwestern Ethiopia.

Temesgen Gebeyehu, "Muslims in Ethiopia: History and Identity" *African Studies*, Vol. 77, Issue 3, 2018, pp.1-17; surveys Islam in Ethiopia in general and northwest Ethiopia specially in Gojjam and in some extent Gondar regions. His study shade considerable light on the marginal position of Ethiopian Muslims specially in accessing land in Gojjam and northwest highlands of the country until the popular revolution of 1974. Although there might be exceptions, Muslims direct access to *rist*,¹⁴ *gult*¹⁵ *waqf* land and so on was common elsewhere both in dominantly Muslim settled areas

14 Hereditary land right.

15 The right to use tribute in lieu of service for the state.

and vice versa in Ethiopia including Gondar region.¹⁶ Even Muslims were competing for the post to led the 'powerful' institution in Ethiopian administration system called *čəqashum*¹⁷ which was common in Gondar region let alone in Wallo, Jimma, Harar, Tigay or Arsi.

The work of Alfredo Gonzalez Ruibal and Alvaro Falquina, "In Sudan's Eastern Borderlands: Frontier Societies of the Quara Region (ca.AD 600-1850)", *Journal of African Archeology* Vol. 15, No. 2, (2017), pp173-201, is primarily about the people and culture of Ethiopian Sudanese borderlands. Ruibal and Falquina reported that the region is a place of mix, fusion and confluence of people and interaction of state and non-state actors, Muslims and Christians alike for several centuries.

Sihabad-Din Ahmed bin Abdel Qadir's *Futuhul-Habesha* (2003: 378-385), provides sizable account on the role of Muslims in trade in the entire country including northwest regions of the highland part of the country. Pedro-Paez's volume translated by Christopher Tribe, *Pedro Paez's History of Ethiopia* (London: The Hakluyt Society 2011) Vol. II., is invaluable document on Pedro Paez's career as Jesuit missionary priest 1564-1622. Paez left rich documents valuable for many aspects of the history and culture of Ethiopia. His account is quite valuable particularly for studying state and society interactions in local and international commerce. At the time of his presence in northwest Ethiopia, the county had sizable Muslim

16 Letter of complaint to the governor general of Begemdir and Semien by *shaykh* Legas Adem dated 1943 Ethiopian calendar testifies that the Qusqwam Debre Tsehay church spiritual association head (ጉባዔ መንገድሳዊ ዐለቃ) confirmed for the *shaykh* that he has birth right to be *čəqashum* of the Andebina and Dereqwa district in Gondarzuria Awurajja. The letter witnessed further the intertwined nature of identities in the region and the country Ethiopia.

17 The lowest administrative office which had access all the information and knowledge of the complex land tenure and tribute system in a particular kebele or *mikitil* warada.

communities lived on commerce and craftsmanship in and around Gondar region.

Muslim spaces in the northwest region of Ethiopia were reported by seventeenth century state agent Alhayimi leader of the Yemeni embassy who visited Gondar the then Ethiopian capital in 1648. The presence sizable Muslim population in the capital Gondar, and other commercial centers further north, west, south and east of the imperial capital Gondar. It is one of the most comprehensive documents on Muslim spaces in northwest Ethiopian region, Gondar. It is uniquely presented to us by Van Donzel, *Foreign Relation of Ethiopia 1642-700 Documents Related to the Journeys of Khodja Murad*, Netherlands: Historisch-Archealogi Intitutete Istanbul, 1979, pp.54-60; Pankhurst Richard, "Muslim Commercial Towns, Villages and Markets of Christian Ethiopia Prior to the Rise of Tewodros," *Athiopistiische Forschungen Franzsteuner* (Verlag Wiesbaden, Stuttgart, 1988), also noted that the chronicle of Emperor Iyasu (1682-1706) confirmed the presence of wider market places with sizable Muslim population.

Another report of the period is by Alhayimi which is annotated and translated by Van Donzel and Emeri Johannes as *The Yemenite Embassy to Ethiopia 1642-1649 (AlHaimi'ssiratal Habesha)*, Stuttgart, 1986. Alhayimi stated that further west one day journey from Gondar along the caravan that ran to Massawa, there were huge settlements of Muslims probably near to Kossoye. Such a place was with Qur'anic school and a mosque. Gondar itself, which by then had been the royal capital for nearly over a decade, also had sizable Muslim population.

Solomon Addis Getahun, "Addis Alem: The Nucleus of Gondar", *Ethiopia in Broader Perspective*, V.I (1994), pp. 1-16, is the most invaluable paper which provides insight about Muslims places in Gondar, specially around Addis Alem which is the Muslim quarter in Gondar city. The study further provides information about Muslim traders and craftsmen contribution to the establishment and growth of the city and the various Islamic holy places in Addis Alem.

The royal chronicle of Ethiopian rulers from 1769-1840 translated and compiled by Weld Blundell, *The Royal Chronicle of Abyssinia 1769- 1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp.516-540, is a valuable document to understand the indicated period. Although the document has a lot to share on Islam, many places of Muslim residence and commerce in northwestern region of Ethiopia, there are some confusions in mentioning place names that need curious scrutiny while using it.

The British explorer Winstanely who visited Ethiopia in the nineteenth century fairly described the institution, the trade routes and the caravan around northwest and the center of Ethiopia to the Red Sea coast and Sennar. He also gave detail account of Muslim spaces as Ethiopian Muslims emerged as the main actors of commerce in bringing commodities and taking it both in local and international market.

Genet Ayele translated a book authored by Arnold D'Abbadie, *BäEtyopya käftäñña täraroč*, part two (2013 A.M). The book is quite interesting on the Muslim locations in northwest Ethiopia, the role of Muslims in trade, social life with the rest of the society and above all to the royal court.

Muslims as Agents, Elites and Soldiers

This topic is historically hitherto untapped in many of serious works on the subject. However, it is clear that the royal envoys or the commercial agents were important personalities in the history of Ethiopia. Tadesse Tamrat, a leading specialist in medieval Ethiopian history in his article "Islam and Trade in Ethiopia (Ca 900-1332)" (University of East Africa Social Science Conference, Dar es Salaam, 1970), describes the position of Muslim traders in Ethiopian court during the time of Emperor Amde Tsion (r.1314-1344). Traced on the fourteenth century Christian document he states that "Ethiopian Muslim traders did business in India, Egypt, and among the people of Greece with the money of the king. He gave them excellent horses from Shewa, red pure gold from Enarya... And these Muslims went to Egypt, Greece and Rome and exchanged

them for very rich damasks, adored with green and scarlet stones which they brought to the king” (p.8). Correspondingly, Tadesse Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia 1270-1527* (Oxford University Press, 1972), stated that Muslim merchants were long before engaged in trade for Christian rulers of the country on whose behalf they carried out many trading missions. Tadesse quoted the king’s compliant against his vassal Sabra -ad Din governor of Ifat one of the Muslim principalities in medieval Ethiopia, “you took away the commodities belonging to me obtained in exchange for the large quantity of gold and silver I have entrusted to the merchants. And you imprisoned traders who did business for me” (p.85). Besides, Muslim traders lead diplomatic mission to commerce and friendship outside of Ethiopia. In this case Wudu’s statement is interesting on the mission led by Yusuf Abdurrahman, an Ethiopian Muslim cleric on behalf of emperor Yagba Tsion (1285-1294) to request bishop from Egypt. Wudu Tafete, Bahäləna Ləmat bä Etopəya [Culture and Development in Ethiopia], Shiferaw Bekele (ed.) “yeähaymanot meäčäčal bä Etopəya”, [“Religious Tolerance in Ethiopia”], *Forum for Social Studies*, Addis Ababa, 2004, p.207.

The translation and annotation made by C.F. Beckingham and G.W.B. Huntingford is another invaluable source to understand Muslim traders’ position in the royal court of Ethiopia. C.F. Beckingham and G.W.B. Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies: A True Relation to the Lands of the Prester John Being the Narrative of the Portuguese Embassy to Ethiopia in 1520*, Cambridge University press, (1958), Vol. I. made the following statement based on the sixteenth century Jesuit priest, Avarez. The priest shared his experience of northern Ethiopia on the roles of Muslim traders in Christian court: “Some of the merchants at Manadel, Tigray appear to have traded on behalf of the Ethiopian emperor. The emperor lent 1000 weqet ‘ounce’ of gold for them to trade with” (p.187).

The chronicle of Emperor Susnyos, mentioned in the preceding section, is indispensable for this subtopic. Emperor Susnyos was in good terms with Muslims as his predecessors. He had Muslim trade and diplomatic agents both male and female as circumstance.

Although he made wars and raid against neighboring Funji kingdom in the northwest, had friendly relations with Muslims in the borderlands. He even made rewards for Muslim rulers and appointees in the western borderlands such as Gedarif, Metema Gallabat and even further inland to Sinnar. See Alemu Haile trans. and ed. *The History of Ethiopia 1597-1625 AM: The Chronicle of Atse Susnyos* (Addis Ababa: Sirak Printing press, 2005 A.M), PP. Xiii-Xiv, 78, 103 and 119.

A chronicler of *atse* Sertse Dengel as presented by Abraham Demoz, "Moslems and Islam in Ethiopic Literature", *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (1972), reported that a Muslim named Asma'ad-Din who fought from the side of the king against the Christian rebel Hamalmal (p.9). The chronicler continued to say of him: "The word of this Asma'ad-Din is trust worthy and he does not lie nor break his oath or covenant." *Shaykh* Jamma governor of Gaddarif, Metema and Galabat in the first half of the nineteenth century was loyal general of the authorities in Gondar. His determination to support Däjjäč Kassa Haylu the later Tewodros II in his military engagement with Tisso Gobeze was recorded in Hennery Blanc's volume: Blanc, Henry. *A narrative of captivity in Abyssinia with Some Account of the late Emperor Theodore His Country People*, 2005, www.manbooks.org, pp.58-9. As clearly recounted in the dairy of bishop Yohannes, an Armenian in the court of Gondar witnessed the then tributary and loyal Muslim king of Funji Sennar to the Christian Emperors in Gondar. Bishop Yohannes returned home from Gondar via Mettema, Sennar to Cairo route. To facilitate his journey the Emperor from Gondar wrote letter of recommendation to Sennar. The bishop wrote: "The king of Sennar stood up with all his soldiers kissed the letter and put it on his head to the Emperor's honor. We stayed until the departure of the caravan. The king of Sennar gave us men to accompany us to Egypt." This is clearly indicated in Van Donzel, *Foreign Relation of Ethiopia 1642-700: Documents Related to the Journeys of Khodja Murad*, Netherlands: Historisch-Archeologischinstitutete Istanbul, 1979, P.182-3.

Poncet the French physician who visited Gondar in the turn of the eighteenth century reported the presence of Muslim state agents in the time of his visit of the imperial capital, Gondar. *Hajji* Ali, an Egyptian (Turk), was once in the service of Emperor Iyasu I (1682-1706). It was Hajj Ali who traded on behalf of the emperor to India, Persia, Egypt and Arabia. In his third visit, Ali Cairo brought not less than five hundred thousand costly fabrics imported from the aforementioned countries to the churches in Gondar. Poncet came from Cairo to treat the emperor from his skin disease. He further commanded Poncet's mission along the caravan route that descended from Cairo to the south via Sennar, Chilga (great town of commerce with sizable Muslim population). Emperor Iyasu I consolidated the commerce in Ethiopia particularly the one in the west direction and in the north by assigning specific state agents as it was tradition of his predecessors. *Hajji* Ali was appointed to control the Sennar Cairo route to the west of Gondar. The route to Messawa direction had been given to Murad. These people also helped the emperor in the diplomatic sphere beyond the sea. An Egyptian called Ani was also appointed in Gondar as *bejirond*.

James Bruce, *Travels to Discover the Sources of the Nile*. Vol. III. (Edinburgh 1790:P.10) stated that "every great man in Abyssinia has one of their Gebbarti for his factor. These were the first inhabitants of Abyssinia whom commerce connected with Arabians." See also pages 198, 362, and 380-381. Bruce also remarked on the multiple roles of these merchant classes on behalf of the state as commercial agents and ambassadors of their country. Muslims were appointed as treasury and custom officers of the state. For instance, *Nagadras* Mohamed whom Bruce met first on behalf of the city of Gondar was the richest man and principal merchant in the country and one of the trusted officials of the Ethiopian state at the capital. As to Bruce's observation, the Muslims of Gondar used to provide quasi-military services to the monarch and the nobility as they oversaw luggage and transport of war materials. They were formed special corpus under Muslim officers.

The nineteenth century French traveler Arnauld d'Abbadie gave us a general remark on Islam and Muslim population in Gondar, especially Islamge which is considered as the Muslim quarter. He reported about Muslim inhabitants and the authority of the *nagadras*. He also noted the special privileges vested for the inhabitants and the formidable place of Muslim clerics in the capital, Gondar.

In the early nineteenth century we have Faqih Ali, ambassador of Egypt to Ethiopia. Faqih Ali had great reputation with Ethiopian authorities. *Däjjazmač* Kassa Haylu of Quara also had an agent called Abu Mahamed Nur. This is discussed in Sven Robinson, Ali Musa to Mohamed Ali of Egypt *Acta Aethiopia: Correspondences and Treaties 1800-1884*, Vol. I, number 81, 1987, Boston: Northwest University Press; Idem. Kassa Hailu to Mohamed Ali, *Acta Aethiopia Correspondences and Treaties 1800-1884*, Vol. I, number 100, pp. 130-131, 1987, Boston: Northwest University Press.

In his collection of letters edited and well annotated, Sven Robinson has discussed a number of other prominent figures. Among which is Ali al-Jebarti otherwise called *shaykh* Ali Gondar who was a prominent agent of the state in most of his career in the first half of the nineteenth century. Widely traveled on behalf of the state abroad mainly to the Middle East, Far East and Europe for diplomatic purposes of his country. See Sven Robinson. Ali Musa to Mohamed Ali of Egypt *Acta Aethiopia Correspondences and Treaties 1800-1884*, vol. I, number 81, 1987, Boston: Northwest University Press. Another figure is the Ethiopian Ali Umar who was a district governor and merchant under *Däjjjač* Sabagadis of Tigre. He was a renown ambassador on behalf of the Ethiopian state to the *sultan* of Turk in Cairo in 1820s.¹⁸ He was identified by contemporary sources a man with special contact with foreign land to deal with commerce and friendship. He was a very good friend of the British missionary and envoy to Ethiopia, Samuel Gobat. We can find additional

18 Ali Umar to Samuel Gobat, *acta Aethiopia Correspondences and Treaties 1800-1884*, vol. I, number 78, 1987, Boston: Northwest University Press, p.31.

information on Ali in Samuel Gobat, *Journal of a Three Years' Residence in Abyssinia* (New York, 1859), pp.386-389.

Another influential personality at the Gondrine court in the early nineteenth century was *nägadras* Mohamed Aman. His personal correspondences on behalf of Ethiopia to neighboring countries made him influential. He had close relations with people on the top such as the queen lady Menen, *Ras Ali*, *Abune Selama* and *Ichege Malisentu*. He assisted the queen to bring peace between the bishop and *Ichege*. See Sven Robinson, Mohamed Aman to Ahmed Manikli, *Acta Aethiopica correspondences and treaties 1800-1884*, Vol I, number 78, 1987, Boston: Northwest University press. See also Sven Robinson, Adem ibn Siddiq to Mohamed Ali, *acta Aethiopica correspondences and treaties 1800-1884*, Vol. I, number 80, 1987, Boston: Northwest University Press.

On the loyalty and discipline of Muslim traders and agents nineteenth century British agent H. Rassam at the court of Emperor Tewodros II has left invaluable observation of Ethiopian Muslim traders he met elsewhere.¹⁹ Rassam summarized his impression by such statement to adore Ethiopian Muslim traders' loyalty to their country and government, "Muslims of Abyssinia were very serious to spy them about their country in whatever mood they were with their ruler or rulers" (Rassam, 1869:178-9).

Religious Interaction and Transcending Boundaries

Young Allan, "Why Amhara get Kureynya: Sickness and Possession in an Ethiopian Zar Cult," *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 2, Number 3 (1975), PP. 567-584; highlights the importance of traditional healing practices regardless of religious and other differences served as meeting places of the various stratified communities of the Gondar region and the rest of central and northern Ethiopian provinces.

Messing, S. D. (1968), "Interdigitation of Mystical and Physical Healing in Ethiopia: Toward a Theory of Medical Anthropology," *Behavior Science Notes*, 3(2), 87-104; in his part is another valuable

19 Harmuzd Rassam, *Narrative of the British Mission to Theodore, King of Abyssinia*, Vol. I, (London: John Murry, 1869).

study in central high land region of Ethiopia about traditional healing practices those brought about different communities together to interact and share fortunes and agonies.

Ulrich Braukämper, "Aspect of Religious syncretism in Southern Ethiopia," *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. 22, (1992), pp.194-207; explained the necessity of syncretism in religion as follows:

Religions are systems which are composed of various elements. Each of these elements, such as religious tenets or cult practices, fulfills a specific function which contributes to the functioning of the system as a whole with the aim of helping to alleviate certain problems peculiar to that particular society. The longevity of elements originating from outside the system is proportional to the degree of their suitability for integration into the entire system; otherwise they will be rejected as foreign bodies within a relatively short time (p.195).

Braukämper (ibid) identifies the various forms of religious transcending processes in southern Ethiopia specially Islam and indigenous religions. In this case there a religion born in Hadiya called Fandano (p.199).

The tradition of saint worship, the marriage of Islam with pre-Islamic sediments and religious syncretism described in some detail in J. Spencer Trimingham discussed earlier (Trimingham, 1952: 256-283). Eloi Ficquet's book chapter, "Flesh Soaked in a Faith: Meat as a Marker of the Boundary of the Christians and Muslims in Ethiopia," *In Muslim Christian Encounters in Africa*, Leiden, (2006); reported that followers of the two faiths overlaps through diverse forms of interaction such as shared residence and social life except some dietary restrictions such as meat and some alcohol drinks and khat. The prohibition of meat is mentioned as a powerful cultural force to distance the two communities. The study is insightful for further scholarly intervention on the subject.

Kefyalew Tessema, in his article "Dynamics of the Cult of Sheik Hussein of Bale, Ethiopia: Its Course and Curse of the Extremists, a Historical Perspective", *EJOSSAH*, Vol. XII, No. 1 (2016), pp.63-95,

surveys about the long transcending culture of religious boundaries in Ethiopia. He highlights the syncretistic elements of Islam with Oromo indigenous religious practices such as the *Muuda salat* carried out on the model of *Hajji* prayers at Mecca. The shrine of Sheik Hussein in Bale brings together Muslims, Christians and other indigenous believers for individual and common cause in honor of the God mediator, sheikh. It has huge potential for peace building since it cements economic and cultural ties among diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds.

Assefa Balcha, "Wadaja Ritual: Portrait of a Wallo Cultural Coping Mechanism", *Eastern African Literary and Cultural Studies*, (2017) Vol. 3, No. 1, 40–52; is about the mixing of Islamic practices and those of the indigenous believe systems in Wallo manifested themselves in various ways such as Wādaja (communal prayer) ceremony. The article further describes the role of Christianity and Islam together to sustain such sociocultural practices that transcend religious boundary to promote and uphold interfaith harmony, religious coexistence, mutual trust, social cohesion, solidarity, and cooperation. Furthermore, such communal prayer such as Wādaja tradition seem helpful to consolidate and indigenize Islam itself. Idem, "Pilgrimage to Holy Sites in Wallo: Past and Present", *Journal of Afroasiatic Languages, History and Culture*, Volume 8, Number 1, 2019, pp.1-24; is about venerating holy places in Wallo where Christians and Muslims gather for prayer that transcend ethno linguistic, cultural, regional, and religious boundaries. These sites are places of nurture core socio-religious values and attributes for peaceful coexistence, communal welfare, mutual collaboration, and resolution of conflicts and disputes. The article also garnered pilgrimage to holy sites in Ethiopia specifically in Wallo has been an age old spiritual and socio-cultural tradition among the Orthodox Christians and Muslim communities. The accommodative nature of Christianity, Islam and indigenous belief systems made the region Wallo and Ethiopia by extension as melting pot of religious and local traditions.

Muslims and Christians frequently intermarry, socialize, attend each other's festivities, and undertake joint activities. ... Muslims accept the mediation efforts of Christian priests and the healing power of Christian priests and saints, to whom there are also some shrines in the area. On the other hand, many Christians visit the tombs of Muslim shaykhs (for instance, at mawlid) and consult the shaykhs' living descendants in cases of personal problems, illness, and other affliction. Such cheerful festivities seem to have cultivated a religiously and culturally pluralistic society based on a fairly strong inter-regional and inter-communal foundation. Marshaling inter-religious cooperation in times of adversity has also served as a valuable building block of mutual trust, social cohesion, and solidarity.²⁰

Kairedin Tezera, "The Unexplored Assets: Religious Approach for Peace Making among the Siltie People in Southern Ethiopia," *Journal for the Study of the Religions of Africa and Its Diaspora*, Vol 3., No. 1, 2017, pp.139-154; is about the centrality of saint veneration among the Sufi and the religious culture of the Seltie and the surrounding people. It further contends that these holy places have been area of communal lives where interfaith solidarity and social cohesion and peace building flourished. Another recent study relevant here is Abebe Kifleyesus's "Islam in Northeastern Shawa" *Movements in Ethiopia, Ethiopia in Movement: Proceeding of 18th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, (Tsehai Publisher, 2016). Abebe Kifleyesus explores Islam in north Shawa. His work focused on the evolution of indigenous Islam and how this indigenization of Islam came into being. He remarked how the values of indigenous Islam and indigenous Christianity help the believers to coexist and respect each other.

Jon Abbink's article, "An Historical-anthropological Approach to Islam in Ethiopia: Issues of Identity and Politics," *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 2, (1998), pp. 109-124; is a very good study on Muslim spaces in Ethiopian history and culture since early period of its introduction to the present. The peculiar patterns

20 Assefa Balcha, "Pilgrimage to Holy Sites in Wallo," p.16.

the interaction of Islam and Christianity in Ethiopia and changes and continuities on issues of religious identities are some of the themes the article devoted. Abbink's another article "Muslim Monasteries? Some Aspect of Religious Culture in Northern Ethiopia" *Aethiopica*, Vol. 11, (2008), pp. 117–133, is primarily about Sufism in Wallo. It presents some preliminary observations on Sufi Muslim shrines or retreats in the Ethiopian Wällo region, places where local Muslim holy men or 'saints' lead the faithful and act as religious mediators and advisors. The article focuses on the shrines of Čali and Tərusina. The article is invaluable study of Muslim Christian cooperation and recognition of one another. In Abbink's words "Čali has a large iron front gate, donated in gratitude by a wealthy Christian supporter of the shrine" (p.125). Moreover, the article suggests the presence of cultural influences and inspirations. Monastic life for Ethiopian Muslims, as to Abbink, seems an Ethiopian innovation most likely inspired by Ethiopian Christian and Jewish monastic life. Patrick Desplate and Terje Østebo (ed.) *Muslim Ethiopia: The Christian Legacy Identity Politics and Islamic Reformism*, Palgrave Macmillan, (2013), pp. 1-241, recount the growth of scholarly interest in Muslim spaces specially in the recent past. The Book focus on the need to redress Muslim spaces to fill gaps and historiographical imbalance as a result of Eurocentric reading of the Ethiopian past.

The major focus of Marcin Krawizuk (2019)²¹ is as to how Islam and Muslims in Ethiopia depicted in Christian hagiography. The work further implicates the economic roles and interactions of Muslims with Christian authorities. For instance, in the word of the author: "it occurs that Muslims experience the power of Christian saint yet it does not lead to their conversion. The case of Yohannəs of Debre Bizän...they visit the saint and perform the traditional Ethiopian gesture of repentance by tying stones to their necks. They are forgiven" (p.104). It also explores the religious stereotypes

21 Marcin Krawizuk, "The Image of Muslims and Islam in Christian Ethiopic Hagiographies Written in Gə'əz," *Studies in African Language and Cultures*, No. 53. (2019), pp. 92-115.

widely prevalent among the authors of the Gädélé towards Muslims which demand serious scrutiny from the part of the historian while using such religious sources for research purposes.

Abebe Kifleyesus's (2007) remark on syncretic nature of Islam among the Argoba is interesting to our understanding of the nature and evolution of Islam in Ethiopia.²² Travelers were also impressed by the religious syncretism in various regions of Ethiopia. For instance, one of the nineteenth century protestant missionaries noted their impressions.²³ Recent scholarly works are quite interesting in this regard. See, for instance Meron Zeleke, *Ye ShakochChilot: "The Court of the Sheikhs: A Traditional Institution of Conflict Resolution in Oromia Zone of Amhara Regional State, Ethiopia"*, *African Journal of Conflict Resolution*, (2010), 10, 1: 63-84; Idem, "The Gendering Dimension in Sufi Contestation of Religious Orthodoxy: Representations of Women in a Sufi Shrine at Tiru Sina", In Desplat, Patrick & Terje Østebø (eds.): *Muslim Ethiopia: The Christian Legacy, Identity Politics and Islamic Reformism*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014; Idem, *We Are the Same but Different: Accounts of Ethiopian Orthodox Christian Adherents of Islamic Sufi Saints*, *Journal of the Study of Religion*, (2014), Vol. 27, No.2, pp. 195-213. The above studies are based on empirical data and about religious flexibility, shared sacred spaces by adherents of different faiths. Without paying due attention to the differences, Muslims adhere and venerated Sufi shrines and the Christians also venerate these saintly holy places. They called the shrine blessed land, የተባረከ ቦታ፣ ቅዱስ ቦታ.

Pankhurst, Alula, "Reflections on Pilgrimages in Ethiopia" In Marcus, H.G. (ed.): *New Trends in Ethiopian Studies. Proceedings of the 12th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, Michigan State University, 5-10 September 1994, Volume 2. Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press; is an interesting study on the coming together of Muslims

22 Abebe Kifleyesus, "Argoba", *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica* edited by Siegbert Uhlig, Harrassowitz Verlag Wiesbaden, 2007, Vol. 1, p.332.

23 Isenberg, C. W. and J. L. Krapf. *Journal of C. W. Isenberg and J. L. Krapf*; London: Burnside and Seeley, (1843).

and Christians to venerate shrines and holy places specially in Wallo. Kelkilachew Ali "Religion, Rituals and Mutual Tolerance in Wollo: The Case of Kabe, Southwest Wallo," Masters Thesis, Addis Ababa University, 1997; is another important work to understand religious syncretism and transcending boundaries between Muslims and Christians in Wallo.

Ishihara, Minako, "Spirit Possession and Pilgrimage: The Formation and Configuration of the Tijjani Cult in Western Oromo Land", In Ege, S., H. Aspen, B. Teferra & S. Bekele (eds.): *Proceedings of the 16th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies* 505-515. Trondheim, 2009; is another study that discusses religious syncretism and transcending of boundaries between Muslims, Christians, and other indigenous belief systems. Several other works²⁴ address the long-established tradition of transcending religious boundaries in Ethiopia. Hussein Ahmed, "Historiography of Islam in Ethiopia", *Journal of Islamic Studies*, VI, I (1992), p.21; reveals that it has been common to transcending religious boundary between Muslim and Christians. They used to visit each other's shrine for whatever cause be it for group or individual, health and material prosperity.

Conclusion

Although this study is not assumed to be complete in its claims and arguments, it attempted to survey what is so far on the dominant literatures and scholarly trends in the study of Islam and society

24 See among others the following works: Gibb, Camilla *In the City of Saints: Religion, Politics and Gender in Harar, Ethiopia*. PhD Thesis, Oxford University, 1997; Desplat, Patrick, *The Articulation of Religious Identities and Boundaries in Ethiopia: Labelling Difference and Processes of Contextualization in Islam*. *Journal of Religion in Africa* 35,4: pp. 482-505, 2005; Braukämper Ulrich, *Islamic History and Culture in Southern Ethiopia – Collected Essays*. Münster: Lit-Verlag, 2004.; Meron Zeleke, 'We are the same but different': Accounts of Ethiopian Orthodox Christian Adherents of Islamic Sufi Saints" *Journal for the Study of Religion*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (2014), pp. 195-213.

combined in Ethiopia. Studies examined so far concur that Islam has long been part of the culture of Ethiopia as early as its emergence in Arabia itself. Its spread to the interior seems to have been characterized by mostly through cleric works specially locals who were "tolerated" to move freely in the country. The annotated essay further highlighted the multi-dimensional encounters and relations of Islam with the Ethiopian society.

Travel accounts, royal chronicles, historians' anthropologists, sociologists, linguists tell us that Islamic polities had both peaceful and discordant relationships with the Ethiopian state. This though at times the religious factor such as fear and suspicion were at work to flame intentions of elites, political and economic related issues were by far important for the conflicts. The study of internal development and evolution of Islam among the common people in the bottom of the social stratum is not studied well as it deserves. Extensive use of oral traditions, local hitherto untapped manuscripts, ritualistic culture, archeology, linguistics, ethnography, musicology that widely accommodate everyone in the process need to be considered to understand Islam in the country, the use of such methodologies to reconstruct the past are some of the issues a researcher needs to investigate the genuine internal dynamism of Islam in Ethiopia. Trade as a predominant occupation of Muslims in the long history of Ethiopia played an important role for deep socio-economic integration and interaction. Regardless of ethnic and religious restriction, politically or socially motivated dynastic marriage of Muslim and Christian families and other related practices are also important in the religious dynamic study of the country. There were also other features and characteristics of Islam in Ethiopia that are related to the mystical orders which facilitated conversion to Islam and coexistence and cross religious appreciation, cooperation and syncretism.

In some but all encountered literatures, it is stated that the conflict in medieval Ethiopia between Christian highland kingdom and that of the tributary Muslim principalities over emphasized to the extent of undermining the prevalence of cooperation and

alliance which characterized much of the relations of Muslim principalities and Christian highland kingdom in Ethiopia. There were complex social political and economic ties between communities and the state. Literatures both primary and secondary still confirmed that Muslim traders were royal envoys and commercial agents in medieval times and later to Christian Emperors of Ethiopia and the rest of the community. Muslim military Generals also fought from the side of the emperors against outlaws be Christian or Muslim. Social and economic impacts of such encounters of Christians and Muslims in the country have so far been overlooked and underrepresented in the secondary literatures consulted in this essay.

For the present author, the long internal dynamics of interaction, integration and symbiosis, shared and overlapped identity of the adherents of Islam, Christianity and indigenous religions have not yet been made the subject of serious study. An insider perspective that balanced both models, “history from above” and “history from below” need to be thoroughly considered to understand fully Ethiopian Islam and its relation with the larger Ethiopian public and the state both in medieval and modern times.

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