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The Muslim-Christian Wars and the Oromo Expansion: Transformations at the End of the Middle Ages (c. 1500 – c. 1560)

Amélie Chekroun and Bertrand Hirsch

The first half of the sixteenth century was a time of profound upheaval in the societies of Ethiopia and Eritrea. The chronic conflicts between the Christian kingdom and the Barr Saʿd al-Dīn became a war of conquest in which the troops led by Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm took control of nearly all of Christian territory; Oromo populations coming from the south began a formidable territorial expansion of their own from the 1520s forward; new actors (the Portuguese, the Ottomans) intervened in Ethiopian affairs in relation to their own commercial rivalry for control of the Red Sea, and thus lent those affairs an international dimension, also visible in the religious sphere in the desire of Ignatius Loyola to include Ethiopia among the lands to be missionized by his newly founded Jesuit order. And yet the historiography on this period, if compared to that on the "classic" (thirteenth- to fifteenth-century) period of medieval history, is rather scanty, as the few syntheses available indicate. The thesis of Merid Wolde Aregay, which was perhaps the first effort in this direction, was never published, despite its qualities; [1] that of Mordechai Abir, which followed in 1980, covers the period too summarily; [2] both are concentrated on the Christian kingdom. One of the challenges of studying this period is precisely that one must take into consideration all the Ethiopian societies attested in the sources and their dynamic interactions, rather than contenting oneself with a simplistic framework of "decline" or "renewal" that pertains only to the Christian kingdom. In fact, the centrality of the Christian kingdom is one of the concepts thrown into question by and in this era.

The Islamic conquest of the Christian Kingdom

The war for the conquest of the Christian kingdom had no precedent. So the emirs of the Barr Saʿd al-Dīn said to imam Aḥmad in the *Conquest of Abyssinia* (*Futūḥ al-Ḥabaša*),[3] a long Arabic account by ʿArab Faqīh (also known as Šihāb al-Dīn)[4] that narrates the rise of imam Aḥmad from the perspective of the city-dwellers of Harar from the 1520s to the attack on the

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[1] Merid Wolde Aregay, *Southern Ethiopia and the Christian Kingdom 1508-1708, with special reference to the Galla migrations and their consequences* (Ph.D diss., School of Oriental and African Studies, 1971).
[2] Mordechai Abir, *Ethiopia and the Red Sea. The rise and decline of the Solomonic dynasty and Muslim-European rivalry in the region* (London, 1980).
[3] While waiting for an edition taking into account the nine manuscripts known for the *Futūḥ al-Ḥabaša*, the reference edition remains the one by René Basset from the end of the nineteenth century, published with a French translation: René Basset, ed. and trans., *Histoire de la conquête de l'Abyssinie (XVI siècle) par Chihab Eddin Ahmed ben ʿAbd el Qâder,* 2 vols. (Paris, 1897-1909). Some translations have been made from Basset's work, into Amharic, Somali, Harari, and English. For the latter see Paul Lester Stenhouse and Richard Pankhurst, *Futūḥ al-Habaša, The Conquest of Abyssinia [16th century]* (Hollywood, CA, 2003).
[4] From his full name Šihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad b. ʻAbd al-Ḳādar b. Sālim b. ʿUṯmān, nicknamed ʿArab Faqīh. He is unknown elsewhere and would have been, according to his colophon, of Yemeni origin, or would in any case have a strong link with the city of Ğizān in Arabia.

Gälila Island in 1535 or 1537.[5] The emirs explain that "[their] fathers and [their] ancestors never wanted to settle in the country of Abyssinia. Instead they would send raiding parties to the outermost borders of the country for booty, cattle and such like [i.e. slaves]; and then they would return to the country of the Muslims."[6] Indeed, from Middle Ages until the nineteenth century, the culture of raiding was a vital part in the economy of the region, for both Muslim and Christian communities. Raids could only take place against an "infidel" population, because the capture of slaves was one of the main goals, and in both Muslim and Christian traditions it was forbidden to enslave coreligionists. By plundering territories that were not under their domination, kings and sultans secured a source of income that did not burden their own population, ensured the protection of their borders, and reaffirmed the mutual respect of borders.[7] The culture of raiding did not prevent the Christian kingdom from taking over neighboring Muslim territories at the beginning of the fifteenth century,[8] but before the jihad of imam Aḥmad, neither the Barr Saʿd al-Dīn nor the Christian kingdom tried to conquer the other. Indeed, despite the claim in the history of ʿAmdä Ṣəyon's wars that the sultan of Ifat wanted, in 1332, to become the "king of all the land of Ethiopia,"[9] it does not seem that the Muslims attempted to conquer or recover their own former territories during the two centuries before the sixteenth. Neither does it seem that such a policy persisted beyond the sixteenth century. The actions of imam Aḥmad are therefore unique in the history of Muslims in Ethiopia.

Almost nothing is known about the leader of the jihad, imam Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm al-Ġazī. In most Christian sources he is called "Grañ" ("the left-handed"), [10] despite the fact that, even if he was indeed left-handed, this pejorative nickname appears for the first time in the sources of the seventeenth century,[11] in order to deprecate this enemy who destroyed so many symbols of

[5] The last years of the war are not recounted in this text; the colophon announces a second volume that was never written or was lost. See Amélie Chekroun, "Le *Futūḥ al-Ḥabaša*: écriture de l'histoire, guerre et société dans le Barr Sa'd al-Dīn (Ethiopie, 16e siècle)" (Ph.D diss, Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, 2013); David Vô Vân, "A propos du Ğihâd dans le Futuh al-Habasha: de la lecture d'Alfred Morabia à la relecture d'Arab-Faqih," *Annales d'Éthiopie* 17 (2001): 125-137.

[6] Stenhouse and Pankhurst, eds., *Conquest of Abyssinia*, 100.

[7] See Thomas Guindeuil, "Alimentation, cuisine et ordre social dans le royaume d'Éthiopie (XIIe-XIXe siècle)," (Ph.D diss., Université de Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne, 2012), 320-322; Marie-Laure Derat, "Chrétiens et musulmans d'Éthiopie face à la traite et à l'esclavage aux XVe et XVIe siècles," in *Traites et esclavages en Afrique orientale et dans l'Océan indien*, ed. Henri Médard et al. (Paris, 2013), 121-148; Mordechai Abir, "The Ethiopian slave trade and its relation to the islamic world," in *Slaves and Slavery in Muslim Africa*, vol. 2: *The Servile Estate*, ed. J. R. Willis (London, 1985), 123-136.

[8] On the Christian expansion into formerly Islamic lands, see Deresse Ayenachew's essay and the essay "Sultanates of Medieval Ethiopia" in this volume.

[9] Paolo Marrassini, ed. and trans., *Lo scettro e la croce, La campagna di ʿAmda Seyon I contro l'Ifat (1332)* (Naples, , 1993), 141.

[10] As examples, see Manfred Kropp, ed., *Die Geschichte des Lebna Dengel, Claudius und Minās,* CSCO 503, SAe 83 (Louvain, 1988), 8; Täklä Sadéq Mäkwériya, *Yäʾaḥmäd Grañ wärära* ("The Invasion of Ahmäd Grañ") (Addis Abäba, 1966 EC [1973/74 CE]). Surprisingly, Somalis have adopted it: they call him *Gurey* (the left-handed) in Somali language, as they embraced the figure of imam Aḥmad as a national jihadist hero.

[11] For example, the *Anqāṣā amin*, an advocacy against Islam addressed to the imam in 1540 by Ǝnbaqom, the eleventh abbot of Däbrä Libanos (which was destroyed by the Muslim army in 1532) never used that nickname: see Emeri Van Donzel, ed. and trans., *Enbaqom, Anqāṣā amin. La porte de la foi : apologie éthiopienne du christianisme contre l'Islam à partir du Coran* (Leiden, 1969).

Ethiopian Christianity and its kingdom.[12] Apart from some legends that develop from the seventeenth century about his part-Christian ancestry,[13] all that is known about him comes from the *Futūḥ al-Ḥabaša.*[14] According to ʿArab Faqīh, he was probably born about 1506, in the Hūbat district of the Barr Saʿd al-Dīn. He began his military career as a soldier in the service of *gärad* Abūn b. Adaš, an opponent of the sultan's authority. *Gärad* Abūn was killed in a battle against the legitimate sultan Abū Bakr in 1525. After his death, Aḥmad succeeded Abūn as leader of the opposition against the sultan. His authority grew and he managed to gather an army powerful enough to defeat and kill Abū Bakr after several years of conflict, probably around 1527. Aḥmad put Abū Bakr's brother, ʿUmar Dīn, on the throne, but the new sultan never had any real authority: Aḥmad appointed his own brother, Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm, to watch over him. ʿArab Faqīh depicts Aḥmad as an ideal Muslim ruler, the perfect *muǧahīd*, the only one able to carry out the project of conquering the Christian kingdom, to convince the Muslim armies to join him, and to legitimize such a war.[15]

The *Futūḥ al-Ḥabaša* does not explain Aḥmad's motives for undertaking the jihad. Some Christian legends claim that it was "to punish the infidelity and pride of [the Christian king] Ləbnä Dəngəl,"[16] or grew from "the desire to avenge his father [a Christian monk] killed by the Ethiopian monks, by massacring all of them,"[17] or was sparked because Aḥmad refused to pay a tribute to the king.[18] Less personal motives have been proposed to explain this conquest as well.[19] For example, Berhanou Abebe attributes it to demographic, climatic and economic factors – the attraction of the riches of the highlands whence arrive "the slaves, the ivory, the powder of gold, the skins."[20] It is quite difficult to develop these hypotheses, because the sources do not

[12] The first text which seems to use that nickname is the *Mäṣḥafä Səddät* ("Book of the Persecution"), a brief text, probably from the first years of the seventeenth century, that relates from the Christian point of view the imam Aḥmad's campaigns from 1527 to his death in 1543. It is the only text that describes the war between the Gälila Island's attack and the Christian king Gälawdéwos' advent in 1540. This text is mainly known through the various versions of the so-called "Short Chronicle," a compilation of short notes concerning certain important events in Christian Ethiopia history, from the legendary reign of Menelik I to the modern period. Many editions and translations have been done. The last and most complete one is by Manfred Kropp, *Die Geschichte des Lebna Dengel, Claudius und Minās*, cited above.

[13] André Caquot, "Histoire Amharique de Grāñ et des Galla," *Annales d'Éthiopie* 2 (1957): 123-143; Carlo Conti-Rossini, "Note etiopiche," *Giornale della Società asiatica italiana* 10 (1897): 152; Domenico Brielli, "Ricordi storici dei Uollo," in *Studi etiopici*, ed. Carlo Conti Rossini (Rome, 1945), 78-110, at 84.

[14] Franz-Christoph Muth, "Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm al-Ġāzī," in *EAe* 1 (2003), 155-158.

[15] Chekroun, "Le *Futūḥ al-Ḥabaša*," 291-309.

[16] Caquot, "Histoire Amharique de Grāñ et des Galla;" Carlo Conti Rossini, "Il libro delle leggende e tradizioni abissine dell'ecciaghié Filpòs," *Rendiconti della Reale Accademia dei Lincei, Classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche*, 5th ser., 26 (1917): 712; Ignazio Guidi, "Leggende storiche di Abissinia," *Rivista degli studi orientali* 1 (1907): 5-30.

[17] See for example Ulrich Braukämper, *A History of the Hadiyya in Southern Ethiopia* (Wiesbaden, 2012).

[18] John Spencer Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia* (London, 1965), 86.

[19] B. G. Martin, "Mahdism, Muslim Clerics, and Holy Wars in Ethiopia, 1300-1600," in *Proceedings of the First United States Conference on Ethiopian Studies 1973*, ed. Harold G. Marcus (East Lansing, MI, 1975), 91-100; Asa J. Davis, "The sixteenth century jihād in Ethiopia and the impact on its culture: Part I," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 2, 4 (1963): 567-592; Asa J. Davis, "The sixteenth century jihād in Ethiopia and the impact on its culture: Part Two, Implicit factors behind the movement," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 3, 1 (1964): 113-128; Reidulf Knut Molvaer, "The Tragedy of Emperor Libne-Dingil of Ethiopia (1508–1540)," *Northeast African Studies* 5, 2 (1998): 23-46.

[20] Berhanou Abebe, *Histoire de l'Éthiopie, d'Axoum à la revolution* (Paris and Addis Ababa, 1998), 50.

mention such aspects. No document, for instance, suggests a population explosion within the sultanate, or even a particular drought prevailing at the time. Many mentions of famines appear in the medieval sources, both in the highlands and the lower lands, without mentioning massive displacement of populations.[21]

Generally, when historians write about "the Grañ's jihad," they refer to all the military actions carried out by imam Aḥmad against the Christian kingdom during the second quarter of the sixteenth century. This is meanly because ʿArab Faqīh, the author of the *Futūḥ al-Ḥabaša*, qualifies each armed action led by imam Aḥmad as "jihad for the sake of Allāh," whether it is a *fitna* (sedition, civil strife, period of internal discord) against the sultan Abū Bakr, a raid (*ġazw* in Arabic) against border territories in order to take booty, a defensive jihad to protect the *Dār al-Islam* against attacks by "infidels," or an offensive jihad, for conquest.[22] ʿArab Faqīh's project is to extol jihad as a worthy undertaking: this explains the omnipresence of the theme in his text. If this has led historians to group all the actions described in this account under the generic term "jihad of imam Aḥmad," we should nevertheless observe that there were several kinds of military action involved whose objectives, modalities and results were very different. Even within the offensive jihad that the Muslims of the Barr Saʿd al-Dīn led against the Christians in the 1520s and 1530s, there were two distinct phases.

The date of 1527 has been commonly accepted as marking the beginning of the conquest of the Christian kingdom, and has also generally been considered the "closing date" for the Ethiopian Middle Ages.[23] It is the date of the first conflict opposing imam Aḥmad and Christian troops that is mentioned in the Christian texts, for it corresponds to a raid led by the Christian leader Dağalḥān (Dägälhan in Gəʿəz), brother-in-law of King Ləbnä Dəngəl, against Muslim border areas. However, this is not the first battle between Aḥmad and Christian troops. The *Futūḥ al-Ḥabaša* mentions a first Christian attack repulsed by Aḥmad sometime before Dağalḥān's attack, and led by Fānīl (Fanu'el in Gəʿəz), the head of Däwaro. The description of Fānīl's attack is very similar to that of Dağalḥān's. But it is undated and does not appear in Christian texts, hence is largely forgotten.

Since, in any case, 1527 corresponds to a Christian attack on Islamic lands and not the reverse, it is an odd date at which to mark the beginning of the jihad. In fact, none of the sources signal 1527 as the beginning of the conquest; all of them date it few years later. The first chapter of the chronicle of Śärṣä Dəngəl[24] dates the "beginning of the Christian persecution" to a "second incident," the battle of Ṣambra Kūrā (Šəmbərä Kʷərə in Gəʿəz) in 1529 and the subsequent Islamic conquest of Däwaro.[25] Another Christian source, the *Mäṣḥafä Səddät* ("Book of the persecution"), also de-emphasizes 1527, for Dağalḥān's attack is here clearly described as

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[21] Guindeuil, *Alimentation, cuisine et ordre social*, 295-319; Cerulli, "Documenti arabi," 57.
[22] See particularly Michael Bonner, *Jihad in Islamic History. Doctrines and Practice* (Princeton, 2006); John Kelsay and James Johnson, *Just War and Jihad: Historical and Theoretical Perspectives on War and Peace in Western and Islamic Traditions* (New York, 1991); Alfred Morabia, *Le ğihad dans l'Islam medieval* (Paris, 1993).
[23] See for example Taddesse Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia, 1270-1527* (Oxford, 1972).
[24] The chronicle of Śärṣä Dəngəl is preceded by three short chapters, each of them dedicated to the reign of one of his predecessors: Ləbnä Dəngəl, Gälawdewos and Minas. See Kropp, *Geschichte*; Carlo Conti Rossini, "Storia di Lebna Dengel;" Francisco Maria Pereira, *Historia de Minás, Además Sagad, rei de Ethiopia* (Lisbon, 1888). None of them are very detailed, because, according to the author, the purpose was to "describe very briefly and without verbiage or prolixity, but in a few words, the history of the victories and glories of our gracious king who loved God and the people."
[25] Kropp, *Die Geschichte,* 9.

a raid. It is only "two years after," in the twenty-first year of Ləbnä Dəngəl's reign (i.e. 1529), that Aḥmad attacked Christian territory and fought for the first time against Ləbnä Dəngəl in Ṣambra Kūrā, and two years after that, so in 1531, that "Grañ left the country of ʿAdal" and started to attack Däwaro.[26] For its part, the *Taʾrīḫ al-mulūk* ("History of the Kings"), a short Arabic text that tells of the last decades of the Barr Saʿd al-Dīn, dates the beginning of the conquest to 937 AH, which corresponds to the year between 25 August 1530 and 14 August 1531 AD.[27]

Finally, the *Futūḥ al-Ḥabaša* is less explicit on the date of the beginning of the conquest, probably because ʿArab Faqīh includes all conflicts between Muslims and Christians under the rubric of the jihad. But the beginning of the conquest strictly speaking is preceded by four "expeditions" (*ġazw* in Arabic) on the initiative of Aḥmad. During those expeditions, the Christian and the Muslim armies faced each other for the first time in two major battles: at Bādaqī (September 1528) and at Ṣambra Kūrā (March 1529). The direct attack on the Christian king in these battles was unprecedented.[28] But the main objective was still booty, and after seizing it the army returned to Harar.

Despite some variability in the sources' accounts, therefore, it seems clear that an Islamic offensive with conquest as its aim was finally launched only in 1531, after long and thorough preparations of the army and the recruitment of foreign soldiers. The annexation of new territories became systematic, as did the appointment of Muslim governors over newly conquered land. The departure from Harar was followed very shortly afterward by a first big battle, at Anṭākya (Anṣokiya in Gəʿəz), near Ayfars, in February-March 1531. After his description of this battle, ʿArab Faqīh's vocabulary sheds all ambiguity: the rules of conquest over new territories are described as scrupulously respected.

By embarking on a multi-year war in which regular return to the Barr Saʿd al-Dīn was unfeasible, Aḥmad broke with the tradition of raiding. This rupture is manifested first of all by a new objective in the fight against the Christians: it is no longer simply a matter of taking booty, but first and foremost taking control of territories and integrating them into the *Dār al-Islām*. During raids the troops were very small, and probably mostly composed of the regular army of Barr Saʿd ad-Dīn, namely the *Malasāy* (riders) and the "soldiers of the sea" (infantrymen). To conquer the Christian kingdom, imam Aḥmad instead used contingents from populations tributary to the sultans (Harla, Somali, etc.), probably essentially peripheral, the so-called "bedouins" of Ibn Khaldun.[29] They were joined by troops and individual soldiers from Arabia, including Mahra, and from other parts of the Islamic world.[30] Though armaments do not seem to have been entirely revolutionized by this exceptional war, the use of firearms[31] bought at Zaylaʿ

[26] Ibid., 12.
[27] Enrico Cerulli, "Documenti arabi per la storia dell'Etiopia," *Rendiconti della Reale Accademia dei Lincei*, 6th ser., 4 (1931): 39-96, at 55.
[28] Stenhouse and Pankhurst, trans, *Conquest of Abyssinia,* 57.
[29] Gabriel Martinez-Gros, *Ibn Khaldûn et les sept vies de l'Islam* (Paris, 2006), 56.
[30] Amélie Chekroun, "Ottomans, Yemenis and the 'conquest of Abyssinia' (1531-1543)," in *Movements in Ethiopia, Ethiopia in Movement. Proceedings of the 18th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, ed. Eloi Ficquet and Ahmed Hassen (Addis Ababa, 2015).
[31] On firearms in Ethiopia see Salih Özbaran, "The Ottomans' Role in the Diffusion of Fire-Arms and Military Technology in Asia and Africa in the Sixteenth Century," in *The Ottoman response to European Expansion: studies on Ottoman-Portuguese relations in the Indian Ocean and Ottoman administration in the Arab lands during the*

was essential, and required a new technical knowledge. The Islamic conquest of the Christian kingdom therefore had profound implications for the way in which war was waged.

For the first few years, the conquest focused on territories in the southern half of the Christian kingdom. The first year was devoted to a systematic attack on the king's places of power, and saw frontal attacks between the royal Christian armies and those of the imam. The latter judged that only the capture of the Christian king could sustainably establish their authority.[32] After a year of pursuing the king from Damot to Amhara, the Islamic army had conquered all spaces south of Amhara. The integration of these territories, mainly Däwaro, Bali, Fäṭägar, Ifat, and Hadiyya, was facilitated by the significant presence in them of Muslim communities, remnants of the Islamic past of these former "Muslim kingdoms."[33] They were the only ones to choose to convert massively to Islam during the peace treaties. In the rest of the Christian kingdom, the population very largely chose to keep its religion and to pay the capitation.[34] By the end of 1532, Aḥmad established his camp at Däbrä Bərhan in Šäwa, which became the center of his new power. Only after taking control of the entire southern area of the Christian kingdom and establishing Muslim governors in each of the territories could the Islamic army travel further north in order to complete the conquest of the kingdom. But the conquest of the north of the kingdom was no more difficult than that of the south: in less than two years, Aḥmad's army managed to seize control of Lasta, Bägemdər, Dämbəya, Təgray, and the coastal region in present-day Eritrea. By 1537, Muslims controlled a large majority of the Christian territory, including a number of key regions. The conquest was therefore a success – except that the king was still not captured, even if his position was very shaky. Islam had never been so powerful in the historical Ethiopian area.

The following years were devoted to the consolidation of Muslim domination. They are not described in ʿArab Faqīh's text, so we must rely on Portuguese and Christian sources. These other documents informing us about the events that happened from 1535-1537 give us only rare information on the actions of the imam and his army. Produced mainly by the Christian power, they focus on the Christian reactions to the Islamic conquest.

In 1540-1541, a Portuguese contingent sent to support the Christian king arrived in Massawa and aided the weakened royal army in fighting against the Muslims. At the same time, a Yemeni contingent joined the ranks of Aḥmad's army.

In 1541, the Portuguese governor of India conducted an expedition to the Red Sea against the Ottomans. During a stop at Massawa in February 1541 he was informed by the *baḥər nägaš* (coastal governor) Yəsḥaq of King Gälawdewos's situation and, probably because Gälawdewos's predecessor, Ləbnä Dəngəl, had asked for help from King João III of Portugal,[35] a military company of 400 Portuguese soldiers under the command of Christovão da Gama was formed in an attempt to rescue what Portugal then considered a strategic ally in its war in the Red

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sixteenth century, ed. Salih Özbaran (Istanbul, 1994), 61-66; Richard Pankhurst, "The History of Fire Arms in Ethiopia prior to the Nineteenth Century," *Ethiopian Observer* 11 (1967): 202-225.

[32] Stenhouse and Pankhurst, trans., *Conquest of Abyssinia,* 190, 196.

[33] See Ulrich Braukämper, *Islamic History and Culture in Southern Ethiopia* (Berlin, 2003); Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, 68.

[34] See Amélie Chekroun, "Conquête(s) et conversions religieuses en Éthiopie du XVIe siècle," *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions*, 182 (2018): 149-166; Richard Pankhurst, "Peace negotiations in the Land of Dāwaro in 1531: A Page From the History of Ahmād Grañ," *Sociology Ethnology Bulletin* 1, 2 (1992): 61-64.

[35] Sergew Hable Selassie, "The Ge'ez Letters of Queen Eleni and Libne Dingil to John, King of Portugal," in *IV Congresso internazionale di studi etiopici*, ed. Enrico Cerulli, 2 vols. (Rome, 1974) 1: 547.

Sea against the Ottoman Empire. (The company included João Bermudes and Miguel de Castanhoso, who both wrote accounts of their journeys in Ethiopia.)[36] After several battles, the Portuguese were defeated at the battle of Wäfla in Təgray in August 1542. According to the sources, Christovão da Gama was captured and killed –maybe even beheaded– by the imam Aḥmad. The surviving soldiers finally joined Gälawdewos in Səmen in October and continued to fight in his army.[37]

It is generally assumed that the Ottoman Empire gave its support to the Muslim military coalition, and that the Portuguese and Ottoman interventions in this Ethiopian war reflected their competing political ambitions around the Red Sea.[38] The sources from both Ethiopia and the Ottoman Empire suggest, however, that the Ottoman sultan was not really interested in the Ethiopian war.[39] The first Ottoman occupation of the Yemeni coast began only in 1538-1539.[40] The military support coming from Zabīd, Aden, and Mahra must be seen as an extension of the close contacts that economically and diplomatically united these regions with Islamic Ethiopia throughout the Middle Ages, rather than as an Ottoman intervention.[41]

There have been some attempts to identify places mentioned in the sources (especially in Castanhonso's narrative),[42] and the main dynamics of these few years have been outlined, but a systematic study of the years following the arrival of the Portuguese has yet to be done. In February or March 1543 – the precise date is unknown, as each source gives a different one – a battle occurred between the Christian and Muslim armies at Zäntara (Wäyna Däga) east of Lake Ṭana, in which imam Aḥmad was killed.[43] His death marks the end of the jihad and of the

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[36] R. S. Whiteway, ed., *The Portuguese expedition to Abyssinia in 1541-1543, as narrated by Castanhoso, with some contemporary letters, the short account of Bermudez, and certain extracts from Correa* (London, 1902); João Bermudes, *Ma géniale imposture – Patriarche du Prêtre Jean*, trans. S. Rodrigues de Oliveira (Toulouse, 2010); Miguel de Castanhoso, *Dos Feitos de D. Cristovao da Gama em Etiopia: Tratado composto por Miguel de Castanhoso*, ed. F. M. E. Pereira (Lisbon, 1983).

[37] On the Portuguese contingent, see Girma Beshah and Merid Wolde Aregay, *The question of the Union of the Churches in Luso-Ethiopian Relations (1500-1632)* (Lisbon, 1964), chap. 6; Andreu Martínez d'Alòs-Moner, "Gama, Christovão da," in *EAe* 2 (2005), 663-664; Whiteway, ed., *The Portuguese expedition*.

[38] Cengiz Orhonlu, *Osmanli Imparatorluğu'nun Güney Siyaseti. Habeş Eyaleti [The Southern Policy of the Ottoman Empire in Ethiopia]* (Istanbul, 1974), 26-27; Salih Özbaran, *Ottoman Expansion Towards the Indian Ocean in the 16th Century* (Istanbul, 2009); Mordechai Abir, *Ethiopia and the Red Sea. The rise and decline of the Solomonic dynasty and Muslim-European rivalry in the region* (London, 1980), 99; Ali Shamshad, "The Ottoman Empire and Ethiopia," in *Foreign relations with Ethiopia: human and diplomatic history (from its origins to present)*, ed. Lukian Prijac (Berlin, 2015), 225-244.

[39] The only mention of the war in the Ottoman archives is in a letter, written in Ottoman and stored in a library in Istanbul, not dated but probably from 1541, addressed by the Ottoman administration to "Sultan Ahmed al-Hākim be Vilāyet-I Habesh " ("Sultan Aḥmad, leader of the Abyssinian Province"): Cengiz Orhonlu, *Osmanli Imparator*, 27.

[40] F. Soudan, *Le Yémen ottoman d'après la chronique d'al-Mawzaʿī: al-Iḥsān fī duḫīl Mamlakat al-Yaman taḥt ẓill ʿadālat āl ʿUṯmān* (Cairo, 1999); Michel Tuchscherer, "Chronologie du Yémen (1506-1635)," *Chroniques yéménites* 8 (2000): 14-29.

[41] See Chekroun, "Ottomans, Yemenis."

[42] Genrela Staff, *Storia della spedizione portoghese in Abissinia* (Rome, 1888); Whiteway, ed., *Portuguese Expedition*; Enno Littmann, *Die Heldentaten des Dom Christoph da Gama in Abessinien* (Berlin, 1907); C. F. Beckingham, "A note on the topography of Ahmad Gran's Campaigns in 1542," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 4 (1959): 363-373.

[43] The Indian Arabic *Ẓafar al-wālih bi-Muẓaffar wa-Ālihi* by al-Ḥāğğ al-Dabīr, a history of the Gujarat written at the end of the sixteenth century that describes the jihad, mainly through the reading of the *Futūḥ al-Ḥabaša*, gives an interesting description of this last battle, with the help of oral information from Ethiopian slaves in Gujarat. See

Islamic conquest, and the beginning of the Muslim debacle. The collapse of Islamic territorial control is not documented, but the chronicle of Gälawdewos's reign describes a Christian reconquest of the former kingdom in less than two years.[44]

The two decades that followed the Muslim debacle deeply disrupted the territorial and political organization of the region. The Christian kingdom and the sultanate of Barr Saʿd al-Dīn both sought to reorganize and strengthen themselves, but the war had left a vacuum into which foreign powers rushed.

The Barr Saʿd al-Dīn's End

The chronicle of Gälawdewos's reign is the only document that describes the situation of the Muslim army after imam Aḥmad's death. The collapse that followed is very quickly evoked: part of the army fled to the pre-conquest Islamic territories, while the rest rallied to the Christian camp. According to this chronicle, after Aḥmad's defeat, the vizier ʿAbbās, chief of the army and second in the military hierarchy after the imam, attempted to take up the role held by Aḥmad by continuing to control Bali, Fäṭägar and Däwaro, three of the most important border provinces annexed during the conquest. His project was to reconquer all the territories Aḥmad had subdued. This resistance was brief. As early as October 1544, a year and a half after Aḥmad's death, Gälawdewos killed ʿAbbās and reconquered these three territories, as well as that of Hadiyya.[45] After two brief attempts to reclaim Däwaro, the Muslims were quickly beaten. We do not know who led these Muslim troops. Finally, two Christian attacks on the Islamic territories are described, the first led by Fanuʾel, head of the Christian army, and the second by Gälawdewos himself. The second attack took place in 1549-1550.[46] It seems to have destroyed the province of "ʿAdal" (that is, the Barr Saʿd al-Dīn), killed the reigning sultan, and hunted down a leader of the region named Nūr.

Amir Nūr was probably the son of one of Aḥmad's viziers, Muğāhid b. ʿAlī b. ʿAbd Allāh Sūha. He took power over the sultanate from the year 959 AH (1551/1552 AD), placing the legitimate sultan under his tutelage. In March-April 1559, during a great battle in Fäṭägar, Nūr killed and decapitated the Christian king Gälawdewos. After this victory, Nūr is said to have returned to Harar with the head of his enemy. It will be remembered that the death of the Christian king had been the main objective – never reached - of the war waged by Aḥmad, the necessary precondition to definitively establish Islamic control over formerly Christian lands.

Denison Ross, trans., *An Arabic history of Gujarat: Ẓafar al-wālih bi-Muẓaffar wa-Ālih, by ʿAbdallāh Muhammad bin ʿOmar al-Makki al-Asafi Ulughkhani* (London, 1910); M. F. Lokhandwala, *Zafar ul wālih bi muzaffar wa-ālihi: an Arabic history of Gujarat (English translation), by Ulughkhāni Hājji ad-Dabir,* 2 vols. (Baroda, 1970-1974); Alessandro Gori, "Fame (and debts) beyond the sea: two mentions of imām Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm in an Indian Arabic source," in *Linguistic, Oriental and Ethiopian Studies in Memory of Paolo Marrassini*, ed. Alessandro Bausi, Alessandro Gori, and Gianfrancesco Lusini (Wiesbaden, 2014), 477-490.

[44] See the chronicle of Gälawdewos (r. 1540-1559): William E. Conzelman, ed., *Chronique de Galâwdêwos (Claudius), roi d'Éthiopie* (Paris, 1895). The author of the chronicle takes an elegiac perspective on the king: see Dimitri Toubkis, "'Je deviendrai roi sur tout le pays d'Éthiopie.' Royauté et écriture de l'histoire dans l'Éthiopie chrétienne (XVIe-XVIIIe siècles)" (Ph.D diss., Université Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne, 2004), vol. 1, 74-106; Manfred Kropp, "La réédition des chroniques éthiopiennes: perspectives et premiers résultats," *Abbay* 12 (1983-1984): 49-72, at 52.

[45] Conzelman, ed., *Chronique de Galâwdêwos,* chap. 23-27.

[46] Ibid., chapters 35-38

But Nūr did not take advantage of this victory to resume the conquest. One explanation for this is the very unstable situation within the Barr Saʿd al-Dīn. The sultanate's power was more fragile than ever, the territory being subject to Oromo attacks and to a serious economic crisis; in addition to epidemics and famine, the population was weakened by the long war and the death of a large part of the male population.

Amir Nūr is particularly famous[47] for having fought the Oromo and for building a city wall to protect Harar from both their repeated attacks and from disease. He died in Harar, of the plague, in 1567.[48] He is regarded as the successor of imam Aḥmad. The *Taʾrīḫ al-mulūk* gives him the title of "second conqueror" (*al-fatah al-ṯānī*), and today, in Harari memories, he remains much more prestigious than Aḥmad himself.

After the death of Amir Nūr, the dynastic troubles in the sultanate resumed. The dynastic line of Saʿd al-Dīn died out during the reign of Amir Nūr in 1559, with the death of Sultan Habīb b. ʿUmar Dīn. Thereafter, according to the *Taʾrīḫ al-mulūk*, five rulers succeeded each other in quick succession, none reigning for more than a few years. This work also indicates that Sultan Muḥammad b. Nāṣir (r. 1572/3-1575/6) led an expedition against the Christian kingdom. It was a bitter failure for the Muslims, who saw a part of their troops go over to the Christian side.[49] Finally, the imam Muḥammad Gaša (r. 1577-1583) shifted the center of power to Awsa, marking the end of the sultanate.

Looking back over these events, we may note that despite the turbulent events of the first decades of the sixteenth century, the descendants of Saʿd al-Dīn continued to reign over the Barr Saʿd ad-Dīn until 1559, when the last sultan of this dynasty, Ḥabīb b. ʿUmar Dīn, was killed. Should we consider that the end of the dynasty marks the end of a period that began with the creation of Barr Saʿd al-Dīn in the early fifteenth century? Should we rather consider the final failure of the conquest of the Christian kingdom in 1543 as a break in the history of this territory?

The conquest led by imam Aḥmad profoundly impacted the Christian kingdom as well as the Barr Saʿd al-Dīn. But it would be wrong to say that the war of imam Aḥmad marks the end of an era, at least as far as the sultanate is concerned. The war against the Christian kingdom was only one manifestation of the troubles that led to the disappearance of the dynasty of the sultans descending from Saʿd al-Dīn, and then to the disintegration of the Barr Saʿd al-Dīn sultanate itself. Beginning in the late fifteenth century, internal struggles for the control of the sultanate, including the very rapid succession of sovereigns, alternating usurpers and legitimate descendants of the dynasty of Saʿd al-Dīn, continued until the reign of a certain imam Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm Gaša (r. 1577-1583). The latter moved the center of power to Awsa in the 1580s. It is this migration that marks the definitive end of Barr Saʿd al-Dīn. Mainly caused by

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[47] See for example Enrico Cerulli, "Gli emiri di Harar dal secolo XVI alla conquista egiziana (1875)," *RSE* 2 (1942): 2-18; Richard Burton, "Narrative of a trip to Harar," *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London* 25 (1855): 136-150; Muhammed Moktar, "Notes sur le pays de Harrar," *Bulletin trimestriel de la société khaldiviale de Géographie du Caire* 1st ser., 4 (1876): 351-3; Ewald Wagner, "Die Chronologie der frühen muslimischen Herrscher in Äthiopien nach den Harariner Emirslisten," in *Wort und Wirklichkeit. Studien zur Afrikanistik und Orientalistik*, *Festchrift für Eugen Ludwig Rapp zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Brigitta Benzing, Otto Böcher and Günter Mayer, vol. 1, (Meisenheim: Hain, 1976), 186-204.

[48] Cerulli, "Documenti arabi," 156 ff; Conzelman, ed., *Chronique de Galâwdêwos*, 178; Franz-Christoph Muth, "Nūr b. Muǧāhid," in *EAe* 3 (2007), 1209-1210.

[49] Cerulli, "Documenti arabi," 162-163; Kropp, *Die Geschichte*; Conti Rossini, *Sarsa Dengel*, 56-59.

Oromo pressures in the Harar region, this migration was also the final consequence of internal discord in the sultanate.

In this long troubled phase, the conquest of the Christian kingdom was paradoxically a stable period for the Barr Saʿd al-Dīn. Sultan ʿUmār Dīn, a descendant of Saʿd al-Dīn whom imam Aḥmad placed on the throne, remained in power long after the death of Aḥmad. Moreover, by federating the various populations under his authority, and driving onto the Christian highlands most of the soldiers and local emirs, imam Aḥmad provided a temporary peace between the central power and the population (especially the Somali clans), and between the sultan and the elites under his rule.

If the Muslims of the Barr Saʿd al-Dīn reduced their attacks against the Christian kingdom after Aḥmad's death in 1543 (but did not stop them – Gälawdewos, it will be recalled, was killed in 1559), the Christian power then saw other foreign powers attack it in various forms.

Portuguese and Jesuits

This is obviously not the place to discuss the role of the Jesuits at the Ethiopian court, which had a serious impact on the reorganization of the Ethiopian Christian monarchy in the early seventeenth century.[50] However, it is impossible to discuss the transitional period in the Christian kingdom following the end of the war against the Barr Saʿd al-Dīn without mentioning the first Jesuit incursions into Ethiopia, a direct consequence of Portuguese policy in the Red Sea.[51] The attempts to establish diplomatic and military relations between Portugal and the "Kingdom of Prester John," first under King Manuel I (1495-1521) and later under João III (1521 -1557), saw several representatives of the Portuguese power visit the Ethiopian royal court. The most famous visitor was Francisco Alvares, chaplain of the Portuguese mission sent by Manoel I to Ethiopia in 1515. He stayed in Ethiopia from 1520 to 1526, and wrote a very famous account of his stay, the first lengthy eyewitness description of the Ethiopian highlands by a European, *Ho Preste Joam das indias. Verdadera informaçam das terras do Preste Joam* ("The Prester John of the Indies. A True Narration about the Lands of the Prester John").[52]

Portugal's goal with the first Luso-Ethiopian embassies was to acquire a new Christian ally in the fight against Islam in the Red Sea. If these first Portuguese embassies made it possible to pinpoint the exact location of the Christian kingdom of Ethiopia, they revealed above all that the Christianity professed there was, according to the Catholic criteria, heterodox. A political alliance could only be envisaged if Ethiopia converted to Catholicism, through the conversion of the Christian king. It was on these ideas that the first Jesuit mission was sent to Ethiopia in 1555, as is shown in the letter that Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuit order, wrote to King Gälawdewos on February, 23, 1555.[53] The mission to Ethiopia was one of the first projects of the Society of Jesus, which Ignatius had founded in 1534 and Pope Paul III approved in 1540. At

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[50] Hervé Pennec, *Des jésuites au royaume du prêtre Jean (Éthiopie). Stratégies, rencontres et tentatives d'implantation (1495-1633)* (Paris, 2003); Andreu Martínez d'Alòs-Moner, *Envoys of a Human God. The Jesuit Mission to Christian Ethiopia, 1557-1632* (Leiden, 2015); Leonardo Cohen and Andreu Martínez d'Alòs-Moner, "Jesuits," in *EAe* 3 (2007), 277-281.

[51] See the first volume of J. Aubin, *Le latin et l'astrolabe. Recherches sur le Portugal de la Renaissance, son expansion en Asie et les relations internationales*, 2 vols. (Lisbon 1996).

[52] The translation of reference, with annotations, is Beckingham-Huntingford, *Prester John.*

[53] *Monumenta Historica Societatis Iesu* (MHSI*)*, vol. 8 (Rome, 1966), 681.

first, Ignatius himself was supposed to lead the mission. A first contingent, composed of *mestre* Rodrigues, Fulgencio Freire and Diogo Dias, was sent to prepare the coming of the mission by meeting Gälawdewos at his court in the south of his kingdom. In a letter of 23 June 1555 addressed to the viceroy of India, dom Pedro Mascarenhas, Rodrigues explained that Gälawdewos was absolutely unwilling to lend obedience to Rome or to receive a Catholic patriarch for the Ethiopians, and was determined to hold to the traditional Ethiopian Orthodox faith.[54]

As a result, the mission was reduced, Ignatius de Loyola cancelled his coming, and only six Jesuits were sent to Ethiopia, under Bishop Andrés de Oviedo, in 1557. They met King Gälawdewos soon after, who refused once again to adopt Catholicism. However, he authorized the Jesuits to settle in Təgray, where they founded a Catholic mission at Fəremona, on the ʿAdwa plateau, in 1566. They were supported by the few Portuguese living in Ethiopia since 1541, and by the *bäḥər nägaš* Yəsḥaq. The persecutions against the Jesuits really started under Minas's reign, and continued with less intensity under his successor Śärṣä Dəngəl. They were always kept away from the royal court. This marginalization was accentuated by the closure of the port of Massawa. The port being occupied by the Ottomans, Europeans could no longer pass this way into Ethiopia, and missionary relief could not arrive. The last Jesuit died in 1597. It was not until 1603 that another Jesuit managed to arrive in Ethiopia, Father Pedro Páez.

Ottomans

As we have said, the Ottomans at first showed little interest in Ethiopia, and it is very likely that during the conquest led by Aḥmad they had only a vague knowledge of the Ethiopian situation. As shown by Gengiz Orhonlu, the famous Turkish historian of Ottoman Africa through the Ottoman archives, the Ottoman documentation before the 1550s, mainly the work of Ottoman geographers, shows that they were only interested in coasts and had very limited knowledge of the interior, and that the Ottoman government had neither a political nor a religious interest in Ethiopia.[55] One of the rare Ottoman documents that mentions "Ḥabešistan" before the middle of the century is a report, most likely of Admiral Seman Reis, dated 2 June 1525, which deals with the situation of Yemen, the countries of the Red Sea, and the Indian Ocean. The author describes the ports of Dahlak, Sawākin and Zaylaʿ, and emphasizes their strategic importance for control of the Bab al-Mandeb. But the priority was clearly Yemen and, more generally, access to the Indian Ocean.[56]

In 1517, Sultan Selim I conquered Egypt, and the Ottoman Empire became the major power in the Red Sea. After the conquest of Yemen between 1538 and 1547 by Sulayman *Paša*, and the Ottoman penetration into Upper and Lower Nubia in 1540-41 by Özdemir *Paša*, the

[54] Conzelman, ed. *Chronique de Galâwdêwos*, ch. 47; Edward Ullendorff, "The 'Confessio Fidei' of King Claudius of Ethiopia," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 32 (1987): 159-76; Leonardo Cohen, "The Portuguese Context of the *Confessio Fidei* of King Claudius," in *Ethiopian Studies at the End of the Second Millennium, Proceedings of the XIVth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, November 6-11, 2000, Addis Ababa,* ed. Baye Yiman, 2 vols. (Addis Ababa, 2002), 1: 152-68; Pedro Páez, *Pedro Páez's History of Ethiopia, 1622*, ed. Isabel Boavida, Hervé Pennec, and Manuel João Ramos, trans. C. Tribe, 2 vols. (Farnham, 2011), 1: 19-23.
[55] Cengiz Orhonlu, "Turkish archival sources on Ethiopia," in *IV Congresso Internazionale di Studi Etiopici*, ed. Enrico Cerulli, 2 vols, (Rome, 1974), 1: 455-462.
[56] Salih Özbaran, *Ottoman Expansion towards the Indian Ocean in the 16th Century* (Istanbul, 2009) Appendix II.

latter occupied the port of Sawākin in the early 1550s – the precise date is unknown – and in 1554, it was declared a *sanǧak* (district of an Ottoman province or *eyaleti*) within the Ottoman Egyptian administration. Özdemir *Paša* was officially appointed as the governor of the Habeš *eyaleti* (the province of Abyssinia), created on 15 July 1555: the administrative headquarters was then Sawākin and the surrounding area was unified under this new administrative unit.[57] The Ottomans quickly came into competition with the Funǧ sultanate of Sinnār, established in 1504, which attempted to control Sawākin and its hinterland. On the other hand, in order to compete with the Portuguese for the control of the Red Sea, the Ottomans launched a military expedition on the southern shore.

Between 1557 and 1559, Özdemir *paša* took Massawa, Ḥarqiqo, the Dahlak islands, and, according to Orhonlu, Zaylaʿ as well, and for a short time Berbera. Ḥarqiqo and Zaylaʿ became *sanǧak*s within the Habeš *eyaleti*[58]. In the same way that "ʿAdal" is often represented on maps as occupying half the territory of present-day Ethiopia, as well as Djibouti and Somaliland, the Habeš *eyaleti* is very often represented as a broad band occupying all of the Red Sea's African shore and extending relatively far inland. The historical situation was in fact a bit more complex. First of all, Zaylaʿ did not stay long under Ottoman rule. The Arabic documents from Zaylaʿ edited by Enrico Cerulli never mention an Ottoman occupation. Instead they identify local *gärad* ("governors") and local warlords, and mention the building of a wall between 1572 and 1577 to protect the town against Somali nomads plundering during the governorship of *gärad* Lādo.[59] So for the southern part of what is generally described as the Habeš *eyaleti*, the question of an actual Ottoman occupation remains open. As for Ottoman control in Təgray, the maximum expansion lasted only a short time before refocusing strictly on the coast. Starting from Massawa, which had become the administrative and economic center of the Habeš *eyaleti*, Özdemir *paša* moved towards the interior, and took a part of Təgray as well as Dəbarwa, the capital of the *Baḥər nägaš* province. He established a fort at Dəbarwa, reportedly full of uncountable wealth, with a main mosque (*ǧāmiʿ*), in order to expand Ottoman power into the surrounding area.[60] The Ottoman settlement at Dəbarwa was important, as shown by two well-preserved copper coins, today kept in the Coin Collection of Tübingen University in Germany, that were struck in Dəbarwa in 974 AH (1566/67 AD), the year of Sultan Selim II's accession.[61] At first, the Christian governor of the province, Yəsḥaq, fought against the Ottomans, and obliged them temporarily to retreat back down the coast. But during the reigns of Minas and Śärṣä Dəngəl, rivalries emerged between these kings and Yəsḥaq, and the latter changed sides and supported the Ottoman extension. In 1562, Dəbarwa was once again under Ottoman rule. In 1576, Śärṣä Dəngəl's troops captured the fort and razed it to the ground, and at the battle of ʿAddi Qorro in 1578, the Ottoman

[57] Orhonlu, *Osmanli*, 37.
[58] Ibid., 43 ff. and 113 ff.
[59] Cerulli, "Documenti arabi," 70-89.
[60] Conzelman, ed., *Chronique de Galâwdêwos*, 166-168.
[61] Necdet Kabaklarli, "Deverya, an Unknown Ottoman Mint in Eritrea," in *Mangır – Yemen'de darbedilen Osmanlı bakır paraları*, ed. Necdet Kabaklarli (Istanbul, 2007), 146-52.

paša Ahmed and the *bäḥər nägaš* Yəsḥaq were killed.[62] The Ottomans decided then to limit their control to the Red Sea shores.[63]

Despite the death in 1561 of Özdemur *paša* (creator of the Ottoman province of Habeš), the definitive loss of Dəbarwa and Təgray, and the general slowdown of Ottoman efforts in Ethiopia after the uprising of imam Mutahhar in Yemen in 1569-1570,[64] the key positions along the trade routes linking the Red Sea with the Ethiopian highlands remained under Ottoman control. The decline of the Portuguese presence in the area helped them. The Ottomans continued to control the trade with inland Ethiopia during following centuries, particularly regarding the import of firearms and the export of slaves.[65]

II. The Oromo Expansion

The major historical phenomenon of the sixteenth century, although not yet studied to the degree it deserves, was the expansion of Oromo populations into territories previously within the Christian and Islamic states of Ethiopia-Eritrea. Within a few decades, the political, demographic, and religious map of the region was transformed.

The small number of studies dedicated to this subject before the 1990s can be explained by three factors: the relative scarcity of the documentation; the production of historical accounts that privilege continuity; and the marginalization and subjection of Oromo peoples after the (often violent) conquests led by King Menelik II into Oromo territory at the end of the nineteenth century, which produced negative and derogatory representations of these peoples that persisted long afterward. Since the 1990s – the publication of the thesis of Mohammed Hassen can be considered a turning point[66] – the number of historical studies has grown in a domain where anthropology previously prevailed.

The Oromo formed a vast group who spoke a Cushitic language (Oromomiffaa), lived in the southwest of Ethiopia, [67] and practiced animal husbandry and agriculture.[68] Due to lack of sources, very little is known of their history or society before the sixteenth century, but one may suppose that they had interactions with neighboring societies and with the Islamic and Christian

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[62] Carlo Conti Rossini, *La guerra turco-abissina del 1578* (Rome, 1923); Paolo Marrassini, "I possenti di Rom': I Turchi Ottomani nella letteratura etiopica," in *Turcica et Islamica. Studi in memoria di Aldo Gallotta*, ed. Ugo Marazzi (Naples, 2003), 593-622.

[63] Orhonlu partially reconstructed this first period of the Habeš *eyaleti* on the basis of the Ottoman archives: Orhonlu, *Osmanli*, 93-128.

[64] Salih Özbaran, *The Ottoman Response to European Expansion* (Istanbul, 1994), 193-194.

[65] See Wolbert Smidt and Alessandro Gori, "Ottoman Empire, relations with the," in *EAe* 4 (2010), 74-81.

[66] Mohammed Hassen, *The Oromo of Ethiopia: A History 1570-1860* (Cambridge, 1990). The dissertation upon which this book draws was defended at the University of London in 1983.

[67] On the question of the "origins" of the Oromo, see the methodological reflections of Alessandro Triulzi, "Oromo Traditions of Origin," in *Études éthiopiennes*, vol. 1: *Actes de la X conférence internationale des études éthiopiennes, Paris, 24-28 août 1988,* ed. Claude Lepage (Paris, 1994), 593-601.

[68] Were there distinct groups of pastoralists and farmers within Oromo society in this period? So supposes Ezekiel Gebissa when he writes, "At the initial stage of the Oromo expansion, only the pastoralist Oromo moved to other areas. The settled agriculturists stayed in their cradle land and in the territories then ruled by the sultanates of Däwaro, Ifat, Wağ and Bale and within the medieval Christian kingdom": "Oromo History," in *EAe* 4 (2010), 61-64, at 61-62.

states.[69] Their formidable expansion in the sixteenth century is documented in the Gəʿəz sources, notably in the chronicles of Kings Gälawdewos and Śärṣa Dəngəl as well as in the Short Chronicles, but these texts only mention a few battles in which the royal army met Oromo warriors.[70] One could add to these the accounts of European witnesses like João Bermudes and oral traditions, of which the first were collected by Antoine d'Abbadie. But none of this would be sufficient to retrace the stages of the Oromo expansion without the aid of a text written by a learned monk named Baḥrəy in the 1590s at the court of King Śärṣa Dəngəl: a history of the Oromo called, in Gəʿəz, the *Zenahu la-Galla* ("History of the Galla").

This text is exceptional in many aspects, but above all because it is one of the only works of Christian Ethiopian literature devoted to the history of a radically different society, and has been the object of several editions and translations, as well as numerous commentaries. Of its author we have long known what he tells us himself in the work: he was a monk from a monastery in Gamo, a region on the southeastern frontier of the Christian kingdom. As he wrote, "The *Däwwe* chased off this prophet, devastated his land of Gamo, and carried off as booty all that he possessed." These events occurred after one Fasil, a leader in the Christian kingdom, was killed in battle against the Ǧäwe (a branch of the Oromo Booranaa), and thus after 1586-1587 CE. Baḥrəy then took refuge at the royal court of Śärṣa Dəngəl[71]. Recent research conducted by Getatchew Haile has enriched his biography[72] in showing that Baḥrəy authored the majority of the texts in MS Or. 534 of the British Library, in particular a *Psalms of Christ* (*Mäzmurä Krəstos*), a poetic tour de force, which confirms other biographical clues and reveals that Baḥrəy was one of the most cultivated learned men of his time.

Baḥrəy explains his objectives in relation to two questions. The first is raised in the work's opening lines:

> I started to write the history of the Galla to make known the number of their tribes, their alacrity in killing and the brutality of their customs. If someone were to ask, 'Why has he written a history of the evil, as well as of the good?' I would answer by saying: Look in the books, and you will see that the history of Muhammad has been written, and the histories of Muslim kings, though they [too] are our enemies in the faith.[73]

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[69] Mohammed Hassen's effort to document these interactions in his work (*The Oromo & the Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia 1300-1700* [Woodbridge and Rochester, 2015] 379 ff.) is not convincing, due to an insufficiently critical reading of the sources coming from the Christian kingdom. One of the first documents to use the name "Galla" (a derogatory term used by Christian Ethiopian authors to designate the Oromo) is the world map of Fra Mauro (1459), which includes a "Flumen Galla," a river that seems to serve as a border between the Christian kingdom and more southerly regions: see Piero Falchetta, *Fra Mauro's World Map* (Turnhout, 2006), 829 (*Terrarum Orbis* n° 5).

[70] Until the chronicle of Śärṣa Dəngəl's reign, there are few mentions of battles against the Oromo; the great subject of the Christian chroniclers was the fight against the Muslims. In the chronicle of Gälawdewos, for instance, there are only few mentions of conflicts with the Oromo (Conzelman, *Chronique de Galâwdêwos*, 141, 149, 157), and no such mentions in the chronicle of Minas (Pereira, *Historia de Minás).*

[71] Paul T. W. Baxter, "Baḥrəy," in *EAe* 1 (2003), 446.

[72] Getatchew Haile, *Yaʾābbā Bāḥrey dersatoçç* Oromoççen *kammimmalakkatu lēloçç sanadoçç gārā* (Addis Ababa, 2002); Getatchew Haile, "Mäzmurä Krəstos," in *EAe* 3 (2007), 897-898.

[73] Ignazio Guidi, "Historia gentis Galla/Histoire des Galla," in Carlo Conti Rossini, *Historia regis Sarṣa Dengel (Malak Sagad) accredit historia gentis Galla curante I. Guidi,* 2 vols., CSCO 20-21, SAe 3-4 (Paris, 1907), 2: 195.

With such an introduction Baḥrəy disarms the critics he knows his work will face. A learned monk, a master of Holy Scripture and religious poetry, and an important personage at court, he effectively quit his proper domain to address a contemporary, "profane" subject, one that was anguishing for Christian Ethiopians, and to give his personal opinion on these "enemies" of the Christian world, as he indicated in signing the work with his name: the phrase "(Thus) has said Baḥrəy" close the text. Such an audacious act, in a world where literature was most often anonymous and distant from secular affairs, can only be understood in the context of royal support, in this case the support of Śarṣa Dəngəl. If it is difficult to know to what degree the work was a royal commission, the king must necessarily have consented to its composition and diffusion. We should therefore imagine that the questions raised by Baḥrəy were those posed in the heart of the royal camp.

The second question is posed by Baḥrəy after his account of the Oromo's expansion:

> Learned men often hold discussons and say: 'How is it that the Galla vanquish us, though we are numerous and have many weapons?' Some have said that God permits it on account of our sins; others have said [that the cause is] that our people are divided into ten groups (*ṣota*), of which nine do not go to war and have no shame to show their fear, and only the tenth group makes war and battles to the utmost of their ability.[74]

There were thus debates and controversies among the learned men, the masters of religious matters, of whom Baḥrey was a distinguished member. Two opposing parties, it seems, hadformed around the question of the cause of the Oromo's repeated victories. One inclined toward a strictly religious vision of history, nourished by biblical interpretations – God punished peoples who sinned against him. The other, of which Baḥrey is the sole known representative, sought answers in a differential analysis of the two societies. This was obviously a way to protect the king from criticisms that the first interpretation authorized: if the king could not vanquish his enemies, it was because he had lost God's favor and support. (Such critiques were, for example, leveled against King Ləbnä Dəngəl for his inability to best the imam Aḥmad.) This is why, throughout his account, Baḥrəy emphasizes that when the king is present on the battlefield, his army is victorious: defeats can be explained by his absence.

Baḥrəy's text, organized by the author into chapters, can be divided into four sections. The first establishes the genealogy of different clans (*gossa*) belonging to the two major Oromo groups, the Boorana and Baarentuu (chapters one to four). The second section narrates the history of the Oromo expansion, following the age classes that succeeded each other in power every eight years, from the *luuba* Mélbah up to "the seventh year of the rule of Mul'äta," for a total of 71 years (chapters five to eighteen). Chapter nineteen describes the social organization of the Christian kingdom as constituted of ten groups in which only one is capable of waging war, much like the ten classes that form an entire cycle of the Oromo *gadaa*, but where all men are efficient warriors. The last chapter, finally, provides information on certain functions of Oromo society[75].

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[74] Ibid., 204-205.

[75] Baḥrəy's extensive knowledge of Oromo political and social organization and language, as well as his borrowing of categories used by the Oromo to conceptualize their history, makes one suspect (contrary to the *doxa* that sees him as a representative of the culture of Amhara Christians) that Baḥrəy was familiar with Oromo culture, perhaps

In the first section Baḥrəy shows a considerable knowledge of the genealogy of Oromo groups, and of the system of fission and fusion that is characteristic of segmentary societies. "When they are allies, they are all called Mäča, but if they go to war, they give themselves the names of Afre and Sädäča; if they are all united with the Tuläma, they are called Säppira."

He is also the first to shed a little light on the political system known under the name of *gadaa* (the term that he employs is *luuba*): "They have neither king nor master, like other peoples, but rather obey the *luuba,* for a period of eight years; at the end of eight years, another *luuba* is named, and the first is deprived of his position. Thus they proceed, with a fixed period for each. *Luuba* means 'those who are circumcised at the same time.'" The *gadaa* has inspired a number of analyses since the pioneering work Asmarom Legesse, who defined the *gadaa,* with reference to the work of Baḥrəy, in these terms: "The ideal model Bahrey uses to organize his chronicle clearly parallels the structure of the Gada system: two generations, forty years each, with each generation divided into five classes and each class given one of a series of ten names covering the complete cycle."[76]

Baḥrəy's text also allows us to follow the major stages of the Oromo expansion, which he describes in eight-year periods, thus borrowing the cyclical temporal system of the *gadaa.* In a first phase, from the *luuba* Melbah to the *luuba* Bifole, that is from the 1520s to the 1550s,[77] it was essentially the Baarentu half of the Oromo who were engaged in the expansion, first in Bali and Däwaro and then in Fäṭägar, thus in regions populated primarily by Muslims. The second phase began with the *luuba* Məsle in the 1550s. The Oromo by now installed in the conquered territories, they pushed their troops further north, into the heart of Christian and Muslim Ethiopia, where thet confronted the armies of the Christian king led by Ḥamälmal at Dago,[78] then those of Nūr b. Muǧāhid near Mount Azälo.[79] From the 1560s, the Baarentu continued their expansion northward, along the escarpment, and eastward in the direction of Harar, while the Boorana, whose expansion, begun later, commenced with the regions of the southwest, menaced the historic territories of the Christian kingdom: Amḥara, Angot, Goǧǧam, Bägəmder. By the end of the 1560s, a large part of the territories previously controlled by Christian and Islamic states had passed into the hands of Oromo groups.

The causes of the Oromo expansion are difficult to establish. Several factors have been proposed, including demographic growth (which however cannot be documented), and the disorder and destruction of the territorial defenses of the Christian and Islamic states in the wake of their own wars. But it seems legitimate to think, following Baḥrəy, that at the heart of the phenomenon lies the *gadaa* system of Oromo social organization. Four elements of this system

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even of Oromo origin (as was, a bit later, Täklä Śəllase, Ṭino by his Oromo surname, one of the redactors of chronicle of King Susənyos), albeit integrated into the religious elite of the Christian kingdom.

[76] Asmarom Legesse, *Gada. Three Approaches to the Study of African Society* (New York, 1973) 138.

[77] In the commentary of their English translation of Baḥrəy's text, C. F. Beckingham and G. W. B. Huntingford (*Some Records of Ethiopia 1593-1646. Being Extracts from the History of High Ethiopia or Abassia by Manoel de Almeida Together with Bahrey's History of the Galla* [London, 1954] – the translation of Baḥrəy's text is based on Guidi's French translation, pp. 111-129) proposed the date of 1522 for the beginning of *luuba* Melbah, and so dated the composition of the text to 1593 (208-210). But this is not confirmed by absolute dates from Gəʿəz sources, and we do have rather to consider that the beginning of *luuba* Melbah is c. 1520.

[78] Ḥamälmal, a great lord of Šäwa and related to the royal lineage, reportedly confronted the Oromo in a region east of Šäwa, at the end of the reign of Gälawdewos: see Michael Kleiner, "Ḥamälmal," in *EAe* 2 (2005), 982-983.

[79] The battle at Azälo (near the Awaš River) would have taken place shortly after the victory Nūr's troops over the Christian army of Gälawdewos in 1559: see Franz-Christoph Muth, "Nūr b. Muǧāhid," in *EAe* 3 (2007), 1209-1210.

can be proposed as enabling factors. First, the age classes in power, who had to accomplish feats of war (such as raids on neighboring peoples), having accomplished their first successes may have launched into a program of progressive territorial occupation. Secondly, it is possible that the rejection of children born in contravention to the rules (which stipulated that only men in the age-class in power could father children) created socially marginalized groups on the geographical periphery of Oromo territory, by necessity pastoralists in the lowlands, who became one of the engines of expansion.[80] Thirdly, the advancement of Oromo groups was doubtless facilitated by the practice of integration, the adoption (*moassa*) of non-Oromo populations into Oromo society.[81] Finally, Oromo warriors, who used original tactics such as nocturnal attacks and surprise raids, were also able to adapt their war culture over the course of their expansion to new methods discovered among their neighbors.[82]

Starting in the decade 1550-1560, the societies of Ethiopia displayed a profoundly altered visage. The Barr Saʿd al-Dīn had practically disappeared as such, the rare successors of the Walasmaʿ dynasty having closed themselves within the city of Harar which would thenceforth transform itself into a "holy city," a refuge and symbol of a glorious, lost past. The Oromo were installed in the southern and eastern regions, previously controlled by Christian or Islamic states, and threatened the territories considered the "domain of the kings" in the Middle Ages (Šäwa, Amhara, as far as Təgray). The Christian kingdom had withdrawn into the northwestern regions, in particular around Lake Ṭana, and had lost control of vast territories once under its dominion. The reign of King Śärṣä Dəngəl marked the beginning of a reinvention, a desire to erase these ruptures and to affirm a faultless continuity with the "golden age" of past centuries – he was the first king to be consecrated at Aksum since the fifteenth century – even while the royal territory was no longer the same (the great monastery of Däbrä Libanos was no longer accessible) and the very survival of the Christian kingdom could only occur through an integration of Oromo groups into its fold.

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[80] Eloi Ficquet, "Dynamiques générationnelles et expansion des Oromo en Éthiopie au XVIe siècle," *L'Homme* 167-168 (2003): 235-251, at 248 : "Les individus en état de minorité permanente dans ce système politico-religieux à base générationnelle, de par leur naissance précoce ou par leur rang de cadet, étaient définitivement écartés vers les terres les plus insalubres et incultes, où ils étaient assimilés ou associés à des groupes castes. Ces segments marginalisés formaient une société frontalière tendanciellement croissante. Ils aspiraient probablement à s'établir sur des territoires plus fertiles afin d'y mener l'existence auguste à laquelle ils n'avaient pas eu droit."

[81] Hector Blackhurst, "Moassa," in *EAe* 3 (2007), 982-983, at 983: "The Oromo's ability to assimilate the peoples they encountered in their northward movement, using techniques such as group adoption, enabled them, it is argued, to successfully accommodate to their new, and potentially threatening, circumstances and to avoid the creation of an unstable and alienated population of non-Oromo in their midst."

[82] Baḥrəy notes that it was under the fifth *luuba*, Məsle (thus in the 1560s), that the Oromo started to settle in raided territories whereas previously they had returned beyond the Wabi Šäbälle River after each expedition; at the same time they began to ride on horseback and form a cavalry.