



The Role of Oromo Cavalry Horses in the Making of Modern Ethiopian Empire: A Historical Review (ca.1870s-1900)

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Abstract

The last quarter of the 19th century was a period of dramatic political and historical importance took place in Ethiopian historiography; the process of the making modern Ethiopian empire and an attempt of external aggression. Thus, this paper is aimed to explore the role of Oromo cavalry horses in the process of making modern Ethiopia and their contribution in the defending the empire from external aggression. To do this, researcher has consulted both primary and secondary sources. The data are collected, analyzed and interpreted. Thus, descriptive and interpretative research design was used to address the aim of the study. The findings of the study show that the role of Oromo cavalry horses was undergone from organizing and training cavalries, submitting internal threats and defending foreign aggressions. The military training and submission was began from Shoa to Sudan border, Wechecha to Walayta, Ilubabor to Mecha and kaffa to Borena and successful defended external aggression like Egypt at Gundet (1875) and Gura (1876) and Mahdist of Sudan. At battle of Adwa (1896) Oromo cavalry horses were also the frontline at battle field as general and soldiers to against Italian imperialism which finally concluded by Ethiopian victory. The aftermath of Adwa (1896-1900) the armies were able to conquered Afar in 1896, Somali in 1897, Kaffa in 1897, Borana in 1897, Benishangul in 1898, Bench Maji, Gardula, to Lake Rudolf in 1898. In peripheral provinces the project of conquest and submission was continued until 1900, the year which marked the making of modern Ethiopian empire of today.

Key words: Cavalry, Horsemen, Empire, Oromo and War

1. Introduction

A cavalry horse designates the history of the soldiers on horseback. They played great role in the rise and fall of an elite fighting force for centuries. It's a history of the warrior, horse and weapons grew the ideal of knighthood and the romantic image of the dashing cavalryman.¹ They have a special place in the history and developments of human civilizations. Humans maintain mutual and strong affiliation with horses not only for riding and pleasure, but also for military². Some historical and anthropological studies indicate that, horses were culturally linked to humans and the peoples also began to use them for different recreational activities such as sport festival, national ceremony, to show respect for patriotism, ritual and military purposes throughout the world.³

Consequently, horses were traditionally seen as symbolic of chivalry, national pride and dignity and privileged animals in the world.⁴ In a history of the warrior, horse and weapons grew the ideal of knighthood and the romantic image of the dashing cavalryman.⁵ In Euro-Asian history for instance, cavalry horses were the shock troops of ancient and medieval warfare by which empires were built or destroyed. They have carried warriors, conquerors, kings and military commanders into battle. Army commanders stubbornly continued to believe that combat on horseback was primary, even at the beginning of World War I. Later, with the coming of machine-guns, cavalrymen and horses were

¹ Maria. (2004).Horse words: *the Equine Dictionary (2nd Ed.)* North Pomfret,VT: Trafalgar Square Publishing.

² V. Vuksic and Z. Grbasic, (1993), *Cavalry: The History of a fighting elite 650 B.C to 1914*) translated by Srdjan Vujic, Printed by Dah Hua Printing Press Co. Ltd., Hong Kong, p. 7.

³Beeton, S. (2011), "Horseback tourism in Victoria, Australia: Cooperative, proactive e crisis management", *In Current Issues in Tourism*

⁴ Argent G. (2012). Toward a privileging of the non-verbal: communication, corporal synchrony, and transcendence in humans and horses, in J.A. Smith, R.A. Mitchell (eds.), *Experiencing animal minds: an anthology of animal-human encounters*, Columbia University Press, New York,

⁵ Beeton, S. (2011), "Horseback tourism in Victoria, Australia: Cooperative, proactive crisis management", *In Current Issues in Tourism*

'dismounted and continued the war on foot.⁶ Without a doubt, Africa has also some of the world's most exciting cavalry horses in which, Ethiopia has share almost 50% of Africa's in particular.⁷

Ethiopians interaction with cavalry can be traced to early times in history of the country. The kings and nobilities of the country were reported to have beautiful cavalry horses to against their rebels, for hunting activities and festival ceremonies in the country.⁸ Likewise, the lives of entire Oromo people⁹ in Ethiopia were highly affiliating with horses as their traditional organization in *Gada* system.

At large, among the Oromo people, horse is one of highly respected animals and symbol of interaction that signifies privileges and dignity, affiliation, as a means for socialization, inspiration of morals in the good and bad time. The Oromo people had been using horses during wedding and funeral to privilege of heroes. The Oromo also using horse racing in the celebration on *Hidar* St. Michael religious memorial day which is observed on November 19th by Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity, *mesqel* (finding true cross) and *Qillee* (Christmas) celebrations. For Oromo people, galloping horse on these occasions is considered as a traditional warfare in practicing. In this case horses are popular and have political and socio-cultural values among Oromo People. Thus, Oromo used to call their horse as *Daamaa, Booraa, Bulloo, Daalee, etc.*¹⁰

⁶ V. Vuksic and Z. Grbasic, (1993), *Cavalry: The History of a fighting elite 650 B.C to 1914*) translated by Srdjan Vujic, Printed by Dah Hua Printing Press Co. Ltd., Hong Kong, p. 7.

⁷ Mekonnen, *et al* (2012). Seroprevalence and risk factors of African Horse sickness in mules and donkeys in selected sites of West Amhara Region, Ethiopia. *African Journal of Microbiology Research*.

⁸ Pankhrust, R. (1989). The early history of Ethiopian horse-names. *Paideuma*, Bd.35, 197–216. Afrika-Studies I

⁹ The Oromo are divided into two major groups: the Borana (senior) and the Barentu (junior) (Gada 1988:8). The descendants of these two main groups later formed major Oromo clans and sub-clans. The Borana section of the Oromo is divided into three main branches, namely the Southern Borana, the Guji and the Macha Tulama (Mohammed 1990, p18). Accordingly, the settlement of the Tulama Oromo largely occupies the Shewan plateau extending over vast areas between Lake Zeway in the south and Wollo in the north, Macha lands in the west and the territory of Karayyu in the east (Alemayehu et al. 2006:137–145). In the entire Tulama Oromo land there was oral tradition and songs related to horse which highly treasured and feed barley. In their songs, the Oromo says “*yoo qotiyoona marga nyaatu, fardi garbu nyaatu maali?*” meaning when the Ox are feeding grass, surprisingly, the horses are feeding the barley”.

¹⁰ Literally *Abbaa* means a father but it is also used for prefix of horse name, or ordinary priests.

Although, there was no historical evidence for when and which part of Ethiopia has started the domestication of horses, the Oromo people has exhaustively used cavalry long years before the 16th century.¹¹ Before the introduction of modern weapons to Ethiopia, horse is one of the magnificent arms in the process of territorial expansion, defending enemies from both internal and external forces, and it's one of an old traditional warfare.¹² The Oromo have used cavalry not only against enemy but also in killing of a big game animal and take the ears and tails of animals and later they hold hung ceremony in which they boast about their heroic deeds. This culture was adopted among the Christian Abyssinian soldiers when the Yäjju army which was primarily composed Oromo cavalry soldiers from Wallo.¹³

Although Oromo cavalries had been played great role in the making of the modern Ethiopian empire in the battle fronts by demising internal threats and revolts to the empire formation and defending external forces, it had been not included in the historiography of the country. Thus, the main objective of this paper is aimed to contribute reconstruct the role of Oromo cavalries in the making of modern Ethiopian Empire (ca.1870s-1900).

2. Research Methodology

In this paper, the author used both primary and secondary data sources including archives available. Secondary data sources were collected by assessing published and unpublished materials. To collect primary data, the author employed individual interviews with local elders who have a good knowledge about horses and it uses. The locally available oral traditions were also used as sources of data in reconstructing this history as it requires oral community and close assessment of oral traditions. The author also used the available oral narration after cross checking it with written sources.

¹¹ Tadesse Berisso "Traditional Warfare among the Guji of Southern Ethiopia" M.A. Thesis, Department of Anthropology Michigan State University, 1988, p. 1.

¹² Merid Wolde-Aregay, —A Reappraisal of the Impact of Firearms in the History of Warfare in Ethiopia (c. 1500- 1800), *Journal of Ethiopian studies*, XIV (1976-79), pp.120-121. Almagor, U. 1979 "Raiders and Elders: A Confrontation of Generations Among the Dassaneteh." in *Senri ethnological studies*. K. Fukui, and D. Turton (eds) No. 3, Osaka, Japan.; see also the works of Cerulli, E. 1922 "Folk Literature of the Galla of Southern Ethiopia." in *Harvard African studies*, Vol. III

¹³ Merid Wolde-Aregay, —A Reappraisal of the Impact of Firearms in the History of Warfare in Ethiopia (c. 1500- 1800), *Journal of Ethiopian studies*, XIV (1976-79), pp.120-121; and Richard Caulk, *Firearms and Princely Power in Ethiopia in the nineteenth century*, *Journal of African History*, XIII, 4 (1972), p.609

Finally, the collected data was analyzed and interpreted using qualitative technique of data analysis. Data was described, triangulated and redefined different views based on systematic grouping of variables and content analysis. Then, results are presented descriptively.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. The Role of Oromo Cavalry horses in the Demise of Internal Revolts

Internally, Oromo cavalymen played great role in organizing and training of the horse, the acquisition of skills of control and riding technique, and the improvement of both harness and saddle. According to oral traditions, there is the very interesting story what happened in the 1860s among local the Oromo chiefs in Salaalee area between Dooluu Jilool of warra Jarso and Nagawo Gemedo of Kuyyu, who compete each for local authority. The relationship of Kuyyu-Warra Jarso local chiefs¹⁴ was to accumulate land and cattle breeding that more advanced state among the Oromo people.

In some areas, the Oromo cavalry's horses also experienced the formation of joint horses to against their common enemies at the battle field. Of these, in 1870s, at the time of Gulale conquest the Metta Oromo under Biratu Gole came with more than one hundred horsemen to support Tufa Muna's armies of Gulale. However, Biratu persuaded by thought of Gobana Dachi diplomatic negotiation and returned back to Metta without helping the Gulale's force. Finally, their leader Tufa Muna, who refused to join Gobana's confederacy of Oromo alliance, was defeated and killed in the battle by the joint horses of the confederate partners, the Abichu and Metta forces. Here in after, the Azmari's has sung in Amharic for Tufa “አመ ሠላሳ ቀን፣ ጎባና ባይጸና፣ ይካፈሉን ነበር ፣ እነ ቱፋ ሙና (*Has had Gobana was not bravely wrestled in those 30 days, easily they [Tufa Muna soldiers] will pay to revenge us*).

Similarly, few Tulama Oromo chiefs have helped Gobana in consolidating his cavalry forces. As Greenfield's remarked in his work, Gobana was the architect of the Shoan Oromo Confederation which sought to unite all the Tulama Oromo in shoa under his leadership. This was paved the way for king Menelik to use them to further extend the areas under his control.¹⁵ According to Enrico

¹⁴ Alemseged Debele. “A History of Kuyyu Worada, 1936-1991” (M.A Thesis, History, Addis Ababa University. 2010), p.22.

¹⁵ Richard Griensfield, A New Political History of Ethiopia 2nd edition p.75; El Amin Abdel Karim Ahmed Abdel Karim “An Historical Study of the Shoan Amhara Conquest of the Oromo and Sidama Regions of Southern Ethiopia 1865-1900”, Doctor of Philosophy in History, University of Khartoum, June 2009, p.95; Bonnie k. Holcomb and Sisai Ibsa, The Invention of Ethiopia; The Making of a Dependent Colonial State in North-East Africa (Red Sea Press, 1990.) p. 96, 285. Darkwah Kofi, Shoa ..p.35

Cerulli, Wobori resisted this seriously. After this, Akka Buta and his 58 cavalries' armies accompanied with Gobana led campaign to Arsi and Mareqo and Menelik to Chaha¹⁶ to Gurage. After severe war Gobana came with hundreds of cattle. At this time (1860s-1870s) Gobana and his Cavalry soldiers under him like Dajzmach Balcha Jima, and his brother Fitawrari Tullu Jima¹⁷, Girazmach Nagawo, Balamabaras Tasew, Astatique, Grazmach Asfere, Firdu, and Bitweded Atnafu, were the brave in military expedition and managing a brave cavalry force.

On 26 March 1878, six days after Menelik's formal submission to Emperor Yohannes Cecchi, together with Chiarini and Orazio Antinori, met Dajjach Gobana and Menelik's cousin Dajjach Mashasha Sayfu. They were commanding 4000 to 5000 cavalry and 6000 to 7000 infantry horses in which some of them were armed with rifles while others carried lances they looted and plundered several cattle from Horro Guduru.¹⁸

Following the victory of Shoan's over Gojjam at Embabo, instead of returning to Shoa, Gobana led the second-round, campaign to Chabo in 1882. He advanced toward the territory of the Chabo Oromo to subdue them. But when he reached at Warego, Gobana's force was assailed and pushed back by the Chabo. During the battle of Warego the son-in-law of Gobana, fitawrari Birru Nagawo Garri, a local chief of Tulama (Jidda), was killed.¹⁹ To humiliate the death of Birru, his son in law, Gobana led a campaign against Chabo Oromo in July-August 1882 for the third-round, after he reorganized his army at Guder.

¹⁶ Nagada , "Yee Ras Gobana Dachu Senedoch" IES Ms no:4616, no year, p.34, 50, as source indicate, one of Akka buta brother lost his life in Arsi campaign, at this time (1869), this the only time Ras Gobana fought Arsi Oromo, no source that indicate his involvement in other cycles of war. Meantime, Menelik and Shoan armies lost the battle they fought with Chaha, Gurage. Its most probably a battle when Debtera Zeneb, the first chroniclers of Emperoro Tewodros II also killed in Battle. See, also, Bahru Zewde, "The Aymallal Gurage in the Nineteenth Century: A Political History" in *Transafrican Journal of History*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (1972), pp.55-68, p.62; Atsme Giorgis GabreMasiyas, *Ye Atsme Giorgis Gebra Masih Dirsatochi: Yee Oromo Tarik (k. 1500-1900), Kifil I & II*, edited by Fitsum Walde Mariam, Far East Trading publisher P.L.C. 2009 E.C P P. 324.

¹⁷ Dajzmach Balcha Jimma and Fitawrari Tullu is a son of Gobana's brother named Jimma Dache, Fitawrari Tullu is a father of Wezero Ketsela Tullu, who married to Hakim Warkneh Eshete (Charles Martin). Nagada, "Yee Ras Gobana Dachu Senedoch" IES Ms no: 4616, no year, p.27.

¹⁸ Gabre Sellasie W/Aregay, *Tarik Zamena Ze Degmawi Minilik; Negusa Negest Ze Ethiopia*, no publisher, 2008, p.64

¹⁹ Cerrulli Enrico, *Folk-Literature of the Oromoof Southern Abyssinia*, Cambridge, 1922.p.41

At this time, he accompanied by his Godsons, Biratu Gole of Meta Oromo nobility, together with his son Garasu Birratu and Lij Habte Gorgis. The rebellion of Chabo was still active in 1883 when Gobana campaigned there with the assistance of Lij Habte Giorgis. During the battle, Lij Habte Giyorgis distinguished himself by leading the Amhara troops to surround the Cabo. They successfully overwhelmed the Chabo. By doing so, Gobana revenged his brother-in-law by cruelly massacring the Chabo.²⁰

Hassanu Wadaj, a ruler of Darra, also confronted the horses of Ras Darge, Ras Gobana and Ras Daresu even Negus Menelik and Negus Teklahymanot, who request him to send his brave horse named 'Kurara'. But he refused any of them. Aleqa Teklayesus noted Hasanu's greed and grievance in a word of Hasanu as follows:

Amharic	English
የሸዋ ንጉሥ ኩራረን አምጣ ይለኛል	The king of Shewa said me give me your horse
የሸዋ ጦር አበገዚ ኩራረን አምጣ ይለኛል	The commander of Shoa's said me give me your horse
የጎጃም ንጉሥ ኩራረን አምጣ ይለኛል	The king of Gojjam said me give me your horse
የጎጃም ጦር አበገዚ ኩራረን አምጣ ይለኛል	The commander of Gojjam said me give me your horse
ቁመት ነዉ እንጂ በምን ይበልጡኛል ²¹ ::	Why I give my horse? Unless for my height?

Afterwards, HasanWadaj badly wounded in war. But, before his death he killed his war horse, Kurara, swearing "after me no one will ride Kurara". The Darra continued to be ruled by a council of their elders which included Hassan's widow. It was Ras Darge with the help of Ras Gobana, who successfully accomplished the conquest of the Darra in 1878.²²

The Tulama Oromo cavalry force has also served as ceremonial celebrity for dignity of rulers and nation. It should also be noted that, Dajjzmach Gobana and Dajjzmach Darge were proclaimed to the position of *Ras* in 1878. Both Gobana and Darge became the first two *Ras*²³ of king Menelik of

²⁰ Cerulli, Enrico, "The Falk Literature of the Oromoof Southern Abyssinia", Harvard African Studies. Vol. 1 Africana Varia (Cambridge, Mas; 1922), p.102 song 42; Tamene Bitima "On Some Oromo Historical Poems" Paideuma, Bd. 29 (1983), pp.317-325P.321

²¹ Cerulli, Enrico, "The Falk Literature of the Oromoof Southern Abyssinia", Harvard African Studies. Vol. 1 Africana Varia (Cambridge, Mas; 1922), p.102 song 42; Tamene Bitima "On Some Oromo Historical Poems" Paideuma, Bd. 29 (1983), pp.317-325P.321.

²²Odd Eirik Arnesen, "The Becoming of place: A Tulama-Oromo region in Northern Shewa in the Being and Becoming Oromo; Historical and Anthropological Enquiries" the edited by P.T.W. Baxter, Jan Hultin, and Alesandro Triulzi; Red Sea Press, 1996, pp.211-238.

²³ Ras was a local title in imperial Ethiopia conferred to the ruling families, provincial governors and high officials, below the title of king

Shoa.²⁴ Gobana, thus became the first in Shoa to be honored the title of *Ras* without sharing the royal blood with Shoa kingdom.²⁵

In the making of modern Ethiopia Empire, the cavalries of Oromo became also used as a commodity and become one of the taxes in kind because every regional lords and emperor personally need to have numerous cavalries. To do this, they received the horse in a form of tribute. In 1865, when Dajjach Menelik escaped from Meqdela and entered Warra Himanu, a province under rule of Warqitu, who helped Menelik to enter Shoa²⁶, Bezabih who proclaimed himself as a Negus of Shoa from 1863-1865 has prepared himself to fight with the newly coming of Menelik to his father's fief. Meantime, Bezabeh has sent 2000 birr, hundreds of Tulama horses and mules (from Salale) to Warqitu, in return to jail Menelik at Wallo.²⁷

In the process of the making of modern Ethiopian empire, the Tulama Oromo cavalries' paid great sacrifices, for instance, at the battle of Embabo in 1882, from Tulama Oromo's mainly Salale, 534 horses, were killed in the battlefield.²⁸ In line with this, Bahru Zawde clearly stated in his essential book entitled "A Modern History of Ethiopia 1855-1991," in his third edition of Amharic version of 2003 entitled "Yee Ethiopia Tarik Kee 1843-Eska 1983," stated the decisive role of Tulama Oromo under command of Fitawrari Birru Nagewo as follows.

እንደ ተፎካከሩትም 29 ግንቦት 1874 የጦርሜዳ ተፈልጎ ሆሮጉድሩ ውስጥ ኤምባሳይ ተገናኙ። ብርቱ ጦርነት ከተካሄደ በሃላ የጎጃም ነፍጥ እና መድፍ በሸዋ ፈረሰኛ (በተለይም በሰላሌ እና በወሎ ፈረሰኞች) ተራምዶ ምኒልክ

²⁴ Bairu Tafla, "Four Ethiopian Biographies: Dajjazmach Garmame, Dajjazmach Gabra-Egzi'abeher Moroda, Dajjazmach Balča and Kantiba Gabru Dasta" in JES, Vol. 7, No. 2 (JULY 1969), pp.1-31 35, Bairu Tafla "Two of the Last Provincial Kings of Ethiopia" in JES, Vol. 11, No. 1(jan 1973), pp.29-55, p.35.

²⁵ Bairu Tafla "Ras Darge Sahla-Sellase, C 1827-1900" In JES, Vol. 13, No. 2 (July 1975), pp.17-37, p.27.

²⁶ Tekla Yesus Waqjira, Yee Ethiopia Tarik, ed by Sergew Galaw, Addis Ababa: Berhane ena Selam press, 2002, p. 125; Getahun Delebo, "Emperor Menelik, s of Ethiopia; 1865-1916 National Unification or Amhara Communal Domination" Ph. D Dissertation, History, and Harvard Universty: Washington -D.C, 1974, p.

²⁷ Heruy Walde Sellasie, Yee Ethiopia Tarik: K Nigist Seba Eska Telaqu Yee Adwa Dil, 1928 unpublished manuscript published 1989, p.; Afework Gabreyesus, Axe Menelik, p.23

²⁸ Harold Marcus, The Life and Times of Menelik II, Ethiopia 1844-1913, trans in to Amharic as Atse Menelik yes Hiwot Tarik ina Yeselxan Zamen, by Biniam Alemayehu, Unit book center, 2009, p.145.; Phawulos Ngongo, Axe Menelik, p72.; 43 Tekla Yesus Waqjira, Yee Ethiopia Tarik, ed by Sergew Galaw, Addis Ababa: Berhane ena Selam press, 2002, p. 65 and 153

ለድል ፤ ተከለሃይማ ኖት ለሸንፈት አበቁ።²⁹ *As they dictated war to last solution, they found the Embabo battle in plateau of Horro-Gudurru on 6 June of 1882; where they brought victory for Menelik and defeats for Tekle Haimanot after bitter fighting and the whole army and artillery of Gojjame were taken by Shoan army;(particularly by the Salale and Wallo cavalry fighters).*

The battle raged for a few hours and the men of Negus Teklehaimanot's fought with astounding bravery. But they were shortly outmaneuvered by the tactics of *Ras Gobana*.³⁰ Initially, an attack on Shoan Oromo horse under *Ras Gobana* was dispersed by Tekle Haymanot's several cannon. The Shoan army fled, and only the King stayed calmly in his position on a high hill. In the meantime, the Shoan's suddenly opened fire up on the Gojjam with the only 200 rifles they had at that time, with such a murderous fire that they wavered. At that moment, *Ras Gobana*, who had just arrived in time, attacked the Gojjam from behind, and the enemy turned in flight. The *Ras* personally took about 40 men prisoner.³¹ Then disconcertingly, on the third volley, the gun carriages of Gojjames had broken and failed to function.

Aftermath of battle, *Ras Gobana* accompanied all the survived until they crossed Abay River.³² Menelik and a wounded king entered Entoto on July 6, 1882, just a month after the battle Yohanis IV imposed tax on Shoas in October of 1882. At this time Menelik covered his all expense easily due to *Ras Gobana* offered king Menelik presents consisting of 1300 horses, 500 hundred mules, gold, ivory and musk.³³

²⁹ Bahru Zawde, A History of modern Ethiopia 1855-1991 his third edition translation of Amharic version entitled yee Ethiopia tarik kee 1843-eska 1983 AAUp p. 71; Tekla Tsadiq Atse yohannis ena yee p.214; Gustav Aren, evangelical pioneers in Ethiopia; p.372.; Tabor Wami, Partisan discourse and Authentic history, Artistic pring press, 2015, p.481. For victory of Shoan army the role of Wallo and Yeju Oromo under commands of queen Mastawat and Dajjach later Ras Wale Bitul is unforgettable.

³⁰ The military strategy that *Ras Gobana* used was to encircled the Gojjames by cavalries' forces; this done for two reasons, one not Gojjames to escape if such desire was there, second not to be victims of Gojjame bullets, the Gojjams contrary focus on rifles than cavalries. See Bahru Zawde, History of Modern...p. 59.; Tekla Yesus, p.153

³¹ Bulatovich, A. K., Richard Seltzer. Ethiopia through Russian Eyes: Country in Transition, 1896-1898. 1st Red Seal Press ed. Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press, 2000.p

³² Gabre Sellasie W/Aregay, Tarik Zamen Za Degmawi Menelik Negusa Negest Ze Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, 2008, p.78.; Oljira Tujuba,1994. "Oromo-Amhara Relations in Horro-Gudurru Awrajja, (Northeastern Wallagga). c.1840s-1941." M.A Thesis, A.AU. Dep't of History; Tekla Tsedaiq Atse Yohannis Iv, p.215.

³³ Mexabir is horse that decored by either by Gold or silver materials See, Phawulos Ngongo, Axe Menelik; Bewuci Hagerat Yetatsetsefachewu Debdabewochi, Aster Nega Publishing

Thus, at the battle of Embabo in 1882 between Shoa force and Gojjam, Gute Dili with Mahdist and Walayta campaign in 1894, Kafa campaign (one of the strongest and independent from 1529 state, as well as known in their fierce resistance and well-remembered in traditional defense from Christian highland kingdom) until of 1897 and other various expeditions were also the good examples that the Oromo cavalries participated to breakthrough and built the Empire of Ethiopia in 1900.

The other events marked the hegemonic power of Tulama Oromo cavalries in 1888, when Negus Menelik asked Gobana on how he was going to confront with the well-prepared Mahdist of Sudan. Gobana replied “all of my *Balambaras*, *Grazmach*, *Qagnazmach*, and *Fitawrari* have their own cavalry horses at least from 30-50 best horsemen, I will mobilize them quickly.” Here after, *Ras* Gobana easily mobilized his cavalry’s armies from Chaca to Sibilu even from Mecha. *Ras* Gobana mobilized around 3000 cavalries’ horses to confront Mahdist from Tuluma Oromo.³⁴ The Oromo horses are also serving as precious gift for war expert. This was when *Ras* Gobana accomplished Menelik’s mission and returned to Shewa in last days of October 1888, King Menelik welcomed him and awarded his general’s, this momentum has also recorded in chronicles as follows.

በዚህም ዘመን በወለጋ በኩል ብዙ ነፍጥ ያለው ደርቡሽ ተነሣ። ራስ ጎበና ገሥግሥ ሄዶ ግምባር ገጥሞት ድለ አድርጎ ፋጀው። ከዚያም ተመልሶ ግዳይ ጣለ። አጤ ምኒልክም ፋረስ ከነወርቅ መጣብሩ ባለወርቅ ጋሻ ባለወርቅ ጫማ ጎራዴ ማለፊያ ጠበንጃ የወርቅ ዝናር ባለወርቅ ለምድ ወርቅ ኩፊታ ግምጃ ሱሪ ግምጃ መታጠቂያ ቀጭን ድርብ ሸለሙት።³⁵

In this year’s the well-equipped Dervish incase Wallaga. *Ras* Gobana marched to west to confront them and he successful beaten them. After his return from campaign, King awarded to *Ras* Gobana a full-fledged *Mexabari*, the golden shield, a golden decorated sword, a golden decorated belt and other form of awards.

3.2. Foreign Aggressions and the Role of Oromo Cavalries

The other major theme in Ethiopia the past 150s years was struggling to defend foreign aggressions like that of Italy, Egypt and Mahdist of Sudan. Thus, Ethiopians has fought many battles and

Press, 2010, pp.136-7, 334Gabre Sellasie W/Aregay, Tarik Zamana Ze Degmawi Minilik; Negusa Negest Ze Ethiopia, No Publisher, 2008, p.115; Phawulos Ngongo, Axe Menelik, Addis Ababa: Mankusa printingpress, 1984,p.30, Erlich Haggai, Ras Alula...pp.35-36

³⁴ Nagada “Yee Ras Gobana...” p.36

³⁵ Mexabir is horse that decored by either by Gold or silver materials See, Phawulos Ngongo, Axe Menelik; Bewuci Hagerat Yetatsetsefachewu Debdabewochi, Aster Nega Publishing Press, 2010, pp.136-7, 334Gabre Sellasie W/Aregay, Tarik Zamana Ze Degmawi Minilik; Negusa Negest Ze Ethiopia, No Publisher, 2008, p.115; Phawulos Ngongo, Axe Menelik, Addis Ababa: Mankusa printingpress, 1984,p.30

especially, second half of 19th century was the time of scramble for Africa as all surrounding regions were conquered by colonial warlords. Magdala, Gundet, Gura, Dogali, Adwa and Maychew battles were among the others battle that fought to defend foreign aggressors. The entire Oromo cavalry from Mecha were installed near to the fields some distance from the center from where they could gallop at top speed to the central as well as the southern, the eastern and Western flanks during combat. The civilians were also responsible for logistics worked day and night in shifts to cook food, to store and to clean up the camp.³⁶

The Satin Chagn unit from Dejazmach Joté Tullu's Leqa Sayo and Benishangul Wallaga administrative region with some 4,000 well trained and fully armed personnel led 4,000 mules loaded with boxes of rations. Abba Jifar of Jimma's contingent supplied tarps and draperies that were installed in the camp. As regards the makeup of the army, the central Ethiopian fighting unit was mainly drawn from Showa infantry, Oromo cavalry from the Machaa-Tulamaa of Salalé, Ada'a Berga, Ambo, Jaldu, Gudar and others.³⁷

In all these, Adwa stands out for inflicting and crushing defeat on Italian by the Ethiopian patriots of both infantry and cavalrymen called Contingent of the Brave.³⁸ Adwa Victory has rewritten the Ethiopian history in golden letters as a result of the determinant and persistence of these patriotic.³⁹ In this case, in 1875 and 1876, the Tulama Oromo cavalries paid thousands of the horsemen to Emperor Yohannis IV, that helps him to easily defeat the Egyptians at the battle of Gundet and Gura respectively.⁴⁰ This was the other positions that Oromo cavalries participated and successfully

³⁶ Sven Rubenson, *The Survival of Ethiopian Independence*, pp. 165-166,188,269,408;297- 8,349-50,277,175-7,222-31.

³⁷ Marcus, Harold G. 1994. *A History of Ethiopia*. Berkeley: University of California Press, p.78

³⁸ Bahru Zawde, *A History of modern Ethiopia 1855-1991* his third edition translation of Amharic version entitled yeEthiopia tarik ka1843-eska 1983 AAU

³⁹ Library of African Affairs. New York: F. A. Praeger, 1965.p.65. Phawulos Ngongo, *Axe Menelik*, Addis Ababa: Mankusa printing press, 1984, p.48;

⁴⁰ Only in a single occasion, Menelik of Shoa has paid 50,000 Tegara birr (ጠገራ ብር), 500 mules, 1,000 horses, 50,000 horn cattle, and other tribute in tax in kind. See, Sergew Hable Sellasie, *Dagmawi*, p.184; See also a works of Zawde G/ Sellasie, *Yohannes IV of Ethiopian: A Political Biography*, Oxford, 1975. Gustav Aren, "Evangelical Pioneers in Ethiopia; Origins of The Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus" (Ph. D Dissertation, Uppsala; Upsala Univesity press, 1978) P,373 ; Gustavo Bianchi, *Alia Terra Die [Oromo]: Narrazione Delia Spedizione Bianchi in Africa Nel 1879-80* (Milano: Fratelli Treves, 1886), p.482.

defended and crushed an ambition of Egyptians to build great Egypt in Northeast Africa. The Tulama Oromo's joint horses with other nation horses played great role in defending the country from foreign invasion continuing during the famous battle of Adwa in 1896. In spite of the defeat at Dogali in 1887, the Italians were unable to set aside their colonial ambitions towards Ethiopia. They thus began to conquer and occupy the northern part of the country.⁴¹

The Adwa victory over European imperialism is an important event in the shared memory of the entire black population in the world. The Adwa victory is a complex nexus of various historical processes with wide-ranging in which hundreds of thousands were died and wounded to the cause of their country. But only small and significant heroes and kings were always remembering. The victory is also not only reflects of time, but transcends it, and that the aspirations and meanings flow from it have been a powerful constitutive force of collective in the rise and evolution of modern Africa in general, Ethiopia in particular.⁴²

In the middle of the battle, Ras Michael's of Wallo (Mohammed Ali Bula Abba Yemam) troops went to reinforce Ras Alula, who had already begun fighting General Dabormida who was outnumbered by the gallant Ethiopian fighters. Moreover, the Oromo cavalry also reinforced Ras Alula, and to his credit Abba Nega effectively blocked the expected Italian reinforcement from Adi Quala. In view of the Italian retreat in masse, Alula conveyed a message to Emperor Menelik for more Oromo cavalry in order to cut off the retreat and make them encircled rather.⁴³

Furious, Emperor Menelik declared a state of preparation for war against the invaders. The declaration reads as follows:

“... አሁንም አገር የሚያጠፋ ሃይማኖት የሚያናወጥ ጠላት እግዚአብሔር የወሰነልንን የባህር በር አሌፎ መጥቷል።
... እያሆራ እንዮፍሌፊሌ መሬት ይቆፍር ጀመር። አሁን ግን በእግዚአብሔር ረዲትነት አገሬን አሳሌፌ አልሰጠዉም።
... ጉሌበት ያልህ በጉሌበትህ እርዲኝ። ጉልበት የላልህ ሆሌጅህ፣ ሆሚሰትህ፣ ሆሃይማኖትህ ስትል እርዲኝ። ...
ዘመቻዬም በጥቅምት ነዉና እስከ ጥቅምት እኩላታ ዴረሰ ወረኢለ ከተህ ሊግኝህ።”⁴⁴

⁴¹ David Levering Lewis, (1988), *The Race to Fashoda: European colonialism and African resistance in the scramble for Africa*, 1st ed., London, Bloomsbury, p.116

⁴² Bahru Zewde. (2007). Habtä Giyorgis Dinagde. In Siegbert Uhlig (Ed.) *Encyclopaedia Aethiopia* (Vol. 2, pp. 952-953). Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, Bahru Zawde, *A History of modern Ethiopia 1855-1991* his third edition translation of Amharic version entitled *yeEthiopia tarik ka1843-eska 1983 AAU*

⁴³ Wylde, Augustus B. (1901) *Modern Abyssinia*. London, Methuen & Co.,

⁴⁴ Gabre-Selassie, *Tarik Ze-dagmawi Menelik, Neguse Negest Ze -Ethiopia*, Addis Ababa: Artistic Printing Press, p. 225.

.....an enemy has come that would ruin our country and change our religion. They have passed over the sea that God gave us as our border. These enemies have advanced, burrowing into the country like moles..... With the help of God; I will get whoever has caused me sorrow. . . .Now, you who are strong lend me your strong arms, and you who are weak, help me with your prayers, while you think of your children, your wife, and your faith . . . assemble and meet me at Warra Ilu, and may you be there by the middle of October.

In response to this national call to arms, Ras Mikael put himself at the disposal of the emperor, at Adwa on 1 March, 1896, more than two thousand cavalries from Tulama and Wallo mainly recruited from warra Ilu, Lasta and Dalanta led by Negus Mikael (Mohammed Ali Yemam Abba Bulaa), the father of the uncrowned Emperor (Li Eyasu). At this time both horseman and infantry paid huge sacrifice.⁴⁵

The battle of Amba Alaghe, a prelude to Adwa, was one of those many heroic combats that testify to the valor of the Ethiopian people. Fitawrari Gebeyehu Gurmu of Abbichu's army stumbled upon units of this Italian force on December 7, 1895 and a battle ensued. Gebeyehu Gurmu was sick but even though he could not carry his weapon, he held a cane and gave direction to his soldiers to fight with determination. He also told them that if they exhausted their bullets, they must use their swords, kill the enemy and die in honor.⁴⁶

The Oromo people cavalries and other submissive local kings were take part in in the demise of local threats starting from Shoa to Sudan border, from Wechecha to Walayta (1894), Ilu to Mecha (1882) and kaffa to Borena (1897).⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Bairu Tafla. (1968). Two Ethiopian Biographies: Wähni Azaj Wäldä Sadeq, Abba Menzir, 1838-1909 and Fitawrari Habte Giyorgis, Abba Mechal, 1853-1926. Journal of Ethiopian Studies, 6(1), 123-130. 10

⁴⁶ Gabre-Selassie, Tsehafe Te'ezaz, Tarik Zemen Zedagmawi Menelik, Neguse-Negest the Ethiopia, p. 238-242

⁴⁷ Bairu Tafla. (1969). Four Ethiopian Biographies: Däjjazmač Gärmamé, Däjjazmač GäbräEgzi'abehér Moroda, Däjjazmač Balča and Kántiba Gäbru Dästa. Journal of Ethiopian Studies, 7(2), 1-31.



Figure:1 Some portraits of Oromo Cavalry fromL'illustrusione italiana

And though, it's very difficult to list the names of hundreds of thousands Ethiopians sons and daughters were sacrificed their lives to defend and built the modern Ethiopian Empire. In this case, the Ethiopian army at Adwa was, therefore, a mosaic of scores of nationalities that marched north ready to shed their blood together for a common cause. The aftermath of Adwa (1896-1900) the armies were able to conquered Afar in 1896, Somali in 1897, Kaffa in 1897, Borana in 1897, Benishangul in 1898, Bench Maji, Gardula, to Lake Rudolf in 1898. In peripheral provinces the project of conquest and submission was continued until 1900, the year which marked the making of modern Ethiopian empire of today.

4. Conclusion

In the history of the empire formation and state building cavalry horses played great role at least from the mid of 16th century. Ethiopians were used cavalry horses exhaustively for both internal civil war and defending foreign aggression. The cavalry horses of Oromo people were used for tribute, gift, power ceremonial, and battlefield. In context of this paper, the Oromo cavalry horses have contributed for the survival of Ethiopian independence and state building under the renowned Menelik's general, Ras Gobana Dachi and his subservient starting from Shoa to Sudan border, from Wechecha to Walayta and kaffa and Borena. The contribution of Oromo cavalry was also remarkable in the Ethiopia's historic victory against European colonialism expansion, mainly Italy at Amba Alage and Adwa in 1895 and 1896 respectively.

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