



SABEAN CONQUEST AND THE EVICTION OF OROMO FROM HISTORIC MEROE

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ABSTRACT

The article explores pre-Sabean Oromo settlement of east Sudan, Eritrea and northern Ethiopia which was under the control of Meroetic kings in the classics. This article also examines the collective administrative system known as Gabala or Gadda along the harbor of Gabala where Meroe's eastern trade route peters out in to the Red Sea via the port town of Adola. The purpose of this article is to investigate economic and administrative involvement of Oromo in Meroe's ancient civilization. In order to validate the new argument, primary evidences were collected together with oral sources recorded from purposively selected five informants, has been referred. Finally, based on place names like Ona Libanos, linguistic evidences, comparative analysis of gender based authority of Meroe- Oromo, archaeological, sources, and living culture of the people of Oromo, the researcher had confirmed the people of Oromo, whose indigenous knowledge had been crucial in transforming socio-economic and political life of the emergent mercantile kingdom of Aksum, was part of the classical Meroe civilization. Gradually, the new comers had snatched not only Oromo's agricultural wisdom, land and trade route that radiates from the harbor of Gabala, but also cut off Oromo's contact with ancient Meroe pushing them aside in to the barren lands of south eastern Ethiopia and northern Kenya.

Key Words: *Meroe, Oromo, Sabean colonization, Cushitic dispersal*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Oromo belongs to Cushites of North East Africa that leagued in to the Borana and Barentu confederacies at about 14th to 16th centuries. The Oromo speaks *Afan Oromo* or the Oromo language shares 50-60% common words with languages of other Cushitic speaking groups Alamayehu Hayle *et al* (2000). The relatedness of words in *Afan Oromo* and other Cushitic languages increases as one move from Meroetic Nubia to southern Ethiopia and northern Kenya. Lewis(1966) and other scholars had concluded that the Oromo speaks lowland East Cushitic

language, which is a kin to its neighbors. As a matter of fact, *Afan Oromo* is an East Cushitic language of Afro-Asiatic family spoken across northern half of Africa and western Asia. *Afan Oromo* or the Oromo language is the mother tongue of most Oromo groups living in Ethiopia and Kenya. It is also spoken by neighboring people as the second language. Before the era of colonialism, *Afan Oromo* serves as lingua-franca of the Ethiopian region and the Horn.

The early history of Oromo has been the major line of departure among scholars. The first assumption about the early history of Oromo, which was dominant during colonial period, came from European travellers. Oromo's early homeland is among the major themes that have been discussed by monks, anthropologists, individual writers, linguists and Catholic missionaries and colonial soldiers. The most notable Europeans who credited a lot to discuss about early history of Oromo were travelers like Almeida (1967), Bruce(1964) Lewis(1966). Almeida (1967), who visited the Horn of Africa in the 16th century, had proposed that the Oromo homeland was near Mogadishu. On other hand, Bruce(1964), who explored Ethiopia in the 17th century, had argued that, the Oromo came from Sennar province of Sudan. Others like Lewis(1966), who visited Somaliland during the colonial period, had proposed that the most probable early settlement the Oromo to be Northern part of the present day Somaliland. When the disparity in assumption has been analyzed, it poses a question leading how it could be possible for peoples like the Oromo, whose genealogy converges at certain point, could have miscellaneous origins? Normally, divergence in proposed place of origin of Oromo reveals the fact that all hypotheses are based on the first encounter of an individual traveler, not on historical evidence.

The Ethiopianist scholars, who get momentum after the conquest of king Menilik II, had argued that Oromo have no recorded history which justifies its very existence in the Ethiopian region. They portrayed Oromo as stranger who infiltrated to the country of 'theirs' or Abyssinia after the 16th CAD. Peoples like *Aleka Taye* argued that the ancestors of the Oromo came from the present day Kenya. According to *Aleka Taye*, as cited in Getachewu(1977) "The Oromo people migrated from Asia and crossed over to Madagascar, and that they migrated from there and settled at sea coast near Mombassa....And from there they came to Ethiopia following the stream called Gannale" (p.172). The assumptions of scholars, which externalize early settlement of the Oromo, had been not supported with tangible evidence except fulfilling the ambition of Ethiopian ruling elite and neutralizing the Oromo from the political sphere considering them

alien to Ethiopia. More specifically, the assumption contradicts with common root of Cushites; which is Meroetic Nubia.

Ethiopianist authors who are always at trouble to point out the reality of Oromo history, had argued that Eritrea and north central highlands of Ethiopia were settled by Agaw groups, a group that never crossed River Tekeze before Semitic arrival (Paulos,2011). One cannot believe that they might fail to refer Cushitic groups that have been listed on Adulis inscription while handing over the entire north central highlands to Agaw. It seems rather part of the deliberate and systematic act of scholars aimed at excluding Oromo from historical inquiry of the nation. As pre-Bantu (Wa-Nyika) settlement of Southern Cushites in southern Somalia and northern Kenya had been credited by Bantu scholars, Agaw's pre- Semitic settlement of Eritrea and north central Ethiopia had been praised by the Semitic writers (UNESCO, Vol.III,1981; Munro-Hay,1991). This is because, as Agaw are already assimilated with Sabeans, it is assumed that they have no power to endanger Sabeans claim of land and power when compared with the most populous Oromo.

In spite of the general view of linguistic researchers, which points out common origin of all Cushites, the ancient Meroe and the present settlement area of Cushites, including Oromo, have been on opposite geographical co-ordinates; that is north eastern Sudan and southern half of Ethiopia respectively. The disparity between the assumption of scholars and the settlement pattern of Cushites are major indicator of the existing paradoxes in historical discourse of North East Africa. Such discrepancies have been directly related with the emergence of Semitic settlement in north central high lands which Lapiso(2003)describes Semitic islands in the vast Cushitic Sea. The replacement of indigenous Cushite by late coming Semitic speakers like Sabeans (Ethiopia and Eritrea) and Arabs (Sudan) since the 3rd century BC had seriously affected historical discourse of north central highlands. Firstly, Semitic groups, who claim eastern civilization, have showed little interest to conduct research on pre-Sabeans Ethio-Eritrea or pre- Arabic Sudan when compared with the growing interest to link their history to the Middle East(Sergaw, 1972; Tades,1972; Mohamed,1990). In order to diminish such inconsistencies, conducting intensive research along the banks of Nile and north central highlands of Ethiopia/Eritrea could be desirable, which might be the probable line of Cushitic dispersal.

In order to write a real history that confirms linguistic root of the native people of the region, one should has to think beyond colonial boundaries. On the other hand, the present research tradition of scholars, which stitch up on national boundaries instead of classical ethnography of Cushites, has negative effect on research works in the field. In view of the fact that the chapter investigate who were the founders of pre-Sabean civilization; and when and how they moved out of their original position, the major focus of the topic would be on native Cushitic inhabitants, whose history was marginalized by post- colonial ‘national historian’ that favored the Red Sea coast and Sabean as initial point while discussing history of the region (Mohamed, 1990). Therefore, to appreciate fully the early history of northern highlands, one has to trace back to Meroe which was believed to be the civilization of all Cushites. Hence, the rationale behind conducting comprehensive research work on early history of north eastern Sudan, Eritrea and Ethiopian societies is common historical background of ancient inhabitants of the region. There are quite a lot of first hand sources such as inscriptions and written documents; Oromo place names, comparative analysis of linguistic evidences and the living culture of the Oromo, which justify Oromo settlement in north eastern Sudan, Eritrea and northern highlands of the present day Ethiopia.

1.1. Research Questions

- ✓ How Meroetic sources portray Oromo’s administrative role during the period of Sabean advent in the Horn of Africa?
- ✓ Whether Oromo’s pre-sabean existence in Eritrea and northern Ethiopian region had been supported by archaeological sources.
- ✓ In what way local Oromo values could rationalize Oromo’s eviction out of the Red sea cost of Eritrea and northern Ethiopia after Sabean colonization?

1.2. Objectives of the Study

The major objective this study is to investigate economic and administrative involvement of Oromo in ancient Meroe and its legacy on Sabean colonizers. Specific objectives are to:

- ✓ Examine the relatedness of Oromo and Meroe civilizations through elaborating Oromo’s role in administering the eastern province of Meroe

- ✓ Explore pre- Sabean archaeological sources which could explain Oromo's early history that confirms with linguistic evidence
- ✓ Identify indigenous socio-economic and political values of Oromo which rationalize their presence in eastern Sudan, Eritrea and northern Ethiopia in the distant past.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study explores about the early history of the people of Oromo, which constitutes the largest among Cushitic speakers of North East Africa. For the purpose of this article, only qualitative type of data that had been collected from primary and secondary sources was used. Therefore, archeological sources and archival materials together with oral records from purposively selected five informants were accessed. The data collected through various methods had been carefully examined based on analogy and historical data analysis method.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There is no doubt among scholars to distinguish Meroetic root of the entire Cushitic civilization. In the meantime, they never stopped up contending on identity of the people who settled in north central highlands and the degree of their relation with the classical civilization of Meroe. So far, scant archeological evidences such as ceramic objects lately come from the Gash Delta, which is located in the vicinity of Barentu town in Eritrea, confirms that a complex society had been appeared there at about 4th - the 3rd Millennium BC (Munro-Hay, 1991; UNESCO Vol.II, 1981). According to these sources, the people around Ethio-Sudanese-Eritrea borderland had been practicing certain Meroetic cultural way of life such as agriculture and decorating their funeral with stone stelae. Consequently, an Italian archaeologist Fattovich, as cited in Munro-Hay (1991) had commented that; "A stele tradition ...to have existed in the Sudanese-Ethiopian borderlands and in parts of Northern Ethiopia and Eritrea in pre-Aksumite times.... belong to an ancient African tradition," (p.118) to strengthen common root of both regions.

In addition to this, rock paintings of Ona Libanos have clearly depicted native inhabitants of north central highlands while practicing plough farming and using spears since fourth Millennial BC (Clark, 1977). Analyzing the information that collected from cave paintings of Ona Libanos and Matara(Matahara?), one can conclude the early inhabitants of Eritrea and north central

highlands constitute the Early Iron Age societies like Meroe who practices agriculture. As a matter of resemblance in archeological findings such as pottery work, erecting stelae and fossil evidences recently discovered along Ethio-Sudan-Eritrea border line, *The Cambridge General History III* (1982) has concluded that the early inhabitants of Eritrea and north central highlands of Ethiopia were Cushites who moved from plains and lowlands of north eastern Sudan.

Some scholars like Houston (2002), Munro-hay (1991) and Paulos(2011) had argued that people of Meroe(north eastern Sudan) and the percent day northern Ethiopia and Eritrea were ruled by a Queen known as Candace to reveal the existing political linkage among Meroe and pre-Sabean societies of north central highlands, which was characterized by common origin, similarity of some cultural elements and economic activity. Politically, classical state of Meroe had adopted some sort of local autonomy in the eastern most coastal province, which was dominated by Eastern Cushites (Shillington, 1989; Munro-Hay, 1991). Ever since the major caravan rout of Meroe had been crossing through north eastern Sudan, Eritrea and northern Ethiopia, the region deserves closer attention of Meroetic kings.

When immigrant elements troubled the movement of long distance merchant caravan, Meroetic kings like King Harsiotef and King Sherkarer had repeatedly made punitive campaigns against Sabean and local collaborators at about the 4th century BC and 1st century AD respectively (Munro-Hay,1991; *The Cambridge History of Africa*, Vol.II,1982; Houston,1926). The aim of both campaigns were not only to restore peace and order in the region, but also had an implication of expressing Meroe's political sovereignty over these lands. In general, when we examine the post- Roman dependence of More on Arabian trade route in relation to Meroetic king's claim to these lands, it might be promising to conclude that north eastern Sudan and north central highlands of Ethiopia and Eritrea had been governed under a single sovereign political entity. Subsequently, Eritrea and northern Ethiopia constitutes Meroe's eastern province, which links it with eastern world via the Red Sea ports. Meanwhile, the existing Meroetic documents have limitations to describe local people and the name of its eastern province.

In spite of the constraint in historical sources scholars like Munroe-hay (1991) had carefully noted that Adulis, the Eastern most harbors and customs point of Meroe, was governed by the

rulers of Gabaza(Munro-Hay,1991). The original name of Adulis, which was described in Periplus of the Eritrean Sea, had been also Adola in ancient times (Weaver, 2019). As enshrined in UNESCO *General History* Vol. II (1981), ancient harbors along the Red Sea coasts of Eastern Meroe or the present day Eritrea was also referred as harbor of Gabaza. The port town Adulis, which was constructively situated on the Red Sea coast of the land of Cush known as harbor of Gabaza, had been the first point on the long distance trade route into the Sudan(Houston,1926; Munro-Hay,1991). In those days, convenience of opportunities to acquire wealth through trading incense and ivory as well as the magnificence of Meroetic civilization increased its celebrity across the Old World including South Arabia (Lipsky,1962). As demonstrated by Munro-Hay (1991), it was this trade which mesmerized South Arabians leading to conflict with native inhabitants of eastern Meroe, which they identify as Gabaza.

In the early days of their appearance in Eritrea and Northern Ethiopia at about the 3rd century BC, the nickname of Sabeen kings had been highly coupled with Gabaza, as a result of their first confrontation with the people of Gabaza (Munro-Hay, 1991). After defeating coastal inhabitants, Sabeen rulers had started calling themselves *ella* Gabaza, which means ‘band’, ‘collection’ or ‘crowd’ of Gabaza in Ge’ez(Getachew,1997; Munro-Hay, 1991; Munro-Hay,2005). Since then, successive medieval kings had sustained calling themselves *ella* Gabaza, which Monroe-Hay call ‘an ambiguous term’ among Abyssinians(Munro-Hay,2005). Regardless of its ambiguity, as noted by Getachew Haile, the use of Ge’ez’s collective marker *ella*, which is not common among Abyssinians, witness the attractiveness of group power holding structure like *Gada* system among the Gabaza.

It was not known whether Aksum had been there from the beginning. What we know is the term Aksum was not well known among Sabeen settlers during the early days of Christianity in the 4th century though the author of *Preplus of the Eritrean Sea* had mentioned it earlier. For example, the church at Aksum, which later on renamed as Maryam Tsiyon, was recognized as Gabaza Maryam to celebrate the victory scored on indigenous inhabitants or Gabaza(Munro-Hay,2005). Meanwhile, a question which remained to be answered is the identity of *Gabaza*. Who were the *Gabaza* people? Is there any society in northern Ethiopia and Eritrea, which has been identified with this name at present? Based on the archaeological sources, linguistic evidence, place names

living culture of the Oromo and comparative analysis of Oromo-Meroe socio-political organizations, the author of this article had identified that pre-Sabean settlers of eastern Meroe were Oromo group whose ruling generation *Gabala/Gada* not Gabaza.

Some scholars have doubts on the argument that the supposedly settlers of east Meroe were indigenous Cushites as a result of the presence of “z” sound in the term *Gabaza*, a sound which is not common among Cushitic Oromo (Ayalew, 2015). Meanwhile, in spite of the early version, the term *Gabaza* was corrected later on. This could be confirmed by Adulis inscription and Amde Tsion’s chronicle. In Adulis inscription and chronicle of king Amade Tsion, the term *Gabaza* has not been mentioned at all, instead it was corrected as *Gabala* (Kirwan, 1972; Ministry of Information, 1999). Historically, the discovery of Oromo place names, the similarity in archaeological findings of Meroe, Eritrea and northern Ethiopia as well as Adulis’s narrative of Oromo in the district of Meroe’s long distance caravan had been crossing, reveals the fact that Oromo and the Oromo Nation had been part of the eastern province of Meroe, which early Sabians were calling rulers of *Gabala* or harbor of *Gabala* at about 3rd century BC.

3.1. Linguistic Evidence about Oromo Existence in Eastern Meroe

It is not only Oromo who claim Meroe as their original homeland, but also various inhabitants of the region like ancient Egypt, Beja and Hausa were also claiming the same region as their original home of their ancestors. Ehret, as cited in Laichas (2009), had estimated pre-dynastic Egyptians presence in Ethiopia-Sudan border area together with other Cushites to be before 13,000 BP. The ancient Meroe represents a place where some common cultural value had evolved among the Oromo, ancient Egypt, Beja, Hausa and others. Basically, the existing similarity in noticeable culture of those who claim Meroe would be the major evidence to declare Meroetic origin of the Oromo. Nevertheless, UNESCO (1978) stated that Oromo language has grammatical similarity with classical Egyptian language. Furthermore, the settlement of Oromo in the land of Cush together with other Cushitic groups like Beja and Hausa has economic indicator. It has been clearly manifested by shared meaning of Oromo loan words like *Sa’a*, which means cow in both Oromo and Beja languages (Ehret, 1979; Tilahun, 2004). The term *sa’a* or *caw* has similar meaning in Hausa language. According to Banti (1988), Oromo term *Sa’a* has

been represented by *Sa'a niyaa* in Hausa language. Except the suffix *niyaa*, the word *Sa'a* has almost similar with Oromo term.

The occurrence of cattle loan terms instead of hoe has also great significance to analyze the economic activity of both in the distant past. It indicates that Oromo and other Cushitic speakers had been practicing pastoralism when they were in historic Cush during the time immemorial. In the Eastern lowlands of Meroe, Bruce (1964) had discovered a place name called Sire where pastoralists were settled. In Oromo nation, there are several places which bear the name Sire. To mention some, Sire of east Wallagga and Sire of Arsi is the most notable (Bruce, 1964; FDREPCC, 2008 Bejiga, 2015; Yihun Belay, 2015). Therefore, the presence of Oromo place names like Sire, Abu Oda, Naga and Mirgisa in the eastern part of Sudan could be an indication of Oromo's early settlement which abandoned later on (Hilliard, 1983; UNESCO. 1978).

3. 2. Resemblance in Gender Based Division of Labor and Authority

The second evidence which justifies Oromo existence in Meroetic realm was the apparent similarity in gender based division of labor and authority which had been practiced at about the 10th CBC (Shillington,1989). As commented by Assafa(2010), the *Gada* system has effectively enforced a gender-based division of labor, which is totally different from class based splitting up of the western society. Gender-based division of the society, which is vital for balancing, regulating and safeguarding the interest of male and female social groups, had been institutionalized all the way through establishment of two equally important separate and interdependent economic domains. The two groups have a well-structured power and institution that helps both groups to exercise their socio-political power. When male representative, *Aba Gada*, wore *Kalacha*, representative of women social group or *Aba Gada's* sister enthrone herself with *Qanafa* (a sacred symbol that is worn in the fore head of nursing mother or a woman that gave birth) at forehead. As *Boku* or the scepter is used by *Aba Gada* to enforce his authority, *Sinqe/ siqe* or a stick serves as an instrument which symbolizes final implementation of women's power.

Women's participation in the society has been not limited in ordinary activities but also includes exercising higher political authority as well. Moreover, in the *Gada* system there is a point at which all male group (those who work out) of the society accept authority of the women (those who entitled the responsibility at home). Women social class, who has been represented by the sister of *Abbaa Gada*, acts as facilitator of power transfer from one generation to another. In the *Gada* democracy women has their own role in process of peaceful hand over of authority to the next generation. This is because, power transfer could be impossible without the inauguration of *Abbaa Gada's* sister, who attends the ceremony holding a stick known as *Sinqe/ Siqe*(Assafa, 2001; Teha,2013;Muktar,2015). Oromo women's responsibility in facilitating peaceful transition of power has similarities with classical Meroe's women. In both cases women acts as symbol of unity when the state exhibits power vacuum. The only difference is that Oromo women are represented by the sister of *Abbaa Gada* while mother of the king represented in the case of the classical Meroe (Shillington,1989).

3.3. Archaeological Sours

The discovery of Oromo's early settlement along Sudan-Eritrea- Ethiopian border area, could serve us as additional source to examine the early history and the root of Oromo's dispersal out of Cushitic Meroe. There are several Oromo place names such as Ona Libanos, Ona Nagast, Ona enda aboi Zewge and so forth which identified in Eritrea and northern Ethiopia (Fattovich and Bard, 2001). In addition to the place names, the discovery of Adulis inscription could contribute multidimensional significance in reconstructing the early distorted history as it listed out one of the Oromo group that settled in north central highlands and Red Sea littorals. The historic Adulis(Adola) inscription, which was written between the 1st century BC-1st , describes the list of tribal groups that had been annexed by unidentified king together with their relative position, is presented as follows:

I waged war on the following peoples: I made war on the Gaze, then, having conquered Agame and Sigyene, I sized half of their property and peoples. Aua, Zingabane, Aggabe, Tiamma, Athagous, Kalaa and the people of Samen....Then Lasine, Zaa, and Gabala; they dwell on a mountain where hot springs flow. Then having subjected the Atalmo, the Bega and with them all the Taggaite peoples who occupy territories leading to the frontiers of Egypt(Kirwan,1972, p.172).

Gabala was among the tribes/clans that have been mentioned in the Adulis inscription. However the identity of Gabala remains contradicting among the scholars. Sergew(1972) and Conti Rossini(1928) had associated Gabala with Semitic or Sabeans . Meanwhile, when we investigate the proposed ideas of both scholars none of them had been supported with convincing evidences. This is because; the term Gabala has been not mentioned so far in relation with Agazian and Habashat tribes, which were considered as the original Sabeans (Dirribi,2011; Tekletsadik,1966). In the contrary, one can find Gabala only among the Oromo. Except the claim of Karayu Oromo, no other group of people in North Eastern Africa that has been recognized so far as Gabala tribe/people. The second reason was associated with the nature of wars in those days. In early days of Sabean arrival, most wars had been fought not among Semitic groups, but waged by Sabean against the entire Cushites(Munro-Hay,1991;Kirwan,1972;Sergew,1972).

3.4. Living Culture of the people of Oromo

Possibly, the reader of this article may ask who Gabala are and how it could be interrelated with Oromo. Gabala is not an Oromo clan, but the term represents an Oromo social group, exclusively used at present by the Karayu Oromo. As discussed by elders of Fantale district of Eastern Shawa Zone, Gabala and Gada are synonym terms which denote governing generation set. According to Karayu Oromo informants, a generation who took power says *Nu Warraa Gabalati* or *Nu Worraa Gadati*, which means, “We are members of the governing generation”(Muktar, 2015, Qasaro,2015;Bru,2015). In Adulis inscription, Gabala has been listed as it was a tribe or people. However, all informants have unanimously responded that Gabala is not a clan or a tribe, but it denotes members of the governing age grade which are represented from sub-clans of Karayu Oromo.

Elders of Karayu recall that each Gabala, the warier age grade of Karayu, are predictable to establish its own camp in the peripheries, which serve as a command post for defensive purpose. The camps (like modern police station) have been highly respected by the society. For example, if somebody has killed a person and seek asylum there, nobody will inflict damage on him but encourage his reconciliation with families of the deceased. The base camp becomes *Ona* after eight years of Gabala’s service and new camp established by succeeding ruling generation set(Muktar, 2012, Qasaro,2015;Boru,2015). As a result, several *Onas* (abandon camps) has been reported so far in the border areas of Karayu. The discovery of an Oromo term *Ona* in the region

that Adulis inscription have described as settlement area of Gabala around archaeological site of Ona Libanos, as well as the prevalence of camp constructing tradition among Karayu all through each successive generation, could secure to conclude that, the Karayu Oromo, sub branch of Barentu confederacy, were settled in north central highlands and its environs at least in the early days of Sabean arrival. This could be confirmed partly by the fact that Karayu Oromo are the only society among inhabitants of the Horn of Africa where the term Gabala is still used as collective name of the governing generation set(Muktar, 2015, Qasaro,2015;Boru,2015).

To conclude the idea, the establishment of Sabean dominated Aksumite state was followed by the coming of new religion; that is Christianity. After the 4th century AD, Aksum was no more traditionalists; at least Christianity had been accepted at the court level (UNESCO, Vol. III,1981;Ilife,2007;Tadesse,1972;Sergew,1972). Christian Aksum, the nucleus of the later Abyssinia, was started expanding its territory to north central highlands since 4th century AD. To achieve its major objective of annexing resourceful territories and controlling lucrative trade route, Aksumite kings sought alliance with Orthodox Church and its priesthood. The book *Cambridge History of Africa, Vol. II*(1982), had noted that, “Christianity had become the court religion by about 350 AD and it is from this time that there began the close connection between Christianity and what was to become the Ethiopian nation” (p.264). The conquest wars of Abyssinian kings, which had been waged on the entire Cushites extending from Meroe to the Horn of Africa, were blessed by the Orthodox Church. Through conquest wars, they managed to get control effectively the Red Sea ports after devastating littoral province of Meroetic, which had been under the sovereign authority of *Gabala* or the ruling age grade of Karayu Oromo. They also controlled some parts in the Northern and North Central highlands (Kirwan, 1972 ; Sergaw, 1972).

Before Sabean intrusion, all Cushites do had good relations among each other. As a result of this; they retained shared values and their manifest destiny in their culture (Lipsky, 1960;UNESCO,1978;Houston,1926). However, the relation was not long lasted. It had been interrupted as a result of Semitic infiltrations. The trade among Cushites of the Ethiopian region and Meroe couldn't continue as it had been before. This is because; Meroe's major trade routes were controlled by Abyssinians, who favored the Orient and showed less interest to trade with Cushites(UNESCO, Vol. III, 1981; *The Cambridge History of Africa*, Vol. III,1982). The

establishment of the Aksumite state, which served as nucleus for the later Abyssinian Empire, had been considered as a watershed in the history of Cushites. It marked the end of pre-Aksumite relation among different Cushitic group. The influx of Semitic group ended not only the existing relation, but also changed the settlement pattern of indigenous people. Oromo's north western neighbor which had been Beja formerly, was replaced by Semitic groups like Amhara and Tegray. This in turn brought new rival to Oromo, whose ambition was territorial and political domination instead of accommodation and local autonomy that had been prevailed during Meroetic civilization (Munro-Hay, 1999; Kirwan, 1972; UNESCO, Vol. III, 1981).

The empire of Aksum was not only the result of forceful conquest or assimilation, but also as discussed by Munroe-hey, during the early days of their conquest, Abyssinian kings of Aksum had evicted the local people from their home and forced them to compulsory resettlement along peripheries. The intermittent war and eviction from cooler areas gradually weakened agricultural economy of the native population. Aksumite or Abyssinian conquest, which was aimed at trade and land domination, had also socio- political magnitude. As a matter of Sabeian cultural domination, some Cushitic groups were swallowed by the Semitic influence. Except few who abandoned their land, most Agaws were assimilated to Abyssinian culture and religion with a limited self-identity since the first Millennial BC(*The Cambridge History of Africa*, Vol. III,1982; Adejumobi, 2007). On the contrary; the majority of Oromo group had abandoned central highlands in favor of self-identity. Trimnghan(1965); who conducted research on Islam and Eastern Ethiopian history, had listed a number of Oromo groups around River Awash valley, which he mentioned some as Tiko (Xiiqqoo), Wargar (*Waraaggarii*), Gabala (Karayu) and others. The concentration of such amount of Oromo along River Awash valley indicates the fact that the eviction had been very intense before the 9th century AD(Trimingham, 1965).

CONCLUSION

The people of Oromo, who currently inhabited in Ethiopia and Kenya, speak eastern lowland Cushitic language. Scholars had concluded that Oromo symbolizes an indigenous Cushites of North Eastern Africa based on noticeable parallelism in physical stature and custom with other Cushites as well as their location in one geographical position. Initially, the people of Oromo had been settled in low land territories of eastern Sudan before the 13,000 BP, and later on they moved to the highlands of Eritrea and northern Ethiopia at about 10th CBC. During the Sabeian

conquest, the Oromo had been settled in eastern part of Meroe; a province that comprises eastern Sudan, Eritrea and northern Ethiopia. The Oromo's geographical position along the Red Sea littorals not only enabled them to communicate with friendly people such as the Greeks and other Near Eastern societies very easily, but also exposed their land for consecutive pressure from the Sabeans, which ended with complete dislocation and dispersal of Oromo.

Ethiopianist scholars, who argued Oromo come out from specific pocket of place such as south central highland, had denied the early existence of Oromo in eastern Sudan, Eritrea and north central Ethiopia. However, it is too difficult to accept the people of Oromo, who have been acknowledged with large population size in the region, extended clans, sub-clans and families were settled in such specific place. Thus, to disprove such claims and to convince the readers that the Oromo were settled in the vast land stretching from eastern part of Meroe to the coasts of the Red Sea in the classics, this article had consulted several place names, similarity in gender based division of labor and authority, archaeological sources, linguistic evidences and living cultures that belong only to the Oromo.

Analogically, if we accepted the early settlement of Oromo in east Meroe or eastern Sudan, Eritrea and northern Ethiopia based on varied confirmations there is no reservation to accept the ancient civilization of northern Ethiopia and Eritrea, which belongs to Oromo, was part of the classical Meroe civilization. Hence, northern Oromo's indigenous agricultural knowledge and nautical commerce along the harbor of Gabala/Gada was crucial in transforming socio-economic and political life of pre-Sabean societies and the newly evolving Sabean civilization. As the power of Sabean kingdom of Aksum getting stronger, the people of Oromo were highly victimized to the extent that their aboriginality in the region had been denied by Sabean immigrants who evicted them from the fertile highlands of Eritrea and north central Ethiopia to the barren lands of south eastern Ethiopia and northern Kenya.

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Interviews

Interviews: Ayalew Teshome (16/7/2015),Dire Dawa

Interviews: Boru Meto(14/9/2015), Matahara

Interviews: Bejiga Garba (25/6/2015), Addis Ababa

Interviews: Yihun Belay Teshome(25/5/2015) Addis Ababa

Interviews: Muktar Fantale (14/9/2015),Matahara

Interviews: Qasaro Jilo(14/9/2015), Matahara

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