



The Legacy of Wolaita Hegemony in Transforming Ethiopia:

The Case of *KawoMotolomi*

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Abstract

The historical events of the 13th century had fundamental implications in the history of medieval Wolaita and Ethiopia at large. At the heart of these events lay the conquest of a larger portion of Ethiopia, which stretches north-south from Tegulet to the Indian Ocean coast, west-east from Tumul(Sudan) to the Gulf of Aden, by the forces of KawoMotolami of Wolaita. The purpose of this article which was conducted between February 2018 and June 2019 had been to investigate the major factors that facilitated the rise of the Grand Wolaita Kingdom in the 13th century and its legacy on socio-economic and political life of the entire Ethiopians. Based on archival sources, works of chronicles, major export items of the kingdom, and interviews made with purposefully selected ten informants the research had confirmed that the most important driving force behind exceeding military capability of the traditionalist king was anti-Orthodox African nationalism which evolved in to subjugation of huge territories together with the sources of major trade items exported from the Horn of Africa's hinterlands. Through historical data analysis method, the article also made known that kawoMotolomi, who was tolerant to the Christian and Muslim immigrants, had played a great role in Orthodox evangelization process after his conversion to Christianity. Finally, the researcher had concluded that kawoMotolami's period deserves the Golden Age of Wolaita examining its leading role in nurturing shared identities, religious transformation, sustaining the traceability of Ethiopian unity, maintaining regional stability and

fostering socio-economic community of the Horn of Africa which interconnected through long distance trade.

Keywords: *Wolaita, Kawo Motolomi, nationhood, Zeila trade, ethnic integration, reforms*

1. Introduction

Medieval Ethiopia symbolizes a center where indigenous African civilization met with northern Christian and eastern Muslim civilizations. Among the indigenous civilizations, the kingdom of Wolaita was the most remarkable. According to the Egyptian sources as cited by Lachias (2009) Wolaita had long history of statehood in the Horn of Africa which dated back to the Egypt's pre-dynastic period. In Wolaita, three dynasties; namely Wolaita *Malla* Dynasty, Arujja Dynasty, and Tigre *Malla* Dynasty were remembered by every single member of the society. It has been agreeable that the founders of the kingdom of Wolaita were the first settlers of the land known as Wolaita *Malla* (clan) which transformed into Wolaita *Malla* Dynasty. At the beginning of the 16th CAD, Wolaita *Malla* Dynasty was replaced by Tigre *Malla* Dynasty which stayed on power until the 1894 conquest of king Menilik (Chiatti, 1984; Deressa, 1999).

During the medieval period, the kingdom of Wolaita was ruled by the kings of Wolaita *Malla* Dynasty. Like other states, pre-colonial kingdom of Wolaita had well defined hierarchical state structure that occupied by local dignitaries. In those days, divine kings were not only governors of their people but also acted as the representative of God on this planet and salvation of their life (Elias, 1987; Chiatti, 1984). Nevertheless, Eurocentric scholars like Stark (1986) had argued that pre-colonial state of Africa has no parallel with the development in other parts of the world since the appearance of state was associated with the post independent period. As a matter of such assumptions, a pre-colonial kingdom of Wolaita was deliberately marginalized from the historical discourse of Ethiopia (Abbink, 2008).

My attentiveness in the field of Wolaita's medieval history was triggered when I saw some conflicting views while articulating socio-political and political history of Wolaita history as well as its role in nurturing Ethiopian shared identities and nationhood. Politically, the local literature

labels medieval Wolaita as a small portion of the Christian highland kingdom whereas Muslim affiliated writers pay no attention to the very existence of the kingdom of Wolaita during medieval period (Trimingham ,1965; Solomon and Wudu, 2014). In the contrary, in an attempt to display the pre-Oromo inhabitants of western Ethiopia, Tasama (2006) had stated “the region was largely inhabited by peoples belonging to Omotic speaking”. According to Tesema, the same Omotic states were conquered by the forces of Macha Oromo in the 16th century. Meanwhile, none of them had attempted to discuss how a powerful and well organized Damota kingdom of Wolaita was subdued by a weaker Solomonian Dynasty and poorly organized Oromo forces in the 13th and 16th CAD respectively. This in turn necessitated the search for additional sources that could be helpful to overcome the biases of medieval hagiographers and chronicles.

Economically, colonial historians who always remains suspicious of the fact that a world class civilization could evolved among indigenous societies, had argued that Africans were uncivilized before the colonial conquest. The intention of colonial thinkers has been articulated by Temu and Swai (1981) as follows: “Africans ... were economically illiterate. [They were] pastoral people whose sole thought was the increase of their herds...” In Ethiopia, those who propagated the necessity of Abyssinian colonization of the south since the 14th CAD had appeared while giving little credit for contribution of non-Semitic groups. The research work of Conti- Rossini (1928) and Tramingham (1965) gave more emphasis to the civilizing mission of Semitic speakers and backwardness of indigenous inhabitants referring only the church documents. Based on such an ambiguous pre-suppositions scholars like Hitti (1970) had acknowledged the farming technique of ancient Ethiopia was adopted from Asia by means of the civilized Sabaeans. However, archeological findings of Mochena Boragocave (Medihanit, 2015) and the account of Christian Topography of Cosmas Indicopleuste (Kirwan, 1972) make known Wolaita was practicing agriculture and long distance trade since the 8th Millennial BC and 6th CAD respectively.

Socio-religious wise, the people of Wolaita and its kings had been described as worshipers of indigenous African religion throughout the medieval period. In the contrary, the hagiography of Saint Teklehaymanot had depicted Wolaita and its dominion were centers of religious revivalism which inspired christian faith all over the Ethiopian region (Budge, 1907; Tekleyesus, 2008 and Bouanga, 2013). However, the work of hagiographers has limitations in elaborating religious change and continuity and the subsequent dynamism among the people of Wolaita. They also failed

to visualize religious revivalism that initiated by local elite and its impact in transforming the entire region during the period under discussion. Therefore, to renovate religious history of the people of Wolaita during the medieval period, the living culture of Wolaita and those who subtended them would be consulted.

Conceptually, it deals with historical premises that led to the emergence of medieval kingdom of Wolaita and its ascendancy as a regional power. The research also attempted to push back the pre-colonial history of Wolaita to the 13th century AD instead of dealing only with the conquest stories of the 19th century. In an attempt to fill the geographical gap, this research had attempted to widen its scope to the localities that believed to be the territories of medieval Wolaita in addition to the present home land. Likewise, it deploys descriptive analysis together with the old content data analysis method to dialogue medieval place names and socio-cultural institutions to fill the methodological gap.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design, Sampling and Types of Sources

The study explores about Wolaitanationalism that evolved out of religious atrocities perpetuated on traditionalists which latter on advanced in to Wolaita's ascendancy to power during the time of *kawo* Motolomi. Hence, primary sources from archival materials, travel accounts, living culture of the people together with oral records from purposively selected ten informants were consulted. Moreover, various secondary sources had been also referred by the researcher. All the data are analyzed through historical data analysis method.

2.2. Objective of the Study

The major objective of this study is to reconstruct the contribution of *kawo* Motolomi's reforms on the socio-economic and political transformation of Ethiopia in the 13th century. Specific objectives are to:

- ✓ Examine the role of Wolaita in harnessing the apparent fraternity and integrity among the Ethiopian nationals and traceability of Ethiopian unity
- ✓ Explore Zeila trade route that gets momentum as a result of peace and stability of the Horn of Africa during the hegemony of Wolaita

- ✓ Identify elements of religious reforms of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church that hosted by Wolaita elite

3. Results and Discussion: *Kawo* Motolomi of Wolaita

There is no agreement on the origin of early state in Africa including the indigenous kingdom of Wolaita. Worldwide, the origin of state has been attributed to the evolutionary theory, the divine right theory, the force theory, and the social contract theory. Except the social contract theory, which was introduced in 1886 by *kawo* Tona's radical government and halted by the conquest of Menilik in 1894, the first three also characterize the origin of state in Wolaita. The evolutionary theory and the subsequent divine kingship theory had been evolved among the early settlers such as *Wolaita Malla* when the clans were twelve in number. The force theory, which was associated with Wolaita's powerful conquest of distant territories, characterizes the periods of *king* Sassu, Motolomi, Sana, king Damote and others (Kirwan, 1972; Budge, 1906; Bureau, 1990). However, this article gave due emphasis to the socio-economic and political transformations of the 13th CAD that accomplished by the *Wolaita Malla* Dynasty ruler known as *kawo* (king) Motolomi; also known as *karettakawo* or the black king in history (Zebdiwos, 2018).

3.1. The Reign Motolomi: *Wolaita's* Political Hegemony in Medieval Ethiopia

The medieval history of Wolaita remains problematic as a result of the controversial statement on Damota and Wolaita. Solomon and Wudu (2014) discuss Damota and Wolaita were diverse political entities; where Wolaita had been a vassal to Damota. On the other hand, local written documents, Coptic Egypt and Muslim Arabs sources as well as the scant European travel accounts gave due emphasis to Damota instead of the Wolaita proper while discussing medieval states of central and southwestern Ethiopia. As knowledge about the kingdom of Damota and its traditionalist kings hold a central position in the study of Wolaita's medieval history, careful analysis of the sources which discuss about Damota kings such as Sasu (Sato) and Motolomi could be helpful in elaborating the present inhabitant of Wolaita (Henze, 2004).

In an attempt to validate the relationship between the present day of Wolaita and the medieval kingdom of Damota Abesha (2016) had consulted place names, list of kings and the living culture of the people to conclude that the founders of the medieval kingdom of Damota were the inhabitants of modern Wolaita. An eye witness account of Abune Tekle Hymanot, together with

the ethnography of Medieval Ethiopian, place names and philology of Wolaita language outlines the exact location of Blate, Ajjora water fall and Tomagerawas in the present day Wolaita Zone. (Budge,1906 and Balisky,2009). Likewise,Kirwan(1972) had identified king Sassu as the king of Damota whereas Budge(1906) mentioned Motolomi as king of Damota, which were also notable kings of Wolaita that confirmed by oral tradition. Therefore, the medieval kingdom of Damotastands for the kingdom of Wolaita in the context of the 13th CAD.

The hagiography of the Christian monks, Coptic Egypt and Muslim together with European travel accounts had confirmed the kingdom of Wolaita, a rival state with Christian and Muslim, was governed by a king known as *kawoMotolomi* in the 13th CAD (Berger, *et al*, 2017; Abir, 1980 and Bouanga, 2013). The sources also added that the kingdom of Wolaita was the major political, religious and economic entity which had the power of dominating Christian and Muslim communities in the 13th century AD. The political dominance of the Wolaita kings enabled them to control the sources of major commodities and trade routes that radiates from the Gulf of Aden to African hinterland before the 14th century (Bouanga, 2013).

During the period of *kawoMotolami*, the political seat of the Wolaita was at the top of a majestic mountain known as Damota, which later on becomes the name of the kingdom as well (Deressa, 1999). *KawoMotolomi*'s palace known as *XazaGarwa*, which had been situated at the top of Damota Mountain, was guarded by the army of cavalry and infantry (Fanch and Eyob,2006). In relation to the political seat of king Motolomi, two place names were repeatedly mentioned in the hagiography of the Ethiopian monks. The two places have direct relation with pre-baptization and post- evangelization of *kawoMotolomi*; Ajjora water fall (180m long); where Motolomi threw Saint Teklehaymanot calling his anti-traditionalist coalition and the second one is Tomagera (Tsome Girar) cave, on the eastern side of Mount Damota where king Motolami was baptized (Zebdiyos,2010 and Balisky,2009).

In the first place *kawoMotolomi*'s expansion was directed towards the North West (Zebdiyos, 2010), where gold mines abundantly found. After controlling the gold fields of Ethio-Sudan borderland known as Tumul and Gojjam; territories which were conquered earlier by king Sassu in the 6th CAD (Kirwan,1972). Then after *kawoMotolomi* had struggled to expand Wolaita's territorial limit to the north east or Shawa region in the second half of the 13th CAD (Budge, 1906 and Bouanga, 2013). In all instances, *kawoMotolomi* had been giving the name Damota (Damot

in Amharic) to the newly conquered territories in order to commemorate his capital. For example, place names such as BureDamot in Gojam, Damot in Shawa and Damot in Dawuro were newly conquered places that had been named in this process. The southern districts of Dawro, Waka, Basketoetc which were under the domain of Wolaita were also known by the name the HudugaDamota (Deressa,1999).

The source of *kawoMotolomi's* power had been stemmed from two factors; religious loyalty of the people and his military capability. In the 13th CAD, the people of Wolaita used to worship the indigenous African religion known as *Tossa-* the superior being (Elias, 1987 and Tekleyesus, 2008). As a priest king, *kawoMotolomi* was feared by the people because of his heavenly grace. In those days, king Motolomi was accompanied with large number of people who were happy to die in all his campaigns (Budge, 1906). Above and beyond, king Motolomi was a well-known military leader who posses' trained cavalry and infantry. His army, who camped in several caves vivid around Damota Mountain. The lower grounds surrounding the mountain served as training centers where cavalry, trench war, defending sword and spear with shields, swimming, jumping across hill and so forth (Zebdiyos (2010). According to SaintTeklehymanot as cited by Budge(1906; “Motolomi was a man who was exceedingly skillful in war, and he was like unto a man who possessed a magical power...” (p.21).

KawoMotolomi'e period deserves the Golden Age ofWolaita in history. According toTasama (2006) “the state of [Wolaita] was extremely powerful and dominated the whole region of Shawa by the end of the 13th century”(p.32). Moreover, as stated by Tadesse (1972), the chronicle of AmadeTsion puts the position of Wolaita between River Jama and Gamo. The dissertation of Bouanga (2017), which was based on the consultation of AbuneTekleHaymanot's hagiography, specified that the Sultanates of Shawa and Ifat were subject to the kingdom of Wolaita in the 13th century. The hagiography of SaintTekleHaymanot also mentioned a place name known as Tumul, iineastern Sudan, was the western border of the kingdom (Budge,1906).Although Deressa(1999) had argued the southern border of Wolaita was expanded to Lake Turkana, which was known as Lake Gallop in the old texts, source from the Christian highland kingdom, hadconfirmed thatthe medievalWolaita extends from central Shawa to the costs of the Indian Ocean the Red Sea (Balisky, 2009)

KawoMotolomi's annexation of the Christian highland kingdom and the sultanate of Shawa and Ifat, marks Wolaita's hegemony was at its zenith in the 13th CAD. The ascendancy of Wolaita to as a regional political power had a profound significance in the history of Ethiopia. The first consequence of Wolaita's political supremacy could be attributed to its contribution in establishing a united state of the present day Ethiopia. The emergence of the Grand Wolaita Kingdom, which was capable of safeguarding stability and scoring merchant activities of along the trade routes, could be the most notable one. This facilitated the movement of traders and their merchandises in Wolaita's vast empire which stretches north- south from Tegulet to the Indian Ocean coasts, west- east from Tumul(eastern Sudan) up to the Gulf of Aden(Bouanga,2013). The initiatives of *kawoMotolomi* in building a vast empire and controlling the long distance trade was also followed by the forces of Christian and Muslim later on. In other words it was king Motolami who placed the skeletal foundation of the modern Ethiopia state earlier than any other kings.

KawoMotolomi's attempt of building a Grand Kingdom of Wolaita also affected the population dynamic of Ethiopia. In modern Ethiopia, due to the inter-ethnic relationships that started since the conquest of king Motolami had reached to the extent one could not be differentiate the DNA of each group except their language(Pagani,2015). Besides growing inter-ethnic marriage, war captives were either enslaved or distributed among the victorious forces of king Motolami as concubines and (Tekleyesus, 2008 and Asela, 2004). The king's force had managed to capture not only the ordinary women, but also the dignitaries of the Amhara family such as *Igzaharya*, a mother of Saint Teklehaymanot. In other sources, it has been stated that *kawoMotolomi* was forced the Amhara of Shawa to let their wives to visit his courts (Budge, 1906). In the manuscript of Tekleyesus (2008) it has been stated that; "*Be shewamekwaninit ye set gibirtilobachewneber. Be tera be teramistochachewunyigebirunebere*"; which means king Motolami had imposed a system of tax known as women tax up on the dignitaries of Shawa. They were agreed to offer their wife one after another in turn (p.125). The outcome of the long term interaction had resulted in 25% similarity of DNA among the Wolaita and Amhara(Pagani,2015).

Owed to the vastness of *kawoMotolomi's* empire for easy retreatment of the army, large number of the people of Wolaita was absorbed in to victorious group since the 14th century. For example in Kambatta, there are groups who claim they are still Wolaita. According to Tesfaye, 2016, Damota, Bubulla, Wolaita Tigre, Goromma and others, who had been cut off from the main

Wolaita group and absorbed in to Kambatta culture without changing their clan identities. In places like Shawa, there are place names such as *Ye Motolomiketema* and *Ensaro (EneSaroo)* which symbolizes Wolaita's northern section during the reign of *kawo Motolomi* (Deressa, 1999; Tesfaye, 2016 and Zebdiyos, 2010).

3.2. Medieval Wolaita: Regional Economic Warehouse and Architect of Zeila Trade Route

The travel account of Europeans and the research findings of economic historians proved the fact that medieval kingdom of Wolaita bears a comparable economic status with other neighboring states such as the Christian Highland kingdom and others (Abbink, 2008). Similarly, the research work of Tasama (2006) had illustrates sedentary farming was the occupation of the inhabitants of the kingdom of Wolaita during the medieval period. The livelihood of Wolaita society was also supported by trade of precious metals and the production of various craft works such as smiting, pottery, weaving and tanning activities.

The oldest trade route was the iron ore trade route of the south which connects markets of the medieval kingdom of Wolaita with Gamo Gofa and farther south up to Bantu speaking territories of Kenya (Fage, 1995). Iron smelting technology of Wolaita has long history which parallels the emergence of state. In Wolaita's traditional administration, kings were expected to hold royal spear known as *Machiamia Tora* made by a special social group known as *wogachia*. Iron was also used to produce various utensils such as knife; spear, hoe and currency (*marchuwa*) for everyday life of the society (Chiatti, 1984). The melted metal that used by artisans was obtained from several mines of Wolaita which located around Damota mountain and Dame River area.

In medieval periods, the stock of melted metal was exported to neighboring societies and distant places (Fage and Oliver, 1972). Accordingly, some places such as Sidama (Surafel, 2008) and Zala (Cerulli, 1956) had been dependent up on the import of Wolaita's pig iron ore (*Toqa Shucha*). The export item such as pig iron (*Toqa Shucha*) and evidences collected from several archaeological sites had confirmed that the Wolaita land to be a center of Africa's Iron Age civilization where iron smelting technology was defused eastwards and southwards. Therefore, the argument of Fage and Oliver (1972) which insist that iron smelting technology was defused from Meroe to the southeastern parts of Africa across the Omotic people of the

present day Ethiopia considering it the only center of iron smelting in Africa could be groundless.

Conti Rossini (1928) and Henze (2004) acknowledged the existence of gold commerce between the Christian north and the southern kingdom identified with its ruler Sassuor king Sassu which was the kingdom of Wolaita (Kirwan, 1972). In those days, inland Agaw-Aksum-Adulis trade route was occasionally visited by merchants due to the security problem. In between the 10th -13th CAD, the rulers of the kingdom of Wolaita had diverted the export of their gold to the eastern or Zeila trade route owing to its growing influence in the region Ethiopia and the horn of Africa. During the period of *kawo* Motolami, it evolved in to one of the major trade route which connects the kingdom of Wolaita to the coast of the Gulf of Aden (Bouanga, 2017).

The Zeila trade route which got momentum as a result of peace and stability of the Horn of Africa was credited to Wolaita's political hegemony. Before the advent of king Motolami, the region south of Agaw land which comprises western Shawa, northern and central Shawa, Gojjam, Wollaga and Benishangul Gumuz were not unified in to the Christian empire or Muslim sultanates. Due to security reason, these lands were temporarily visited by few merchant caravans who came in search of gold and other tropical products. However, the establishment of Wolaita's vast empire made possible the free movements of ideas, values and merchandises. Wolaita became the major destination of merchants from the east and north that regulated by *kawo* Motolami. The initiatives of the king to introduce long distance trade route of the east through Muslim agents such as Qeferi Wudim was also adopted by the Christian kings after the 14th century AD (Bouanga, 2017 and Tekleyesus, 2008).

Early European travel accounts reveals that Wolaita had long established gold mining technique and use of gold made ornaments. According to information from Offa *Woreda* (district), a social groups known as *Jawonantaso*, who settle in Atlacha village of the historic Kindo Koisha area, were engaged in gold and silver work in ancient and medieval Wolaita. The dignitaries of Wolaita used to wear golden ring which represents royal in sigma of kingship. Likewise, the ordinary people also adorned with golden rings and bracelets. The development of mining activities had also long lasting effect on boosting local and foreign trade of medieval Wolaita. In south western Ethiopia, where the largest gold deposit still abundant, a considerable quantity of gold had been found by searching along alluvial deposits of the river bank after rains have washed the soil away, collecting gold simply from glaciers after rain (Alvarz, 1961, p.457).

The thesis of Bouanga (2013) specifies that the medieval kingdom of Wolaita had trade relation with Middle East and Far Eastern countries. The merchants from various countries were attracted by trade of the kingdom of Wolaita due to the abundance of trade commodities such as gold, iron, slave and other African products attract traders from various parts of the world. In Muslim and European literature, the kingdom of Wolaita was renowned as the economic warehouse of the Ethiopian region and the Horn of Africa due to the abundance of the major trade items in the region. After the establishment of trade relation with Arabs, Persia, India, Egypt and Greece the volume of the eastern trade route was increased (Alvarez, 1961). The role of local people in linking the port with the hinterland had been not clear, what we know is that the activities of local merchants were confined to the market of Ifat which took a journey of one week.

Subsequently, some Muslim Arab immigrants had appeared to settle in the kingdom of Wolaita and elsewhere along this trade route. One of such Muslim immigrants, whose name was Qeferi Wudim, had elevated to the rank of managing king Motolomi's treasury and handling external trade due to his religious similarity with the Arabia and Muslims of the Indian sub-continent (Tekleyesus, 2008). Gradually, the immigrants managed to establish the early Muslim settlement of Shawa which later on moved to Ifat area (Trimingham, 1966). The proportion of gold supplies from Wolaita's gold fields which passed eastward by way of Zeila trade route was 30-36 tons of gold annually (Blanchard, 2001). In return, Muslims traders from India bring spices, cloths of gold and silk and other merchandises to the kingdom of Wolaita (Bouanga, 2017). The rising power of Christian Highland kingdom in the Red Sea littorals had forced the kingdom of Wolaita to retreat southwards. After the takeover of the kingdom of Wolaita by the Christian Highland king, the Arab Muslim settlers were emerged as dominant merchant group in eastern part of the Ethiopian highlands replacing the traditionalist Wolaita (Cerulli, 1988).

3.3. Societal Changes: Religious Tolerance and Africanization of Christianity

Religion and religious practice holds a central position in conveying everyday life of the people of Wolaita and Africa at large. As religion and religious practices are the major components of the material culture of the society which distinguishes it from surrounding others, understanding the variety of religion worshiped by the people could be helpful to build up one's group identity. The study of religion and religious practice of the people could be not only associated with the

identity of the people, but also has significance in reconstructing history. As a result, religious history of Wolaita becomes a subject of denial among Muslim and Christian elites, who were competing for regional domination, needs to be investigated from perspective of the subject people.

Nevertheless, leave alone the 13th century, the Wolaita people were not heartedly accepted the imposed Orthodox Christianity even after the conquest of Menilik II in the 1896. The intent of Wolaita's sentiment about the imposed orthodox Christianity after the 19th century conquest had well described by Marcus (1966) as follows: "I don't care about that but I must have a Christian's cord, because all the soldiers jeer at me know" (Marcus, 1966, p.276). This reality was confirmed in the works of the chronicles which repeatedly described *kawoMotolomi* and its people were adherents of the indigenous African religion. In addition, the Muslim Arab sources together with the living culture of those people who subtended them, it becomes clear that the medieval kingdom of Wolaita was totally traditionalist in its religious belief (Tekleyesus, 2008 and Bouanga,2013). According to the account of SaintTaklehymanot as cited in Budge (1906);

"The rose up a certain evil man, whose name was Motolome, and whose mothers name was Eslandani, and he rulled according to his will over the provinces of Damot and over the provinces of Shawa, even to the border of Amhara, and to the great river which is called Jama, and he tore down all the churches of the Christians...."p.21.

The above presented discussion make known the people of Wolaita were traditionalist in belief, respect for priesthood and elderly people when saint Teklehaymanot was started his evangelical work in the 13th century. As a matter of their political dominance and attractiveness of their indigenous institutions, those immigrants who settled in central Ethiopia had adopted some socio-cultural and religious values of the Wolaita. For example, some Muslim affiliated entities of Hadiya- Gurage and Kambatta group, who subtended Wolaita in central and western Ethiopia, had adopted Wolaita's traditional religious institutions such as *Maga*; which was assistance in indigenous religious ritual (Bustorf, 2005). The experience among the Hadiya- Gurage and Kambatta reveals socio-cultural institutions of central and western parts of medieval Ethiopia was similar with practices of the present living culture of the people of Wolaita.

The first contribution of *kawoMotolomi*'s kingdom was his religious tolerance for Christian and Muslim minorities. The medieval kingdom of Wolaita and its dominion were remembered in history by the prevalence of stability where people with different religion had been peacefully resides all together. In those days, the traditionalist ruler of Wolaita had been highly respected by the Muslim and Christian communities who were settled there. According to Cerulli (1988), the founders of the Walasma dynasty were refugees from Arabia who acquire asylum in to the kingdom of Wolaita. It was not only Muslims but numerous pocketed fortune seeker Christian communities of the north were also allowed to settle among the Wolaita population. As far as theright of the settlers was concerned, Yates (2009) had argued that Islam, Christianity and traditional deities were equally worshiped in Wolaita dominium of Shawa in the 13th CAD.

One of the major problems that trigger the credibility of history in Ethiopia has been associated with unfairness of the scholars in appreciating the major achievements of southern societies and dignitaries. As a matter of fact, they appeared while undermining socio- economic values of the south whereas similar northern achievement over emphasized. For example, *kawoMotolomi*'s act of kindness towards Christian and Muslim immigrants in the 13th century could be a comparable event with *Nigus*(king) Armah's reception of early Muslim immigrants of the 7th century to elaborate the deep-rooted religious tolerance among both the Wolaita and Aksum society respectively. However, it has been noticeable in the Ethiopian literature and other artistic works while the act of *kawoMotolomi* was repeatedly neglected. In reality, what both king Armah and Motolomi had done was almost similar; allowing Muslim and Christian minority to reside .in the Aksum and Wolaita territory respectively. The Christianimmigrants were not only permitted to reside but also tolerated to construct their churches and monasteries as well as to propagate the Christian faith in the Wolaita's dominion (Erlich, 2003).

In the Christian literature, the second half of the 13th CAD was period during which Ethiopia experienced religious revivalism. It includes expansion of evangelical work in to territories held by traditionalists. In those days, Ethiopian Orthodox Church has three centers of Christian learning based on ethnic line. These were DebreDamo, DebreHayk and DebreLibanos. The titles given to *Abots*(fathers) of each monasteries has also ethnic connotation. For example the title given for the monasteries of Tigray, Amhara and Wolaita was *AqabeSensen*, *Aqabesa'at* and *Echege* respectively. As the term *AqabeSensen*(the keepers of the fly whisks in

Ge'ez), *Aqabesa'at* (Guardian of the Church hours in Amharic) and *Echege* (he became old enough or trustful person in Wolaita language), the three synods of the Ethiopian Orthodox church were Tigrean, Amhara and Wolaita respectively. Among the three, the synod of the south or dominion of Wolaita was the most successful of all in its missionary efforts during the period under discussion. One of the major achievements of *Abune Teklehaymanot* was the conversion of Wolaita king *kawo Motolomi* into the Christian faith (Tadese, 1972).

The people of Wolaita were not fully Christianized in the 13th century, even though some dignitaries like *kawo Motolomi* had accepted the Christian faith. After his conversion, *kawo Motolomi* became a spearhead of religious revivalism among the traditional societies of the south western Ethiopia. Religious revivalism of *kawo Motolomi* had also indications of Africanization process. The first initiative of *kawo Motolomi*'s indigenizing process was attributed to the architectural change of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Religious revival of *kawo Motolomi* had also architectural dimensions. The variation in style and architectural pattern of the church through time clearly indicates that the Ethiopian Orthodox church was continually expanding in to the African interior. In the early days, the architecture of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church was rectangular as Semitic had been dominant population in the north. As it moved deep in to the hinterland in the 13th century, the architecture of the church also changed from rectangular to circular or octagonal church adopting the housing style of the Omotic speakers which were the dominant group in central and southwestern Ethiopia before the 16th CAD (Getnet, 1998; UNESCO, 1981).

The Ethiopian orthodox church had adopted not only the style of southern house architecture but also domes that placed at the top of the house. As the center of Christianity moved deep in to the south the Christian highland society, which had no culture of using dome to decorate their house, were also adopted indigenous Wolaita's tangible cultural heritage such as *Gumbuwa* (dome) as roof of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. In general, the act of Ethiopian Orthodox Church in adapting indigenous African architecture and dome abandoning the style of the Semitic north made the church to be unique and more Africanized in its features (Zebdiwos, 2010). In other words as stated by Getnet, 1998 "the Ethiopian Orthodox Church's uniqueness imply that she is not a copy of ... any other church in the world, but original, ... The long history of indigenization of the church has enabled her to develop unique features which show that she is more African" (p.90).

The second reform of *kawoMotolomi* was directed towards improving administrative structure of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in such a way which accommodates local people. The king was attempted to achieve this motive through the adaptation of some indigenous socio-political institutions. In the context of Wolaita language, the term *Echege* means he became old enough or trustful person. Likewise, the Shawa Amhara uses the term *Echege* to call a person with higher rank in the church. According to (Balisky, 2009), *Echge* is the only socio-religious term that has been shared by both the speaker of Semetic and Wolaita language. The root of the similarity between Wolaita's traditional institution and Church institution was dated back to the reign of *kawoMotolomi*.

The fourth contribution of *kawoMotolomi* was the expansion of the Christian faith. Under the authority *kawoMotolomi*'s, more than 4500 Orthodox Christian churches were constructed throughout southern, western and central Ethiopia (Fancho and Eyob, 2006). In the kingdom of Wolaita early from urban centers such as Debre Libanos, Damota, Tomagera (Tsome Girar) and others were emerged. Late on, these urban centers became the center of Christian teaching and learning from where Orthodox Christianity preached all over Ethiopia and Nilotic speaking Tumul region of Sudan. According to Tesfaye (2011) Tekle Haymanot was sent his 12 disciples throughout Ethiopia from the monastery of Debre Libanos. Similarly, Christianity was also expanded southward up to Ethio-Kenyan borderland and Lake Turkana/Rudolf, which was remembered as Lake Gallop in medieval literature (Deressa, 1999). According to Teklehymanot as cited in Bouanga, 2013 ;

“Now our father the holy man Täklä Haymanot dwelt in the country of Damot for a period of twelve years, and he filled with the doctrine of the Christ all the provinces thereof, even as far as the land of Barya, and as far as the river Geyon, and as far as the land of Humal, and all the cities which were in the neighbourhood of Damot believed in Christ through our father the holy man Täklä Haymanot” (p.84).

The medieval kingdom of Wolaita deserves one of the major centers of Christian learning and evangelization in the 13th century. Due to the notable Wolaita men's excellence in evangelical work, missionaries of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church had been ordained and dispersed not from Aksum or Lalibela, but from monastery of Debre Libanos which had been under the effective

control of the *kawoMotolomi*. According to Tsegaaye (2011) TekleHaymanot was sent his 12 disciples throughout Ethiopia from the monastery of DebreLibanos.

Conclusion

The reign of *kawoMotolomi* symbolizes the Golden Age of Wolaita in history. Politically, Wolaita's managed to restore its hegemony after annexation of the Christian highland kingdom and the sultanate of Ifat in the 13th CAD. *KawoMotolomi*'s domination of south western, western and central territories had provided the skeletal foundation of modern Ethiopian state earlier than any other leader. Economically, *KawoMotolmi*'s political hegemony was also credited for trade opportunity that gets momentum in the Horn of Africa. Before the 13th CAD, these lands were temporarily visited by merchant caravans due to security reasons. The emergence of strong and stable kingdom, which had the capability of escorting merchant activities along the trade routes, Wolaita became the major destination of merchants from Greek, Egypt, Arabia, India and Persia. The initiatives of *kawoMotolomi* in empire building and controlling the long distance trade routes was also followed by the forces of Christian and Muslim later on.

The root of Ethiopia's inter-ethnic relationships had been dated back to earliest times, but it reached the climax during *kawoMotolami* to the extent one cannot able to differentiate each group with the exception of their language. Inter-ethnic marriage, southward deportation of war captives as slaves or concubines as well as Wolaita's northern settlement in *Ye Motolomiketema* and *Ensaro (EneSaroo)* area had resulted in the similarity of DNA among the Wolaita and Amhara which had no history of shared borders. On the other hand, a portion of some Wolaita clans were absorbed in to Kambata, Dawuro and other societies groups since the 13th century. After the conquest of *kawoMotolomi*, the kingdom of Wolaita had also tolerated Christian and Muslim societies to worship their own belief. Although the origin of Christianity was from the Semitic north, but the merger of Wolaita in to the Christendom had resulted in the Africanization of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church itself.

The conquest and the subsequent reforms of *kawoMotolomi* had long lasting importance in nourishing traceability Ethiopian nationalism and unity which promotes co-operation, fraternity and integrity among Ethiopian nationals prior to the modern ages. In

general, *kawo* Motolomi's primacy in empire building, his control of major export items and dominance along Zeila trade route as well as religious revivalism which ended with indigenization of Ethiopian Orthodox Church indicates the vitality of Wolaita's wisdom in transforming socio-economic and political life of the inhabitants of the present day southern, central and western Ethiopia in the 13th century.

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Interviews

Interviews: GetaWotango;EyasuGajebo(12/02/ 2018), Gesuba town

Interviews: Zebdiwos, Chama (09/10/ 2018), Sodo town.