

Hadiyya People: History and Culture by Alebachew Kemiso and Samuel Handamo, Sefir Printing, Addis Ababa, 2010, 366 pages, written in Amharic

Introduction

Hadiyya People: History and Culture (the book, here after) was published and inaugurated in August 2010. The book deals with the history and culture of the Hadiya people living mainly in Hadiya Zone, South West of Addis Ababa. It has seven chapters, where the introductory chapter takes 8 pages, while the conclusion takes only one page. The historical issues (record of events such as wars, peoples' life and movements) took 125 pages. Presentation of the social system (*sera*), including administrative issues, religion, types of marriages, and folklore took 207 pages. The remaining pages are a list of references, annexed documents and photographs of 12 notable personalities. The method of study is qualitative where documents (secondary sources), interviews and observation techniques are used.

The Contents/Key Points

At least for the benefit of foreigners and those who do not read Amharic, the key points of the book will be provided first and then some of the strengths and weaknesses of the book will follow. The presentation of the contents (key points) of the book will follow the order presented in the book. The following are the key points raised (of course the reviewer is selective of the main points and any misinterpretation is his):

- The Hadiya people speak Hadiyisa language and most are multilingual-they speak Amharic, Indegegn/Gurage, Siltigna, Kambatigna, Wolaita, Oromifa and/or other languages particularly neighboring the Zone. In addition to the Zone, Hadiya people live in Arsi and Bale Zones of Oromia, Wonji/Showa/ Metehara, neighboring zones, Addis Ababa and other parts of Ethiopia.
- Hadiya people are Cushitic language speakers who have perhaps settled in Northern Ethiopia, at least 1,000 years B.C. They were mainly pastoralists, but settled in between Abay, Awash and Gibe rivers. Lake Zeway was reportedly in the middle of Hadiya territory (at least before 13th century).
- Hadiya state and "Christian North Ethiopian Government" had centuries of conflicts and wars in which the Hadiya people have lost their land and self

administration. There is abundant evidence that Hadiya was a powerful vassal kingdom of Ethiopia and it was mentioned in *Kebre Negast* in the 13th century.

- The Hadiya state and the history received better recognition after King Amde Tsion (1314-1344 AD). A major battle took place between Amde Tsions' soldiers from the Christian North and Hadiya warriors led by Ameno in 1316/17.
- Atse Zera Yaacob (1438-68) married Hadiya Princess Ellenie Mohammed (daughter of Hadiya *Gerad* or Chief). Queen Elleni was an outstanding political personality in Ethiopian history.
- Hadiya people were Muslims till the expansion of Minilik II in late 19th century and cooperated with Gagn Ahmed's attempt to rule Ethiopia in 1530's and early 1540's.
- Despite conquest, assimilation, invasions and pushing, the Hadiya people maintained relative independence (often paying tributes) till about 1900 (Minilik II conquest).
- It is estimated (by U. Braukamper, 1980) that Hadiyas were assimilated into Oromo people since/during the Oromo expansion in 1540s on wards (eg. *Mogassa* Oromos in Arsi, Dollo, Bale areas). In fact he estimated 2-3 million in 1980's.
- Libido/Mareko, Kebena and Alaaba are Hadiya people living in neighboring zones outside of the Hadiya Zone. The wars and pushing from the Christian North, expansion of the Oromo people and various clashing with other ethnic groups have put the Hadiya people in the small territory that it is residing now.
- Despite various resistance, refusals and wars, the Hadiya people came to the full control of the North Christian Governments in late 1890's. Some of the Hadiya leaders mentioned in the book include: Walga Mochie, Hassan Enjamo, Gerad Orsie Beebiso and Dejach Yarshie.
- Conquerors, expansionists or rulers have used various divide and rule tactics to put the Hadiya people under their territory and control. Making one group fight against the other, and giving leadership roles to specific chiefs or *Gerads* were some of the techniques used from 14th to 20th century.
- A list of 24 famous gentry (feudal lords or *balaabatoch*) and 9 patriots is provided in pages 89 & 91. The patriots are mainly the ones who fought against Fascist Italians (Tembein Front in late 1930s). Fitawurari Garedie Jaabamo and Fitawrari Geja Geribo are the highest ranked ones.

- The present zones of Hadiya and Kembatta (and some parts of neighboring *woredas* of other zones) used to be called “Kembattana Leimo”, “Leimo-Shashogo and Kembatta”, “Kembatta”, and “Kembata and Hadiya” *Awraja*. The name that mainly reflected the actual composition of the people was given in 1974/75. A number of elites such as Haile Arficho, Haile Woldemichael, Ersa Adada and Alemu Woldehana as well as the then parliamentarian Kagnazmach Seyoum Anore have contributed to the struggle to change the name to Kambatta and Hadiya *Awraja* (though the preference was for “Hadiya and Kembata” *Awraja*).
- Hadiya people give a number of titles to its leaders/chiefs depending on their roles and areas of residence. These titles include *Adila*, *Abegaz*, *Abageda*, *Asmachie*, *Dana*, *Imama* and *Gerad*. The most common ones are *Gerad* and *Dana*. To have titles such as *Garad* or *Dana*, one has to fulfill a number of criteria: adequate wealth (land & cattle), being wise and having the ability to make decisions and solve problems, communicating well, able to coordinate people and is respected by the community.
- Detailed explanation of the social system including naming of children, types of marriages, methods of conflict resolution, religion, folklore, and traditional administration structure are presented in the book.
- Six administrative ladders exist: Family level (*Minie*), neighbors (*Nefera*), relatives (*molo*), community (*sulo*), nationality (*Gicho*) and nation (*Girra*). *Minie* and *Nefera* look at and decide on small matters such as conflicts within family, while *Girra* looks at all inclusive and serious matters such as conflicts between communities that involve most or all Hadiya and other ethnic groups.

Strengths and Weaknesses

There is no question that the young academics (faculty members in the AAU) have put a lot of effort in the collection of the data and the preparation of the book. To the reviewer’s knowledge, there is no such a book in the Amharic language. The book is useful to historians, teachers, researchers, students and social scientists in general. In addition to the interviews conducted with elders and key informants, the book is supported by the works of U. Braukamper (key source), Haile Arficho, Lapiso G. Delebo, Tesfaye Habiso, Bahiru Zewde, Tadesse Tamrat, Edemo Herago and others.

The flows of thoughts and over all coherence of the chapters are admirable. Most of the serious statements and conclusions are supported by sources or are qualified where seemed needed. In general, it reads very well.

One of the major weaknesses is that the data concerning northern Hadiya (Leimo and Kontebe areas) are scanty or missing. For instance, no mention of *Kagnazmach* Lobie Hemecho, the *balaabat* of Merabicho sub-district of Konteb *woreda* was made, while

Girazmach Lopiso, the *balaabat* of Boshona, the second sub-district of Konteb woreda was mentioned. Another example is that Fitawurari Geja Geribo was not a *balaabat*, but a patriot who fought in Tembein front leading hundreds of Likibo, Getorie and other Hadiyas against Fascist Italians who invaded Ethiopia. He should not be considered as a *balaabat*.

I also believe that the relationships between Hadiya people and other ethnic groups such as Kembatta, Wolaita, Gurage, Silti, and Oromo deserve some paragraphs or pages. The interethnic marriages, socio-economic similarities, the common struggle against the Feudal system, etc. are examples. Activities related to *enset*, house construction, marriage ceremonies, conflict resolution methods, and overall cultural values of these neighboring ethnic groups are quite similar. I know of *Imamas* who belong to the Selti, Hadiya and Oromo ethnic groups. I know several *Abagedas* belonging to Hadiya and Oromo people. *Asmachie* and *Abegaz* are common among the Indegegn-Gurage. The borrowing, mixing, and assimilation have been vast. It is difficult to distinguish which elements of the culture are strictly Hadiya.

Furthermore, I feel that the authors of the book are a bit harsh concerning the “Enmity of the Christian North” to the Hadiya people. In a long period of history, it is the Hadiya themselves, who administered their territory paying tributes to the “Emperor” or the Government (with the exception in Emperor Haile Selassie’s regime). My observation is that some of the Hadiya *balaabats* were not better or softer rulers than the so called “*neftegnas*”. Finally, I would like to indicate that I am not convinced that all of the photographs annexed really represent Hadiya leaders at different times. The criteria for the selection are not clear and the annexed letter does not reflect their representativeness or better contribution/performance to the long struggle of the Hadiya people. Despite these and a few other limitations, I think that the book is a major contribution to the study of the Hadiya people, to Ethiopian history, and social sciences in general.

References

- Braukamper, U. 1980. A History of Hadiya in South Ethiopia-From Their Origin to the Revolution of 1974 (Summary). Weisbaden.
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