

## The Archaeology of Islam in North East Shoa

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Islam in Ethiopia is not only a religion but also the whole civilization within which indigenous traditions have achieved harmony, tolerance and co-existence that brought unity and integration to the country. This, paper, therefore, tries to discuss the contribution of Islamic heritages in shaping and molding the historical and cultural developments of modern Ethiopia from an archaeological perspective. It attempts to bring to light new issues that go beyond simpler culture description and tries to analyze how Islam is perceived in the society for the last one thousand and two hundred years. It seeks to discuss the role of Islam as a socializing force that has brought a new sense of religious identity and that promoted social, cultural and political values in the creation of modern Ethiopia.

### General Presentation

Ethiopia is one of the countries in the world that provided a fertile ground for early Islamic expansion. This expansion was manifested particularly in present day Harar, Afar, Somali, Shoa and Wello regions. This is proved by the presence of the earliest Islamic cultural evidence in different parts of the study area among Semitic and Cushitic communities. The heritages of these communities are very rich both in terms of material and non-material cultures (Hussein, 1992).

However, Islamic studies in Ethiopia have not been recognized as an academic discipline within the broader framework of Ethiopian studies until recent times. Our limited knowledge has been viewed within the framework of Christian – Muslim conflicts of the medieval period.

Ethiopian and expatriate scholars began to be involved in this field of research only very recently<sup>2</sup>. The limited research focused more on religious and political issues than on contacts and interaction among the Muslim and non-Muslim communities. The interdependence that facilitated the process of integration among the various communities has not been part of the study.

Italian and British scholars were the first who showed interest in Islamic studies in Ethiopia (Cerulli, 1941; Trimmingham 1965). Their works were focused on the medieval history of Harar and Awsa. Trimmingham's research was on the distribution of Muslim communities and viewed the history of Islam from the perspective of Muslim-Christian conflicts. Other writers presented Islam as a hostile religion and its struggle with Christianity as a purely religious one (Abir, 1978). Concerning the presentation of its studies at national and international conferences, Islam is almost absent. The number of papers presented at the International Conferences of Ethiopian Studies was very few.

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<sup>2</sup> Among the established Ethiopian scholars Tadesse and Merid recognized Islam not only from the religious point of view but also from cultural, economic and population pressure aspects (Tadesse, 1972 & 1977, Merid, 1974). On the other hand, from the Anthropological point of view one could say Islam is totally neglected except for Harar, Hadiya and Jimma (Waldron, 1974, Learis, 1964; Braukamper 1980).

Their themes were very limited and without a critical analysis of the contribution of Islam for the development of modern Ethiopian culture and history.

Though the history of Islam in Ethiopia spans more than 1200 years, research and conservation activities have been marginalized. On the other hand, Islamic faith has contributed to the enrichment of Ethiopian modern culture. The mosques, urban and trading settlements, shrine centers, commercial areas, cultural itineraries and graves have been considered as important depositories of the traditional cultures of many indigenous Muslim communities (Cerulli, 1941).

However, these impressive heritages are suffering due to pressures from both natural and man made activities. Unplanned modernization projects and tourism, poverty, drought, illicit traffic and clandestine excavation have dramatically accelerated the process of heritage destructions before any systematic documentation and research work can be done. Thus, the need for effective conservation and research activities has been felt strongly by many national and international institutions that have carried out a series of complementary activities classified as primary and supportive<sup>3</sup>.

This is a big challenge for the government, heritage professional and communities to overcome this crucial problem, which is deep-rooted. The government has realized the magnitude of the need and has accordingly endorsed limited conservation and research activities and set up a legal framework and administrative organizational structures to address the problem from its own perspectives. However, the absence of effective heritage management backed by trained professionals, adequate funds and legal organizational structures has worsened the state of these heritages.

This research was undertaken in different seasons from Nov. 2003 to Dec. 2006<sup>4</sup>. These fieldworks were carried out under the title "Islamic Archaeology and History in Shoa". Many findings belonging to various periods ranging from the ancient to modern times were recorded. The research has also underscored the importance of the area for the future archeological research which was considered as the former center of the Christian state that witness a rich history of harmony, tolerance and co-existence among the many communities.

The principal objective of this research is, therefore, to study the richness and diversity of Islamic material culture in Shoa and to provide a comprehensive documentation that can be used by researchers, conservators and heritage promoters at national and international levels. This research seeks to bring about new issues that go beyond simple historical and cultural documentation and description.

### **Geographical and environmental setting of the study areas**

The study area is located in the administrative zones of the Amhara and Oromia Regional states, traditionally known as Shoa. It stretches from the Southeastern part of

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<sup>3</sup> The government's commitment to document, preserve and promote the country's heritage is clearly indicated in the cultural policy issued on Oct. 1997. The policy recognizes the importance of the country's heritages and the need for their proper management. At the international level, the 2<sup>nd</sup> global meeting of the world heritage center organized by the UNESCO from 29<sup>th</sup> July to 1<sup>st</sup> August in Addis Ababa and the Workshop sponsored by the British Institute in Eastern Africa and the National Museum of Kenya at Nairobi from 25-28 Feb. 1999 endorsed the need to encourage research, documentation, conservation and promotion of African heritages. These recommendations reflect the concern of both national and international institutions.

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the shoan mountain fringe and the Rift Valley to Southern Wello and the Afar desert plains. This escarpment forms an integral part of the Awash River Valley and the Rift Valley lakes drainage system that links the area with the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden and Indian Ocean.

Generally this region is surrounded by hilly and broken landscape with flat areas. The cliffs and escarpments are sources for many rivers that drain into the Jama River, Awash River and the Rift Valley lakes.

The broad ecological diversity of this area has created a favorable condition for the inhabitants of the area to get the necessary natural resources for their day-to-day life as well as for the production of their material culture. The archeological sites of this area consistently follow this ecological diversity characterized by scattered villages with ceremonial centers like churches and mosques on the top of the amba or along the slopes of the hills.

### **The Introduction of Islam**

Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa is one of the regions to be influenced by early Islamic cultural activities. The geographical proximity of the region to the Middle East and the presence of Pre-Islamic contacts on both sides of the Red Sea has produced a symbiotic relationship characterized by interdependence. It is well known throughout history that all cultural, economic, social and political developments that occurred in the Arabian Peninsula and Middle East had a direct or indirect impact on Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa since the remote past.

The introduction of the Sabean language and writing as well as art and architecture from the Arabian Peninsula to northern Ethiopia around the first millennium BC could be cited as an example of this close interaction and relationship. Thus, what we observed during the expansion of Islam in the seventh century to and after was not a new development rather a successful fusion of old and new cultural element. Gradually, this fusion has created shared identity and values and promoted harmony and co-existence among the different communities.

The other factor that contributed for an easy expansion of Islam in the region was the decline of the Akumite Empire which controlled the trade activities along the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. Since the beginning of the eighth century A.D the Aksumite kingdom was unable to influence any more the commercial activities in the region. The principal factor was the general change that occurred in the region due to the dramatic rise and rapid expansion of Islam throughout the Middle East and North East Africa. This decline began to pave the way for the emergence of Muslim communities and principalities along the trade routes. The rulers of these areas became the patrons of natural resource, trade routes and urban centers in Southeastern part of Ethiopia particularly in present day Afar, Harar and Shoa in Ethiopia and modern Somalia. Though relations between Christian and Muslim communities and rulers had fluctuated, political and economic contacts were frequently maintained. This mutual dependency was practiced through coastal and caravan traders in collaboration with the commercial agents of both Christian and Muslim rulers.

It is also very important to note that Islamic activities reached its peak in the Shoa highlands in the 16<sup>th</sup> century with the coming of the Portuguese and Ottoman Turks using local Christian and Muslim conflict as a pretext. It was at this time that the Portuguese and the Ottoman Turks were struggling for supremacy over the Red Sea and Indian Ocean in order to control the silk and spice trade. In this struggle the Portuguese

sided the Christian state while the Ottoman Turkish allied with the Muslims. The presence of these super powers in the region was marked not only by military activities but also brought a new social and cultural development. One example is the expansion of Islam deep in to the Christian highlands of Shoa and neighboring regions. However, many historians and archaeologists have viewed this development from the Portuguese point of view leaving out the Ottoman Turkish impact. It was also at this time that Islamic literature, art and architecture began to be disseminated deep in the highlands among different ethnic communities. Many important centers for Islamic teaching and learning proliferated. As a result of this, many mosques and settlement areas, Commercial and shrine centers were established in the region.

### **The Islamization process**

The process of islamization and interactions was pacific. The principal cultivators were Muslim traders and missionaries who moved from the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden to central Ethiopia as far as Northeast Shoa. In due course, the Muslim traders produced the first urban Muslim communities and urban centers within the Christian state (J. Markakis 1974). These Muslim merchants had the support of the Christians and their rulers. This is because the Muslim merchants controlled the principal long distance trade as well as the import and export commodities during the medieval period. The role of the Christian rulers, therefore, was to facilitate and promote the normal flow of trade and maintain peace and stability by introducing law and order in the entire area where trade was practiced. The principal ports for all these commercial activities were Zeila<sup>5</sup> and Berbera on the Gulf of Aden. These ports were very important not only for internal trade activities but also commercial shipping to the Persian Gulf, Far East and Southeast Asian countries.

The coastal areas were the first to be affected by Islamic activities. This was followed by Islam's rapid expansion from the coastal region into the pastoralist and agriculturalist communities where and finally into Northeastern shoa by Muslim traders and missionaries who moved from Zeila and Berbera to central Ethiopia along the principal trade routes.

It was within this general frame work that the Sultanates of Shoa and Ifat as well as other Muslim states like Dawaro, Fatagar, Bali, and Hadiya emerged and proliferated in the southeastern part of the country.

The Sultanates of Shoa (9<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> century) and Ifat (13<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup>) were the principal core of Islamic activities during the medieval period in Ethiopia particularly in Northeast Shoa. It was from the sultanate of Ifat<sup>6</sup> in Shoa that Islam gradually spread into the near by areas and Wello particularly to Dawway and Qallu as well as into the rest of wello and neighboring provinces.

The region of Shoa has been an area of co-existence among diverse communities like Argoba, Agaw and Gafat classified the Cushitic and Semitic speaking groups.

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<sup>5</sup> Zeila was an important commercial port on the Gulf of Aden. Yaqut mentioned it in his account It was an important port for trade in Southeastern Ethiopia. Gold, Ivory Slaves, Salt and Skins as well as incense were exported. Weapons, metal work, cloths glass, and glazed pottery were imported through this port. By the 14<sup>th</sup> century Ibn Batuta has described the trade activities of Zeila (Harndun and king 1994)

<sup>6</sup> Ifat came to an end in the 1<sup>st</sup> half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The descendants of its Walasma Dynasty established a new state in Adal. Their capital was Dakar located Southeast of Harar near Fuganbiro. The nomadic of Afar and Somali dominated the state. However, the leaderships were controlled by Semitic Argoba and Harari ethnic groups.

The Argoba people are considered to be one of the oldest surviving inhabitants in the region. They were also the first to accept Islam and to establish the first Sultanate of Shoa in the Horn of Africa. As a result of this, the Argoba are considered to be the center for the origin and expansion of Islam in the surrounding area and deep into the interior part of the country. Mosques, tombs, urban and shrine centers, settlement remains, features, gravestones with Arabic inscriptions were discovered. These archaeological evidences prove the establishment of Islamic communities in Northeastern Shoa by the Argoba communities. These archeological sites are considered as the earliest Islamic evidence in the area that dates back to the early 9<sup>th</sup> century A.D. They are widely distributed along the Shoan, Wello and Afar escarpment within the strong hold of the Christian State. In addition to this, in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century, Muslim and Christian communities have inhabited some parts of Northern Shoa particularly in the distinct of Tegulet, Gedem and their surrounding areas.

### **Archeological Sites**

Many archeological sites were recorded in Northeastern Shoa that signifies the presence of Muslim communities and strong traces of Islamic material culture in the region in its popular and Orthodox forms. These findings include Islamic architecture (mosques, tombs and domestic houses), settlement remains, shrine and urban centers, trade routes, gravestones, and Islamic inscriptions. The historical significance of these settlement remains is not studied. However, base on this research, these heritages are directly and indirectly linked with the Muslim states like the sultanates of Shoa, Ifat and Hadiya that flourished in the area. The sultanate of Shoa was the first inland Ethiopian Muslim polity which clashed with the Christian state in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries for the control of the Zeila trade routes and the rich natural resources of Southeastern highlands and lowlands of Ethiopia. The presence of many archaeological sites in this area is connected with this development. These sites were emerged to serve the new religion as well as the new institutions. They served not only as scared centers but were also used to hold annual religious celebrations and festivals as well as meeting places for cultural, political and social interactions. The festivals and the celebrations were attended by Muslim Amhara, Argoba, Afar and Oromo communities (Ahmed 1994). According to our informant<sup>7</sup> there are many Muslim followers and holy men who came to the annual celebration from different parts of the country.

Based on the fieldworks carried out in the study area the representative and potential sites are located within and around Shoa-robit, Aliyu amba, Debre Zeit, Zway and Gamza district. These sites exhibit many similar cultural features that they share in common. This is because of the long standing symbiotic contacts and relationship that existed among them since the remote past. The archaeological fieldwork carried out in the study area revealed many archeological sites. However, for better discussion and presentation these sites are classified into six groups.

#### *Eastern Shoa complex*

This study area stretches along the Eastern escarpment of the Shoan plateau as far as Aliyu amba. It includes part of Mojo, Ada'a, Erer, Wonji and Minjar. This area was centre of interaction among Muslim and non Muslim communities during the medieval period. The famous battle field of Shimbra Kure is also found near Mojo. Generally, it

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<sup>7</sup> Ato Mohammed Yimam, 67, civil servant, married, and has 6 children. He has lived in the area very long. His information was very important.

is considered as an important site for early Islamic activities: The most important and representative sites in this area as Garbica, Bishoftu, and Didimtu. From these sites many archeological data were discovered and recorded. The most important are gravestones with engraved Arabic inscriptions and settlement remains. The grave stones have similarities among themselves. However, they have different size that varies from 100 cm to 66 meters in height and 4 cm to 7.5 cm in thickness. These gravestones have geometric decoration with early Islamic architectural designs.

#### *Shoa Robit complex*

It is located in Northeastern Shoa about 180 km from Addis Ababa along the Desie road. The area is inhabited by the Argoba communities. In this area many Islamic sites that include mosques, settlement patterns, grave stones with Arabic inscriptions, grave yards, itineraries and many ruin structures were recorded. These archaeological sites are related with the Sultanate of Ifat. The most important site in this complex is the site of Goze. It is located 15 kms north of the town of Shoa Robit. This site is considered as the earliest religious and political center for the Argoba communities (Ahmed 1994, Trimmingham 1965). The Goze mosque is also considered as the most important sacred place in the area. The architecture of this mosque is similar to that of the Shonke mosque at Kemise. Though this mosque is dated to the medieval period, it is preserved better than other similar site.

#### *The Rasa – Complex*

This site is located about 30 km east of Shoa Robit town. It is a plateau area situated between the Eastern part of the escarpment and the Awash River valley. The top of this plateau is known as Rasa Guba by the local inhabitants. There are many important archeological sites in this area. The most important are Asberi and Wessiso – Nora. The third site is found outside the area of the two sites on the southern end below the northern slope. These sites have revealed traces of ancient Islamic activities that provide valuable information about early Islamic influences in the area. Mosques, settlement ruins, grave stones with inscriptions and cemeteries were discovered among the many sites in the area, wessiso-Nora is considered as the largest structural remains. On the other hand, human made destruction on the site of Asberi is great. In this site, we also recorded grave yards, structural features and grave stones with Arabic inscriptions.

#### *The Rift Valley Complex*

This site is generally located within and around the area of Lake Zway. It is generally known by its ancient traces of Islamic activities. The history of the area is connected with the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden and Indian Ocean trade network that dated between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. The region is also considered as one of the major centers for the emergence of a chain of Muslim states in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries.

In this complex the Munessa site is the earliest where Islamic cultural activities had been identified. In this site we recorded cemeteries, gravestones with Kufic inscription, trade routes and settlement ruins that date back to the 10<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. (Schneider 1970). The majority of the gravestones were in Kufic script.

#### *Gamza Complex*

This complex is situated in the district of Gamza bordering Shoa, Wello and Afar. There are many traces of early Islamic sites like shrine centers, settlement remains, cemeteries, mosques etc. All these historical and archaeological sites are located on the frontier of

the Afar Depression and had been centre for the expansion of Islam in the region particularly in northern Shoa, Wello and afar communities. These sites were frequented and visited by the Argoba, Muslim Oromo and Amhara as well as the Afar. Among the many sites, some of them are Qutber Yusuf and Awgard Nurit, Salfa and Ogobdi shrine Centers. According to the oral tradition<sup>8</sup> these sites have been considered as the centers of early Islam Teaching and learning. There are many shrine centers and residential houses with medieval architecture. These monuments were used also for annual Muslim religious festivals and celebration.

#### *5.6 Aliyu Amba and Abdul Rassul Complex*

These sites are located along the foothills of the eastern escarpment of Shoa. It is located south of the historic town of Ankober bordering the valley and the central highlands of Ethiopia. The site of Aabdul Rassul is located about 7.8 Kms southeast of Aliyu Amba. The origin of these sites goes before the 14<sup>th</sup> century and connected with the long distance trade of the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden and Indian Ocean. These two sites were natural gate way for the expansion of Islam to the heartland of Shoa and its neighbors. The Zeyla trade route was geographically very close to this part of Shoa.

These sites are known by the presence of mosques, ruin structures, tombs, Shrine centers, market area, burial sites and trade routes. Most of these sites had similarities among themselves. Most of them are located within and around urban areas and trade routes. In short Aliyu Amba was a prominent cultural, religious and political center in the area. Later on, it became a garrison city with three gates. It was dominated by Argoba Muslim communities. Its central position served as a meeting ground that enabled the different communities like the Harari, Oromo, Afar and Amhara to live together and co-exist.

This archaeological research has convinced the research team that the study area possessed various Islamic heritages. This research has revealed that Islamic architecture was not only limited to mosques and shrine centers but also extends to community buildings, palaces, ceremonial and festival constructions and religious buildings.

In the early stage of Islamic expansion, mosque constructions have showed different development in terms of style, forms and techniques. However, these differences disappeared and established a firm Islamic architecture later on.

The research on the settlement pattern has showed that they were widely distributed within and around mosques, cemeteries and trade routes. Their lay out had more or less similar organization throughout the study area.

Graves have showed difference in size and shape. Each grave contain single or double dead bodies covered by pieces of woods and stones. These burial graves were represented by standing stones. Some of these grave stone have geometric decorations and Arabic script.

It is hoped that these archaeological sites will contribute to a better understanding of the diversity and richness of the materials culture of the country and the characteristics of the local Muslim culture. It will also contribute to the promotion of transcultural education and for sustainable economic development. However, these heritages require an urgent systematic conservation and research activities

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<sup>8</sup> Sheik Sultan Omer, 69, Imam, 2 children. He has lived in the area very long. His information is extremely important.

### **Impact and Characteristics**

The Islamization process in Ethiopia has unique characteristics. The process was not followed by Arabization as in North Africa and elsewhere. Although the Muslim communities in the region take pride in Islam and some of their languages, architecture and literature reflect Arabic influences, they have remained loyal to their traditional culture and ethnic identities. In addition, Islamic expansion in the region was not a result of holy wars that involved large-scale migration into the region as elsewhere. As a result of this Islam in Ethiopia and the Horn did not establish a political power base like Islam in the Sudan, Egypt or in Maghrib.

Certainly, Islam is not only a religion in Ethiopia rather is it a whole civilization. Among the many aspects religious practices, art and architecture, language and writing as well as institutions are the most important heritages. It seems that Islam and indigenous culture have achieved more or less a compromising harmony in Ethiopia. This strategy has brought harmony, tolerance and coexistence among diverse communities. The integrative capacity and simplistic nature of Islam also facilitated its rapid expansion in the area.

Islam arose as a religious phenomenon in Ethiopia by integrating it self with local tradition and by leaving dominant imprints on modern Ethiopian cultural development. The new religion brought a new sense of identity not only to the Ethiopians but also to many communities in the Horn of Africa, that is, an identity based on syncretism. However, this new belief and practice was complicated at times by political issues that contradict its mission.

Islam has brought not only various Muslim communities together but also other non-Muslim ethnic groups. Local and long distance trade has played an important role by creating interactions and interdependence among the diverse rural villages throughout the region. Its impacts were not only limited to the exchange of commodities and proletarianization Islamization but also facilitated the emergence of a new culture, politics and economy in the region.

This simple nature of interaction which started in the early days of Islam has continued smoothly until the present day in different parts of the country among the various ethnic and cultural groups. The relationship was based on mutual understanding and interdependence. These communities have been sharing patterns of life despite the fact that they belong to different religious and ethnic groups. Because of this, they developed good mutual understanding and neighborliness in their day to day life. They work and live together and celebrate their annual festivals together. Generally, Muslims were not distinguished from their fellow non-Muslim Ethiopians by way of life. This shows the interbreeding of Islamic culture with existing traditions and practices as long as the latter were not directly opposed to the Islamic teaching.

Urbanization is another development which exhibits a strong linkage with the process of Islamic expansion and its attendant consequences. It has a long history in the country particularly in the northern part of Ethiopia. This tradition goes to the pre-Aksumite and Aksumite periods. Yeha and Aksum could be cited as a good example. This development continued in the later periods and took a new phase during the medieval time. The principal actor in this development was trade dominated by Muslim merchants. Because of this, many urban centers, towns and cities emerged in the Southeastern and central part of Ethiopia.

Rural villages initially created to support the immediate inhabitants grew into centers of commerce, religious practices and administration. This new development accelerated

the process of urbanization and Islamization in the region and paved the way for the rise of many Muslim towns and cities which were later transformed into Muslim states. These urban and administrative centers were characterized by a complex system of social, cultural, political and economic organization.

In this regard trade and urban centers were the principal promoters of this historical development. They contributed not only to the expansion of Islam but increased the process of interaction among different religious and ethnic groups and established a network of urban life in the country.

The other important Islamic influence is also manifested in art and architecture. Islamic art does not depict an ideal or imagination rather it focuses on fineness of lines, colour harmony and designs. Islamic art consists of a design of interlacing lines and figures that produce various combination of geometric patterns of intricate decoration.

Similar design lines are widely used in Ethiopian manuscript paintings. The principal painting in many manuscripts are encircled by the different designed lines locally known as *Hareg*. These lines are also used on the walls, doors, windows and roofs of churches and monasteries. The geometric pattern of these lines has a decorative character. The origin of these decoration can be connected with Arabic script and writing. The art of Islamic calligraphy developed because of the rule against portraying natural objects.

Metal objects which seem to show Islamic artistic influence with Arabic inscriptions are preserved today in the church of Galila-Iyyasus at Mannagasha near Addis Ababa. Similarly, there are other objects from the sabbata church decorated with Islamic characteristics and dated to the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries (Leroy, 1965). These evidence shows that Muslim communities were well established in Shoan in the middle of Christian communities at least from the beginning of the 9<sup>th</sup> century A.D.

Oriental exotic goods like carpets and luxurious silk fabrics were imported into the country from the Islamic world in the late medieval period through Muslim merchants. These prestigious materials were apparently limited to the elite class. However, some of these prestigious objects like fine carpets, umbrellas, and other silk materials were donated by the nobility to their favorite churches and monasteries.

At present some Islamic Luxurious carpets of Ottoman Turkish kelims origin have been discovered in some churches and monasteries in the northern and central part of Ethiopia. This discovery highlights not only the artistic value but also the oriental weaving technology in the late medieval period. This in turn has a valuable contribution to the study of oriental art and textile collections of Islamic origin in Ethiopian churches and monasteries<sup>9</sup>.

Islamic architecture in Ethiopia is not just the architecture of mosques. It ranges from the ruins of structure of domestic settlements to mosques, tombs, fortresses and public buildings. Its Islamic characteristics are also manifested in building Its Islamic characteristics are also manifested in building structures, doors and windows by means of their carvings and decorations. Similarities between the different palaces in Gondar and Islamic architecture in Yemen and India have been observed

Islamic architecture and design are thus other important cultural aspects which influenced the decoration of medieval Christian architecture and art. Some of then

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<sup>9</sup> The discovery of about 20 prestigious carpets was discussed by H.Henz during the 14<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Ethiopian Studies. The fragile nature of these important heritages is another challenge that Ethiopia faces. Heritage Management institutions with practical training, documentation and conservation programs should be given a priority list to preserve these heritages of the country.

geometrical ornaments carved in rock and wood in Ethiopian churches during the medieval period can be compared with corresponding Islamic designs. Although Islamic architecture and designs in Ethiopia have not been studied, they do not seem to be different from those on other Islamic areas around the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden., The old mosques in and around Harara, the Arabic script on the seal of Abba jifar and the Massawa mosque have a long and important history of connections with Islamic culture across the Red Sea, Nile valley (Last and Pankhurst, 1969, Riviglio, 1966). In addition to this, the main faces of the Castle of Gonder as well as the wall niches have ornamental decoration, shapes and characteristic of their oriental counterparts like in the Islamic world (H. Atkins, 1968; Monti della corti 1938).

Islamic impact is also manifested in the political life of the people. Islamic institutions had influences in the court as well as in policy – making. The Shariah, for instance, is respected and operational even today in Ethiopia. The Shariah principles are core of Islamic religion. The use of Shariah by its believers is considered as an obligation to fulfill the Islamic faith to assure Islamic values and promote its destinies. The application of marriage, for example, is performed within the general framework of the Shariah law. Similarly, Shariah is in favor of marriage between relatives.

In addition, like Judaism and Christianity, the introduction of Islam has also brought new culinary tradition in the area. Diet restrictions become important criteria for many followers to be a good Muslim. Alcohol consumption was also one of the principal items of food stuff prohibited by Islam.

In general, diet and drinking restrictions might have created food stuff shortage and the appearance of new species of plants and animal products in the region. According to some informant<sup>10</sup> big circulation of new food stuff from the highland to the lowland and from the coastal areas to the highland were frequented during this time. So the appearance of new crops and change of agricultural and animal products might have changed and modified the natural and the way of life of the communities. For example, porridge and bread eating, chat chewing, tobacco smoking, tea and coffee drinking began to frequent among both Christian and Muslim communities in the region. This change of culinary habit not only reflects religious beliefs but also have social economic and political touch.

Islamic impacts in undermining traditional beliefs and practices as well as institutions were clearly marked from the beginning of Islamization in the region. This was because the new religious practices and institutions were created in service of the new faith. On the contrary, the old beliefs and institutions were exposed to condemnation as far as they were contrary to the new religion. Whatever the reactions to both practices, the effort made by Islam to replace the old religion by the new faith gradually resulted in the weakening and in some cases obliteration of many indigenous values and traditional institutions This is partly because people gradually began to change their proper names and the names of their gods for example *Waqqa* and *Rabbi* in Oromo culture, in line with Quranic teaching. Their beliefs, music, proverbs, marriage system and dietary which occupy a center position in their day to day life were affected by the new religion and doctrine.

Traditional center of worship and celebration were transformed into shrines and mosques. The roles of traditional religious leaders were discredited. Traditional annual celebrations and ceremonies were made to decline claiming that they were contrary to

<sup>10</sup> Haji Nur Husen, 58, Head of the Shariah (Shoa-Robit) married to 4 wives, 16 children. He has lived in the area for 35 years.

Quranic teachings. In addition to this, although Islamic impacts on traditional religious practices and institutions were clearly manifested negatively. In the final analysis the new religion seem to have achieved a compromising strategy to live together and co-exist in a harmonious manner.

### **Conclusion**

Islamic influences in Ethiopia are widely diffused in the country. It is represented in the society through its doctrine, institutions, architecture, art and language created in the service of this faith.

Synereticism has played an important role in the Islamization process and in the making of Islamic identity that has been recognized as an important notion to explain why people in the study area and elsewhere were converted to Islam.

The archaeological investigation of Islam in northeast Shoa is not recognized as the study of sacred places and cult practices; rather, it has helped to understand the socio-cultural, economic and political developments of the various communities in the area. The material cultures and social organizations of these communities have also contributed to comprehend how Islam has been perceived and described in the society.

Generally, Islam has been considered as one of the most important element in the community. However, the absence of a systematic archeological and historical research, analysis and interpretations has hampered the study of the history of Islam and its influence over the historical and cultural developments of the country. This is because Islam in Ethiopia has been framed within the perspective of medieval Muslim-Christian conflicts. This framework seems inadequate on a number of counts. It fails to reflect contacts and relationships existed among the various communities that brought the emergence of cultural complexities and new historical process in the area.

On the other hand, in medieval Ethiopia religious and political life at local, regional and national levels was more developed than it was in earlier times. The socio-economic and cultural changes that occurred in the country during this time were associated with the expansion and Islamization process of Islam. This, in return, has created many buffer communities responsible for the present day wide distribution of Islamic communities in the country.

The research team, therefore, was convinced that these archeological sites possessed various heritages of archaeological and historical nature that go back to the medieval period. These heritages have contributed also to shaping and molding the present day history and culture of the country as well as to transcultural and sustainable economic development. However, these archaeological resources are threatened both natural processes and rapid developmental projects. Federal and Regional Governments of Ethiopia have to race against time to recover these fragile sites by promoting their protection and conservation.

In this period of the surge for transformations, Ethiopian commitment to change should not be limited to economic and political issues but also should extend to cultural sectors as well. This is because culture addresses fundamental questions of national identity and values, unity and development. In view of this, for any modern society there is not more valuable treasure than to understand and promote its heritage in the process of attempting to assure its values and identities for a better future.

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