

HISTORY AND CULTURE OF THE ARGOBBA : RECENT INVESTIGATIONS

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Résumé : Cette recherche ethnographique et historique sur les Argobba des régions Amhara, Afar, Oromiya et Harari, a montré que ceux-ci possèdent en propre un mode de construction des maisons, ainsi qu'une cuisine traditionnelle. Néanmoins, l'étude a aussi mis en évidence l'importance des interactions culturelles avec les populations voisines, voire une assimilation.

Mots-clefs : Argobba, ethnologie, histoire, Éthiopie, régions Amhara, Afar, Oromiya & Harari.

Summary : The aim of this study was to investigate the history and culture of the Argobba found in the Amhara, Afar, Oromiya, and Harari National regions. It has been pointed out that the Argobba have their own traditional mode of house construction, and their own form of food preparation. Nevertheless, the study also found that there is a great deal of cultural interaction and assimilation with neighbouring ethnic groups.

Keywords : Argobba, Anthropology, History, Ethiopia, Amhara, Afar, Oromiya & Harari regions.

Introduction

The field studies of the CRCCH on the Argobba started in 1993 and continued yearly until 1997. Each field study covered a period of one month. In the period 1993-1996, the studies were conducted in the Oromiya zone of the Amhara Region, in *Debub* (South) Wollo and *Semen* (North) Shoa zones, and in the Gacheni *woreda* (district) of the Afar Region. In 1997, the field studies were conducted in the Eastern and Western Hararge zones of the Oromiya Region, and in zone 3 of the Afar Region. Finally, the study was not complete.

Background Information

The Argobba are one of the Semitic-speaking peoples, and their language is part of the south Semitic group of languages¹. On the basis of the new administrative division, the people are found spread in the Amhara, Afar, Oromiya, and Harari Regions².

¹ BEND M.L. & al., 1976: *Language in Ethiopia*. London, Oxford University Press, pp. 14-15.

² This was gathered from the reports of the field studies conducted in the period 1993-1997.

Amhara National Region

The Argobba live in the following villages of the sub-district of Argobba, Aallu *woreda*, Debub Wollo zone: Feteqoma, Areranechro, Chomiye, Medina and Afeso. In the Oromiya zone of the same region, they live in the villages of Shonke, Toleha, Jile & Timuga, Artuma, Farsi, Isye Gola, Chefa Gola and Dewe. In the Semen Shoa zone, they live in the villages of the environs of Shoa Robit, Goze Berasageze, Mafad and Aliyu Amba.

Afar National Region

The Argobba live in zone 3 in the special district of Gachene in the villages of Suf Ager, Abale, Belai Meteqleia, Betach Meteqleia, Bilo, Chesa, Debreko, Koka Begweze, Work Amba, Maqo Amba, and Cheno. In Fentale they live in the towns of Awash and Metahara, while in Amibara *woreda*, they live in Melka Werer.

Oromiya National Region

They live in four *woreda* in two zones. In the Eastern Hararge Zone, they live in Fedis *woreda* in the villages of Gureqere, Afeyzero, Issaqoi, Ishiye, Genda Adem, Atero, Urde, Adasha, Qaleya, Adadi, Shanqo, Umere, Hajigoda, Berofife, Areda, Gendagara, Gutush, Nure Kliche, Arer Hamero, Fekati, Sadiqo Berbere, Roriso, Qelad, Qululut, Towiko, Ademrare, Umerkelle, Bereda, Adamhakola, and Qumash. In Mieso *woreda* of Western Hararge zone, they live in the environs of the towns of Bordede, Asebot, and Mieso, in Lega Arba *kebele* of Chiro *woreda*, and in the villages of Cheleqleqa, Fera, Besse, Adaele, Gedamba, Boradiya, Chorora and Bedey of Anchar & Gurba Qorcha *woreda*.

Harari National Region

The Argobba live in Hundane *woreda* in the villages of Koreme, Umerdin, Halilo, Eledi, Werarawa, Alela, Afer Deba, and Qaqi.

On account of their geographical spread in the various regions, the Argobba are thus found to be living as neighbours of the Amhara, Afar, Oromo, and Harari peoples. The climate and vegetation is that of *qolla*, *woina dega*, and *dega*. According to the 1984 census, the population of Argobba was 60, 412.

Nomenclature

Argobba is a name used for both the ethnic groups and the language. The name is related to the historical origin and settlement of the ethnic group. There is one point on which all the elders knowledgeable about the people's history and culture, agree. In all the areas studied and according to all the elders, the name *Argobba* is derived from the Amharic phrase *Arab gebba* ("Arabs came"). On the other hand, the term *Argobba* has a variety of significations when we examine written documents. In this regard, if we look under the entry *Argobba* in Kesate Birhan's *Amharic Dictionary*, we find that it gives as its meaning a *woreda* in Yifat which is inhabited by Muslims³. From this definition, we understand two basic points: one, that *Argobba* is the name

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of a place or territory, and, two, that it is an area inhabited by followers of Islam who are called *Argobba*. Of scholars who have made a study of the history, culture, and language of the Argobba people, one is Volker Stitz. In his study entitled "The Argobba of Western Yifat, Central Ethiopia", he writes that the term *Argobba* refers to the people who speak Argobbigna, follow Islam, and engage in agriculture, weaving, or commerce and that it excludes Muslim Oromo and Afar herders, or the Christian Amhara who are cultivators⁴.

History and Origin

The data provided by knowledgeable elders in all the areas inhabited by the Argobba indicate that there are three different versions on the origin of this people. The first version holds that when the Arab clan known as Benew Imeya lost its ruling power to another clan 800 years ago and dispersed throughout the world, it came also to Ethiopia. The second version holds that when a dispute arose between the Prophet Muhammad and the followers of other religions, eighty-two followers of the Prophet came to Ethiopia to Ahmed Nejash carrying a letter asking him to accept Islam. After having delivered the letter, they came to Yifat and settled there. The third version on the origin of the Argobba differs from the previous two. According to this version, the Argobba are not immigrants, but an ancient and indigenous people who accepted Islam very early from religious leaders who came from Arabia.

The elders give various reasons for the migration of the Argobba from the center of the country to different regions. Among the chief reasons they cite, are the forcible conversion to Christianity that the Emperor Yohannes tried to impose, and the problems caused to them during the era of Lij Iyassu, the fascist Occupation, and by the troops of *ras* Abebe. They maintain that migrations took place during these periods. When we observe the movements made and the settlements chosen, we see that the Argobba selected well-watered and hilly areas which they cleared for cultivation. Once settled, they engaged in agriculture and weaving. The elders explained the matter thus, and it has been possible to confirm their account of village settlements from field observation.

Language

The language of the Argobba people is called *Argobbigna* and it is from the Semitic language family which is classified as a member of the southern Ethio-Semitic languages. The language has as yet no alphabet and no literature. There is a high degree of linguistic exchange and assimilation going on. In this regard, the Argobba language is being submerged by and giving way to Amharic, Afarigna, and Oromigna.

The Argobbigna language is widely spoken in the villages of Shonke and Toleha in the Special Oromiya Zone of the Amhara National Region. It has also been possible to observe that in some villages of the other regions, the language is spoken especially by women and the youth. However, even in such villages, the language has come to gradually give way to the dominant language of some other ethnic groups. In general, Amharic, Oromigna, and Afarigna either singly or two of the three, are spoken as second languages along with Argobbigna.

⁴ STITZ Volker: The Western Argobba of Yifat, Central Ethiopia. *Proceedings of the first United States Conference on Ethiopian Studies*. Michigan State University, 1973, p.188.

Social Structure

When we examine Argobba society in general, discounting the non-uniformity of the age boundaries in all the villages, we find that social division and organization occur along lines of infancy, childhood, youth, adulthood and old age. Infancy is a period when the baby is with both mother and father, while childhood is a period when the child is engaged in herding or in domestic chore. Youth is the period when the member begins to engage in cultivation, starts a household, and opens a new chapter in life. Adulthood involves the management of the family, and the administration of community and property. In old age, the member brings the community together on occasions like weddings and mourning, reconciles members who have quarrelled, and generally instructs the society about its history, culture, tradition and mores.

The role of the female is to give birth to children and nurture them, to take care of domestic chore (preparation of food, fetching water, spinning cotton, basket weaving, etc.). The role of the male is to participate in public meetings, to cultivate (ploughing, weeding, harvesting and threshing of grain), and to weave cloth. The culture holds women in respect. Earlier, women were confined to the home and kept chaste. Now, however, they participate fully in social, economic and political affairs.

We find in Argobba culture a defensive posture and a strict injunction against marrying from outside and a provision for marriage among close kin like cousins. In other respects, however, and in some areas where the Argobba live intermingled with other nationalities, they form marriage ties. The social groups formed from both types of marriage engage in various economic and social activities.

When we examine the kinship system of the Argobba, we find general features that describe terms for cousins and the establishment of kinship on both paternal and maternal lines that is reflective of the characteristic of Semitic peoples⁵. Among the Argobba, kinship is a major criterion for the selection and establishment of residence. Moreover, it is the basis for solid relationships in weddings and mournings in social life. In the economic sphere as well, co-operation and mutual aid is amply reflected. In Argobba culture, the term *jad* refers to establishing backwards in order to determine a given individual's correct biological line. In the belief of the society, anyone whose genealogy is not established in this manner is not considered an authentic Argobba. He/she could be subjected to insult and derision and would not be considered as a choice for marriage.

All members of Argobba society are Muslim and every Argobba village has a mosque. Every Friday and on other religious holidays, the people gather for prayer in the mosque. The prayers are led by a *qadi* who is selected from among the society on the basis of his religious education, capability, knowledge and social regard.

The Traditional Administrative and Judicial System

Besides its own specific administrative and judicial system, Argobba society has also adopted some features from its neighbouring Oromo nationality. The administrative and judicial system it follows are called *wolasma*, *qadi*, and *demina*.

Wolasma

According to Argobba informants, the term *wolasma* refers to a person who has

⁵ William A. SHACK: *The Central Ethiopians*. London: International African Institute, 1974, p. 145.

pure [Argobba] blood, and who has land and is a member of the ruling class. A *wolasma* is from the *doba* lineage and holds land and administers the society. According to *wolasma* rules, the eldest son holds the land in his name and partitions it among his siblings who then collect tribute for him. As the *wolasma* had close ties with the former feudal ruling class, it was an executing agent for it. For this reason, it was given land and administrative authority which made it a class superior to other Argobba. However, the system disappeared after the proclamation that made land public property.

Qadi

Apart from leading religious ceremonies, the *qadi* officiates at weddings and formalizes marriages according to the rules ordained by the Holy Quran. On the death of a father, the *qadi* divides his wealth between the offspring. He administers justice according to *Sharia* law.

Demina

In Oromo culture, *demina* is a system of justice aiming to reconcile the offender and the injured in cases of land litigation, and in criminal cases of murder, physical injury, etc. In areas where the Argobba live as neighbours with the Oromo, they have also adopted the *demina* system. The *demina* system is normally operative within the confines of a single clan and whatever criminal case arises among members of a given clan, it is the *demina* of the clan which adjudicates it. However, when the case involves members of different clans, it is the *demina* of both clans which adjudicate the case. When a murder occurs within a clan or among clans, the close kin of the murderer hide themselves until the *demina* of the clan or the *demina* of both clans come. The *demina* goes directly to the murderer and holds him in its own or in some other person's custody. Then the *demina* and nine other persons from the party of the murdered discuss the amount of property to be paid as compensation blood money. According to *Sharia* law, 101 cattle have to be paid as blood money. Initially, 12 cattle are given to the family of the deceased as *refisa* [a means to calm down the injured party]. The remaining 88 cattle are given later to the clan of the deceased. The payment is in cash or cattle, but is never made solely in cash. The members of the clan of the murderer contribute the cattle and the exchange is effected by the *demina* of the clans of the murderer and the victim, in which nine members from each clan are selected to participate. On the last day, the ox brought by the murderer's clan is slaughtered by the murderer and the meat is shared with the members of the clan of the deceased.

Some Cultural Features: Marriage, Nutrition & House Construction

Marriage

We present information regarding the ceremonies attendant on choice of marriage partner, on the wedding, and postnuptial parties. This information has been collected from informants as well as from the offices of the Argobba People's Democratic Movement.⁶

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Choice of Marriage Partner

Boys and girls live with their parents until they get married. Girls marry at the ages of 10-15, while boys marry at the ages of 18-20. Marriage is arranged through parents. The father of a boy goes alone to the house of one he considers a worthy peer and asks for the hand of the daughter on behalf of his own son. The father of the girl responds that he will consult with his family and that the suitor's father should come back after eight or fifteen days. If he likes the suitor's father and considers him his equal, food and coffee are served to him. On the other hand, if he does not consider him his equal, he will either say that his daughter is not of age or that she has already been given in promise to someone else. The father of the girl will consult with his wife, her parents and siblings as well as with those of his own. If the family agrees to the marriage, he expresses his consent. If the family does not agree, he will say either that the girl is not of age or that she has already been promised to someone else. When, on the appointed date, the suitor's father comes and asks the girl's father on whether he has consented and gets a positive reply, they then select elders and decide on the date of *fatiha* (the *bethrothal*).

On the day of the *fatiha*, the father of the suitor, elders, the qadi, the family, etc., go to the house of the girl's father and greet the host standing and saying "Selaam Alekum!" The girl's family responds by saying "Wealekum Selaam!" Then the suitor's party say "We have come to ask for the daughter Allah gave you for our son Allah gave us!" Then the girl's family responds by saying "We have given the daughter Allah gave us to the son Allah gave you." Then all of them sing Muslim hymns, kiss each other's hands and complete the agreement. Neither the boy nor the girl are present on this occasion. On this ceremony of the *fatiha*, the contract of the civil marriage is effected. After this, the father of the boy presents to the girl a hairpin, fresh butter, a silver necklace, a belt or girdle, and five thin rings that are hung on the neck. This signifies that the girl is engaged.

The girl stays with her parents until she reaches the age of marriage which is fifteen. Subsequent to this, the best man of the future bridegroom brings a dress, a pair of shoes and other presents to the future bride every *Id* holiday. On *Arafa* holidays, the best man takes a prize castrated sheep, slaughters it himself, offers it to the bride's family and returns home. The expenses for those gifts that the best man takes to the future bride's family are covered by the boy's family. If the girl's father goes back on his word after the engagement has been completed, the matter is reviewed by elders and he is penalized. If the boy's father goes back on his word, he sends elders to fetch back the gifts he has sent, upon which the girl's family returns them after cleaning them properly. The chief reasons that bring about this turn of events are situations like not attending mourning ceremonies or not visiting on occasions of childbirth affecting either family. It is especially important on the part of the boy to visit his best friends, his mother-in-law or sister-in-law when either of them gives birth.

Any person who rapes or abducts a girl who is engaged is liable and punishable according to customary law. In such a situation, the elders of the community gather in a meeting, examine the matter, and on finding the person guilty, they slaughter one of his farm oxen and eat it. This is a type of punishment which appeases the victim and as a result of which reconciliation is effected.

Wedding

When the wedding day fixed by the involved elders approaches, preparations are made by both the boy's and the girl's families. One who is wealthy enough buys butter, cattle for slaughter and other essential things and begins preparation for the feast. Family, kin, and neighbours all participate in the preparation. Eight days before the wedding, old women neighbours dip the bride's fingers in milk and cut her fingernails. This is done to symbolize the girl's rite of passage to womanhood and the reason for dipping her fingers in milk is to express the wish for her to be fertile. Further, she is made to drink *koso* (an anthelminthic purgative) as a cleanser. The bridegroom's fingernails are cut in a similar way, and he is also made to drink *koso*.

Three days before the wedding, her hair is braided in a different manner. This braid, which is thin and fine and which is called *setket* is warmed up by the leaves of *azegaro* (a kind of tree) until the day of her wedding. On her wedding day, the leaves of the *woyba* tree are boiled and her body is washed with the water and massaged with the leaves. After this, in order for the bride to have sweet odor and beauty, she goes through as three-phase cosmetic fumigation. The first is called *mansha* and involves the burning of a combination of *azegaro*, *lubanja*, and *ned* (all odoriferous woods) and a perfumed powder. After she cools off, following the fumigation, she puts on her wedding dress and wears her jewellery. The embroidered dress she wears on this occasion is what is known as *Gondare* while the necklaces are called *unda*, *chenchel* and *ashen kitab*. She also wears a ring and bracelets known as *ambar*, *azab*, and *katena* while the anklets are known as anklet *azab*, anklet *ambar*, anklet *albo*, and anklet *chachete*. On her ears she wears *chilchele*. She covers her hair with a black shawl while she wraps a *kuta* and *meqlemia* around her body. Seated decorously, her best friends and escorts surround her and talk to her. For a girl marrying for the first time, a *gofta* is put on her head. At this point, her brothers or relations fire bullets into the air, and others express their joy with ululation and clapping. Her mother brews coffee and says the *dua* (prayers) to celebrate her "crowning with *gofta*". Guests are offered bread, honey, butter and other food and drinks.

As for the bridegroom, he goes to the house of one of his best friends escorted by the others, and after partaking in the feast prepared there, he begins to dress up before going to the bride's house. His trousers are what is called *tenfanef*, while the tunic he wears is white and made from fabric known as *mebruq*. He puts on a coat and on top of that, he wears a *kuta* that is called *shirfin*. He wears leather shoes called *timuro* and he holds a thin long staff called *zeng* or a whip made from hippopotamus hide in his hands. As they go to the bride's house, the bridegroom's party take with them a wedding gown for the bride known as *Harar musa*, a wrap-around called *jawi*, shoes, jewellery, *weleba*, *gufta*, bracelets and anklets, and a toilet device made from leather that is called *irkot*. These gifts are presented by an elder from the bridegroom's party to the father of the bride in the presence of other elders and the *qadi*.

At this time, the elder from the bridegroom's party asks the bride's father whether the gifts are complete. If they are, the bride's father replies affirmatively. If they are not, he gives his word that they will be complete within ten days and names a guarantor. If a contract was not entered earlier during the *fatiha* ceremony, the bride's father asks the *qadi* to seal the contract, the *nika*. The *qadi* then calls out the names of the bride and the bridegroom and binds them in matrimony, upon which the bride-

groom's father kisses the hands of the *qadi* and the elders and chants prayers.

Once this ceremony is over, the married couple and the guests sit down on their assigned seats and the feast begins. Accordingly, the elders sit in the mosque, the bridegroom and his party in a neighbour's house, and the bride and her party in her father's house. After the feast is over and the married couple is ready to leave, a cousin of the bridegroom goes to the bride's house, takes her out carrying her on his back and they start the journey to the bridegroom's home. When the wedding party arrives at the bridegroom's house, the song "Azey has come!" is sung and danced to. Those who are in the bridegroom's party sit together on one side. While the bride is led into the nuptial bower (*chagula bet*), a bed is stretched for the bridegroom. Then the feast prepared at the bridegroom's house begins.

At this point, the best men of the bridegroom take him to the nuptial bower in secret, take the bride from her guard, give her to the bridegroom and then shut the door and leave the bower. After the bridegroom takes the bride's virginity, one of the best friends waiting outside enters the bower when he hears the voice of the woman guarding the bride. Then the best man and the woman guardian respectively give the bridegroom and the bride a cup of a mixture of honey and butter to drink. After this, the best friend and the woman guardian go out of the bower and go to the place where family, kin, friends and guests are gathered and break the good news, the best man chanting war-like songs and the guardian woman ululating. At this time, the bride's father presents to the bridegroom an ox or a cow, or some other gift commensurate with his means. The bride's mother also offers a complete *kuta* to him. The bride's brothers and sisters also offer various gifts. After this, the singing and the dancing continue.

The bridegroom is not allowed to take the bride to his home. Instead, they stay at her parents' place and in the early morning, the couple and their best friends are offered porridge and other food. After this, they go out of the house to the public square and food and drinks are taken to them there from the bride's family. In the late morning, an animal is slaughtered and the party goes back to the house and eats breakfast.

The bridegroom, his best friends, and the rest of his party stay at the bride's house for four days feasting, drinking, singing and dancing. After lunch on the second day, one of the best men takes the bride out of the nuptial bower carrying her to where the party is and she sees the bridegroom's house. Flour, butter and honey, are displayed in the presence of the bride's family and kin. This is done in order to show the quantity sent and the number of those acting as escort. Following this, the food is prepared and cattle slaughtered and butter and honey drunk throughout the remaining days until the bride goes to the bridegroom's house.

On the third day, one of the best men, followed by some companions goes around offering sugar cane stalks and spraying perfume, all the while and lightly lashing out with a whip at those present and commanding "Cheer up! Brighten up!" At this time, if the person who has been gently stroked with a whip is a woman, she will say "I have brightened up for my husband! If it is an unmarried girl, she will say "I have brightened up for my future husband!" If the person gently stroked with a whip is a married man, he will say, "I have brightened up for my wife!" If it is a bachelor, he will say, "I have brightened up for my future wife." Everyone present, from the wedded couple down to those preparing the food and drinks, takes part in this frolic and they laugh and clap.

On the fourth day, the dowry the bridegroom brought is displayed to the bride's family and kin. The dowry for the bride includes dresses known as *Benin* and *katch*, perfume, a towel, a scarf (*shash*), shoes, an umbrella, a mirror and body toilet and laundry soaps. The dowry also includes a dress and a shawl for the bride's mother and a shirt, a wrap-around and a turban for the bride's father. Following this, the companions of the bridegroom are invited to a meal of bread made from millet and *téf*, a chicken sauce with boiled eggs, *aqalimo* and *alitato* after which they are each given an oval-shaped bread and bidden farewell. The bridegroom and his best men, however, stay in the bride's house for twelve days feasting and drinking all the while. On the eleventh day, all the clothes of the bride, her family, and all those who were preparing the food are taken down to the river and washed. On the following day, a farewell ceremony, similar to the one for the companions earlier, is held for the bridegroom and his best men, and they leave for their homes.

Postnuptial Party (mels)

Three days after the bridegroom's return to his house, the bride's family prepares a post-nuptial party to which the bridegroom goes with 10 to 15 of his best men and close friends. The feast that is prepared for the post-nuptial party is traditional food like that for the wedding. The bride, bridegroom and their party feast for four days. On the fourth day, the bridegroom and his party leave, while the bride stays with her family. The bridegroom secretly visits the bride from time to time. Finally, he sends an elder to her family with the request to take her. Her family fixes the date on which he can take her. On the fixed day, one of his best men goes to her family's house and takes the bride, her best friends, and the rest of her party. On that day, a donkey loaded with flour, bread, red pepper, *shiro*, butter and honey as well as a fattened and castrated sheep are sent to the bridegroom's house. The flour sent from the bride's house is baked, and the sheep is slaughtered for a feast to which neighbours are invited and people mix. This ceremony is called *ij metatebia*.

The bride's and the bridegroom's parties feast for four days, after which they leave for their homes. Within six months to a year, the bridegroom's father gives the newly married couple farm plots, oxen, cows, a donkey, grain stored underground, and household items. The bride's parents also give the couple various household goods, after which they build their own home and live independently.

The boy and the girl wear various distinguishing marks both before and after the marriage. Accordingly, an unmarried girl does not put anything on her hair, while a married one puts a kerchief on her hair and two bracelets on her left hand. She may not wear one or three or more bracelets, according to the custom. An unmarried boy does not have his hair cut while he wears colored glass beads on his neck and on his left hand. However, he has his hair cut when he gets married.

Food Preparation and Nutrition

The variety of food prepared includes *injera*, *ilbet*, *alitato* and *weqalimo*. The *injera* is made from *téf* alone, or from a mixture of *mashila* and other grains, after which it is eaten with *wot* (a sauce). *Ilbet* is a mixture of fenugreek and wheat flour which is soaked and made viscous in water. *Alitato* is leavened wheat flour paste that is then prepared with chicken consommé. *Weqalimo* is a very special Argobba food that is

prepared only on holidays, weddings, and special ceremonies. *Weqalimo* is prepared from any kind of meat. After men slaughter an ox, a sheep or a goat, they give the meat and the intestines to women. The women then squeeze out the contents of the intestine first with their hands and then with their fingers until it looks like a sheet of paper. After this they chop the beef or the mutton into fine pieces which they then rub with spices and pepper and stuff into the cleaned intestine. They then hang the stuffed intestine on a rope. All the beef or all the mutton chopped is stuffed into the intestine of a single ox or a single sheep. The stuffed intestine is hung out for three or four days in *qolla* (hot) areas, while in colder areas it is hung out for much longer. The cleaned and now dried intestine may be used some other time for stuffing chopped meat. The chopped meat stuffed in the intestine and hung up to dry is then fried or cooked in a sauce and eaten with *injera* or other bread. When *weqalimo wot* is made, the chopped meat along with the intestine holding it is thrown into a pot into which are added onions, butter, salt and other spices. It is then boiled together, after which the intestine is opened and the sauce and the cut pieces of intestine are put on plates separately. At this point, whoever wants to eat the intestine alone may do so, while whoever wants to eat both the intestine and the sauce together may also do so.

On weddings, *weqalimo* is offered first to the bridegroom, to the father-in-law, and to the bridegroom's friends. Then, it is offered to elders, adults, women and the young in turns. The food is offered to everyone in equal portions. However, as the marrying couple does not finish all the *weqalimo* or *alitato* offered to them, they eat half of it and leave the other half. According to the culture, it is a shame for them to eat all of what is offered.

House Construction

The Argobba live in villages on hillsides (fig.1), because such a location is healthier



Fig.1: Argobba village of Shonqé (South Wollo).

and also easier to defend. However, as space on such hillsides is limited, the houses are built close to each other. Once a site for a house is selected, construction may proceed at any time before April when the work load is light. An expert first measures the length and breadth of the house by rope and then construction begins on a Saturday which is considered a favorable day for such construction. On this occasion, bread is baked, grain roasted and coffee brewed, after which it is offered to elders who chant prayers and wish that the house being constructed will bring comfort and happiness to its would-be occupants. Some people slaughter an ox when work for the foundation of the house begins. The blood is then collected in a deep wooden bowl from which the owner or a relative sprinkles the blood around on the ground. Informants say that this is done to symbolize the wish that the residence might bring long life and prosperity to its occupants.



Fig.2: House entrance in the Harar vicinity.

In former times, most houses were built of stone and wood. It is believed that this mode of stone construction was brought by Arabs from Yemen in ancient times. Houses are nowadays built of wood that is not eaten by termites. This was confirmed both by informants and by observation in the field. The walls are built from stone, wood, and mud, while the roof is made from thick wood called *qeletuma*, on top of which lighter and smaller wood and wet leaves are piled. It is further covered by mud that does not wash away when it rains.

The house is a hall with three rooms. The first is a bedroom called *nedeba*, the second a kitchen called *dera* and the third a cattle pen called *gola*. The bedroom is where adults and guests sit or sleep and it is the front part of the house. The kitchen holds utensils and cooked food; it further serves as the sleeping quarters for women and children up to eight years old. The kitchen is to the left of the house. The father builds a new house and moves out when the son grows up. Whenever a house is built, the cattle pen is attached to its right. Its lower part is for cattle, while the upper part is used as storage for coffee, peanuts, and other household items. The two parts are partitioned by stacked wood. The reason for building the cattle pen within the house is for protection against thieves and beasts.

The house is built by communal labor comprising 20-25 people. The men bring the building materials while the women prepare food and drinks for the workers. The proprietor requests those who will participate in the construction via community elders. While the proprietor supplies the necessary timber, the others bring the stones from a distance and the earth for the mud from nearby. The construction takes up to eight days. The proprietor slaughters an ox and supplies *qat* and the workers eat their supper there every day. On completion of the house, all those who participated in the construction are invited to a party of *qat*, coffee, *qolo* (roasted grain) and bread. On this occasion, the *qadi* and community elders are also invited. The eldest person blesses those gathered wishing them long life and chanting *dua* to which the proprietor says "Amen!" At

this point, the proprietor enters the house if he built it for himself. If he built it for his son, the latter moves into the house when he gets married. A house lasts for over 300 years if it is properly maintained, and it is inherited by the youngest male son, in whose absence a daughter inherits it. A village is enclosed by a fence. The farms are located in the environs of the village.

Conclusion

The aim of this study has been to investigate the history and culture of the Argobba found in the Amhara, Afar, Oromiya, and Harari National regions. Argobba society manifests a high degree of linguistic assimilation on account of its contiguity with the peoples living in the Amhara, Afar, Oromo and Harari National Regions. Informants say that the Argobba language is being swallowed up by Amharic, Oromo and Afar languages. Field work ascertains that the Argobba language is still a medium of communication in some of the Argobba villages. Concerning social organization, we observe that the Argobba adopt that of the neighbouring people. For instance, the Oromo age set and age grade system as well as the custom of levirate marriage (the younger brother marrying his elder brother's wife on the latter's death) have been adopted by the Argobba. As far as administration and justice are concerned, the Oromo system of *demina* has also been adopted.

Traditionally, the Argobba married cousins within the same village. Nowadays, they have started intermarrying with members of neighbouring ethnic groups and integrating with their cultures. It has been pointed out that the Argobba have their own traditional mode of house construction and their own form of food preparation and nutrition. Nevertheless, the study found that there is a great deal of cultural interaction and assimilation with neighbouring ethnic groups.



▲ Pl. I : Peintures rupestres d'Anza (cf. pp. 89-92).



◀ Pl. II :
Peintures rupestres de
Babuda (cf. pp. 89-92).



▲ Pl. III : Peintures rupestres d'Anza (cf. pp. 89-92).



◀ **Pl. IV** : Saint Fasilädäs à cheval ; *Gädlä Fasilädäs* conservé à Meşlé Fasilädäs, fol. 1 v° (cf. pp. 207-270).

▶ **Pl. V** : Saint Luc, Tétraévangile conservé à Krestos Šāmra, fol. 78 v° (cf. pp. 207-270).

▼ **Pl. VI** : Saint Marc, peinture sur toile marouflée sur une ancienne porte, conservée dans l'église de Réma (cf. pp. 207-270).

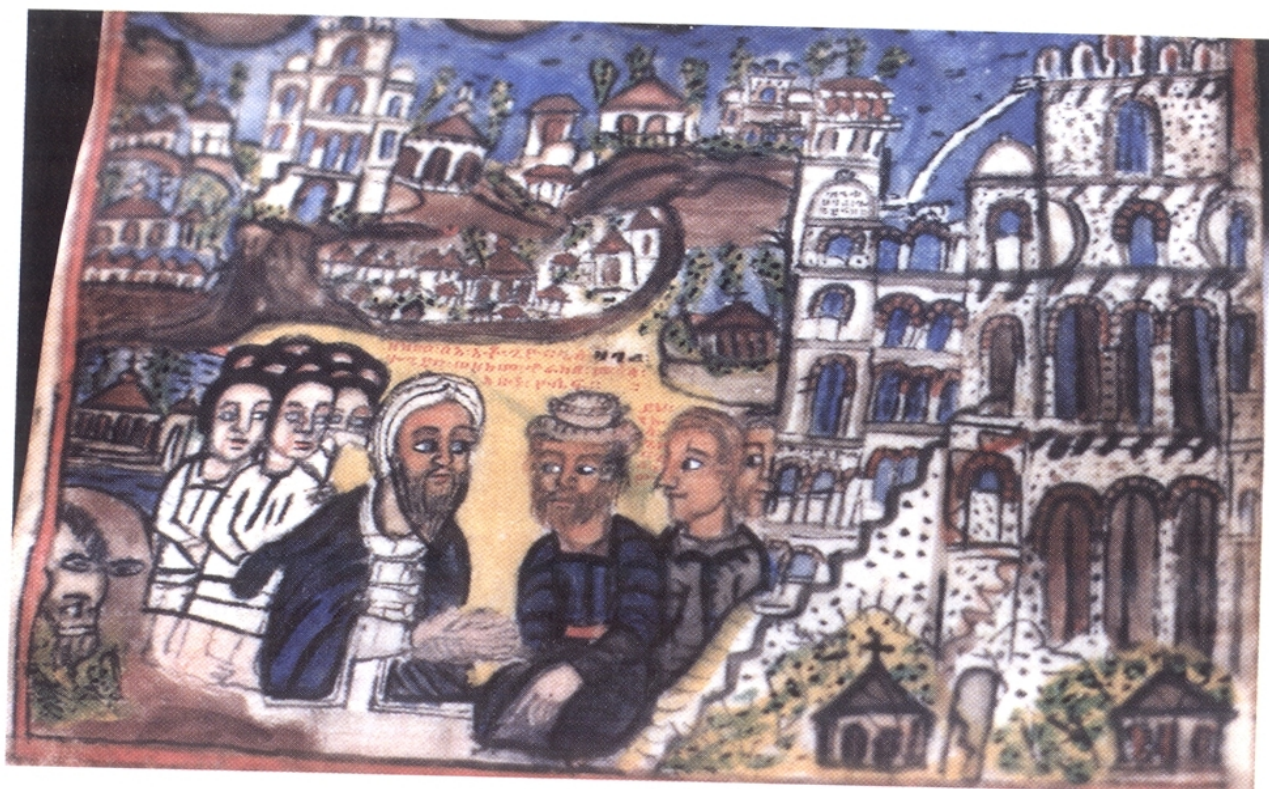




◀ **Pl. VII :**
Giyorgis et Mac
Kelbie fabriquant un
canon. Manuscrit
BNF Eth. 205,
fol. 163 - 164 v°
(cf. pp. 309-338).



◀ **Pl. VIII :**
Le *balambäras*
Giyorgis à cheval,
entouré de soldats.
Manuscrit BNF
Eth. 205, fol. 24 v°
(cf. pp. 309-338).



▲ **Pl. IX** : Rencontre à Gondar de Giyorgis et de l'*abuna* Yoséf. Manuscrit BNF Eth. 210, fol. 140 v° (cf. pp. 309-338).



◀ **Pl. X** : Ménelik lors de la fête de Mäsqäl. Manuscrit BNF Eth. 205, fol. 70 v°-71 (cf pp. 309-338).



▲ **Pl. XI**: Giyorgis, au centre avec une épée. Derrière lui, deux autres européens, Hasä et Salomon. Ils sont reçus par Abal Haylu. Manuscrit BNF Eth. 210, fol. 124 (cf. pp. 309-338).

▼ **Pl. XII**: Le *balambäras* Giyorgis terrasse un Européen, mais la légende signale qu'il s'agit d'un Derviche. Manuscrit BNF Eth. 210, fol. 165 v°-166 (cf. pp. 309-338).





▼ **Pl. XIII :**
Crucifixion (n°3),
par Alāqa Ayyälä.
Église de Şegé Dengel
(cf. pp. 271-308).

▲ **Pl. XIV :**
Annonciation (n°2),
par Alāqa Ayyälä.
Église de Şegé Dengel
(cf. pp. 271-308).

◀ **Pl. XV :**
Vierge allaitant (n°8),
par Alāqa Ayyälä.
Église de Gäbrä Endreyas
(cf. pp. 271-308).



Pl. XVI: Vierge à l'enfant (n°7), par Aläqa Ayyälä. Église de Şegé dengel (cf. pp. 271-308).



▲▲ Pl. XVII: Gäbrä Mänfäs Qeddus (n°12), par Aläqa Ayyälä.
Église d'Aqasta (cf. pp. 271-308).

▲ Pl. XVIII: Gäbrä Mänfäs Qeddus et Gäbrä Endreyas (n°11), par Aläqa Ayyälä.
Monastère de Yägäzaza Abbo (cf. pp. 271-308).