

LIT

AD. E. JENSEN
THE KONSO

EDITED BY SOPHIA THUBAUVILLE

3
SOUTHERN ETHIOPIAN STUDIES
AT THE FROBENIUS INSTITUTE



Adolf Ellegard Jensen

The Konso

Southern Ethiopian Studies at the Frobenius Institute

edited by

Sophia Thubauville

Volume 3

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With a preface by Kansite Gellebo

Edited by Sophia Thubauville

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Table of contents

Acknowledgements	1
Preface	3
<i>by Kansite Gellebo</i>	
Editor's preface	13
<i>by Sophia Thubauville</i>	

The Konso

by Adolf Ellegard Jensen

Country and its people.	29
Social life	53
The <i>xelta</i> system	53
The <i>xelta</i> system in northeast Konso.	57
Age groups	57
The dual system	58
Sequence of festivities.	63
The <i>xelta</i> system in northwest Konso	74
Age groups	75
The dual system	76
Marriage in the <i>xelta</i> system.	78
Sequence of festivities.	80
The <i>xelta</i> system in southwest Konso or Fasha	83
Age groups and triple division.	84
Officials	85
The <i>xelta</i> system in southeast Konso	87
Offices, clans and caste systems	91
Hereditary and non-hereditary offices	91
The nine clans	100
The castes	103
Religious and spiritual life.	115
The idea of God	115

Myths of origin	120
Spirits and illness	121
Death and burial	127
Burial of the Kalla	128
Other ceremonies	134
Calendar and other	136
Oral traditions	145
Stories about Kalla	145
The visit to God	147
Stories about Kalla	147
Children that became animals	148
The sheep of God	148
The three wise men	149
The monkey and the elephant	150
The lion and the hyena	151
The origin of death	151
The origin of the war and the <i>xelta</i> groups	152
The borrowed spear and the swallowed stone	152
The emergence of the division of labour	153
How death came into the world	153
The sharing of the spoils	153
From the early days of the Konso	154
The Argamaida clan	155
The evil stepmother and the thunder	156
The daughter of the rich man and the daughter of the poor man	157
The Butota snake	158
Appendix	159
Bibliography	159
List of illustrations	161
Glossary	165
Index of names	170

Acknowledgements

Ever since I began working as a research associate at the Frobenius Institute in 2010, I have been fascinated by the Institute's archives, especially the materials relating to the expeditions to Ethiopia in the 1930s and 1950s. In particular, four unpublished manuscripts by A.E. Jensen and Eike Haberland left me no peace. Unpublished and unnoticed, they had lain in the archives for several decades. Unfortunately, I had to realize, it was not easy to find funds for their translation and publication. So, my first and greatest thanks must go to the Hahn-Hissinksche Frobenius Foundation for granting me the money to finally undertake this long-anticipated project.

Furthermore, I would like to thank Kansite, who supported me in reviewing the manuscript and was an invaluable help in checking the Konso words and names. Hermann Amborn, who had known the manuscript himself for decades, gave me equally helpful advice. In addition, Elmar Lixenfeld has done a really great job in designing the unique cover of the book.

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Frankfurt am Main, February 2021

Sophia Thubauville

Preface

by Kansite Gellebo¹

Anthropology, considered as the science of humanity, originated in the region we commonly but inaccurately call ‘the West’: France, Great Britain, the USA and Germany (Eriksen and Nielsen 2012). The African continent and its peoples have been the subject and object of anthropological enquiry for decades (Ntarangwi 2010). Foreign anthropologists introduced anthropological study to Ethiopia in the 1950s (Lewis 2017) and anthropologists from Britain, France, Germany, Holland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Norway, Sweden, and the USA have since studied Ethiopian cultures (Pankhurst 2002).

The Konso people have been studied by many scholars since the 1920s. Two archaeologists, Azaïs and Chambard, are considered to be the first scholars to have visited Konso, in 1926; they later published their work about the megalithic and wooden monuments of Konso in 1931 (Azaïs and Chambard 1931). Having been trained in the tradition of British anthropology, Hallpike carried out intensive fieldwork in Konso from 1965–67 and the results of his fieldwork were published in 1972 as an ethnographic monograph entitled *The Konso of Ethiopia: A study of the values of a Cushitic people*. Other foreign scholars who have studied or described Konso include Cerulli (1956), Black (1973), Cowen (1978), Amborn (2009), Arthur (2005, 2010), Kimura (2004), Watson (1998), Demeulenaere (2002), Förch (2003), Poissonnier (2009), and Ellison (2006). They have described various phenomena in Konso: language, environment, agriculture, social organization, wooden sculptures, settlement patterns, death and funerals, architecture, socio-economic transformation and so forth. Among the Ethiopian nationals who have described Konso are Mamitu (2002, on the status of women), Lakew (1998, on settlement and clanship), Ongaye (2013, on the grammar of Konso), Awoke (2010, on the heritagization of Konso cultural landscape), Shako (2004, on the impact of missionaries on Konso culture, and the nine clans of Konso), Kan-

¹ Kansite Gellebo Korra earned an MA in Social Anthropology from Addis Ababa University after gaining a B.Ed in History from Mekelle University. Currently, he is lecturer of social anthropology at the Sociology and Social Anthropology Department at Arba Minch University. His main research interests include: Konso culture, sacred forests, competing cereal crops, social change, social marginalization, material culture and public places.

site (2017 and 2018, on Konso public places, spirits that secure them), Alemayehu (2011, on indigenous knowledge for coping with climate change), Menfese (2010, on the role of trees) and Meron (2012, on agro-ecological farming practices), and Metasebia (2016, on death and burial).

Aside from Azaïs and Chambard's published photographs, none of the above-mentioned scholars' work precedes that of Adolf Ellegard Jensen and his team from the Frobenius Institute, Germany. Detailed description of the Konso was heralded by Jensen and his research team in three expeditions, undertaken in 1934/35, 1950–52 and 1954/55. The expedition team was fascinated by the cultural phenomenon of the memorials for the Konso heroes, which best fitted into the 'meritorious complex' (*Verdienstkomplex*) theory of the Frobenius approach to Ethiopian anthropology (Braukämper 2015). Among scholars who study Konso, knowledge about Jensen's publications on Konso is limited. Yet, his publications provide the earliest anthropological studies on southern Ethiopia and specifically Konso.



Image 1: Monuments to the dead in Kolmi. On the left an elephant

During his stay in 1934/35, Jensen conducted a pioneering study on the generation grading system and wooden statues. After his return to Frankfurt in 1936 Jensen published the findings of the research in a monograph, *Im Lande des Gada* (In the land of Gada) (Hallpike 1972; Thubauville 2020). Other participants of the expedition were Hellmut Wohlenberg and Alf Bayrle. The former's role was to document material culture and oral narratives; the latter was responsible for mak-

ing drawings, particularly of steles (Thubauville 2020). Because of his love of Konso culture, Jensen undertook a second expedition in 1950–52. Elizabeth Pauli (who Jensen married in 1952) together with Eike Haberland were involved in this expedition. The final expedition to Konso took place in 1954/55 and was undertaken by Jensen, Pauli, Haberland and Helmut Straube (Thubauville 2018). The outcomes of these expeditions in the 1950s were not published as planned, and the present ethnography is an English translation of the manuscript of the expedition results that has, until now, lain unpublished in the archives of the Frobenius Institute.

The ethical, methodological and theoretical parameters under which the researchers of these expeditions worked are today subject to criticism by scholars such as Thubauville (2018), Bustorf (2015), Braukämper (2015), Abbink (2017), Data (2017), Ambaye (2017), and Hallpike (2008). Hallpike says the value of Jensen's ethnography is greatly diminished by his tendency to make reckless assertions that have little or no relation to the facts (Hallpike 2008). In criticizing the 1936 monograph published by Jensen, Hallpike says that Jensen, unable to speak the Konso language, was obliged to converse in Oromo language, and derived much of his information from a Borana living in Konso. Jensen states, for example, that the craftsmen called themselves *bericha* but that the Amhara and Oromo workers on the expedition did not know the word and denied that it was an Oromo word. It is therefore not surprising that he ascribes many Borana traits to the Konso. He calls the age grading system and its ceremonies *jila* and *harriyada*, which are Borana words for the age grade system quite alien to the Konso (Hallpike 1972, 2008). The Konso generation grading system is called *xelta*. Likewise, Jensen states that Konso cultivators called themselves *obbruu*, while the craftsmen call themselves *bericha*. Again, both *obbruu* and *bericha* are Borana terms. Jensen makes numerous similar language errors. His theoretical preoccupation with the cultural traits of Cushitic Ethiopia and the very short time he spent in Konso perhaps explain the disappointing quality of Jensen's ethnography (Hallpike 1972).

Furthermore, Jensen sometimes uses derogatory terms, such as tribe or tribal system. Finally, Jensen does not take a neutral position in describing the craftsmen: he categorizes the cultivators as actual Konso, while the craftsmen were considered as outsiders and migrants.

Despite these shortcomings, the documentation by the Frobenius expeditions on southern Ethiopia are an indispensable source of ethnographic and historical information due to the fact that they took place before the Protestant missions converted the locals and before the socialist revolution drastically transformed the region (Bustorf 2015; Thubauville 2017). There has been rapid social, cultural, political and economic change since the advent of Protestant religion and modern education in the Konso area (Shako 2004; Hallpike 2008; Ellison 2006). There-

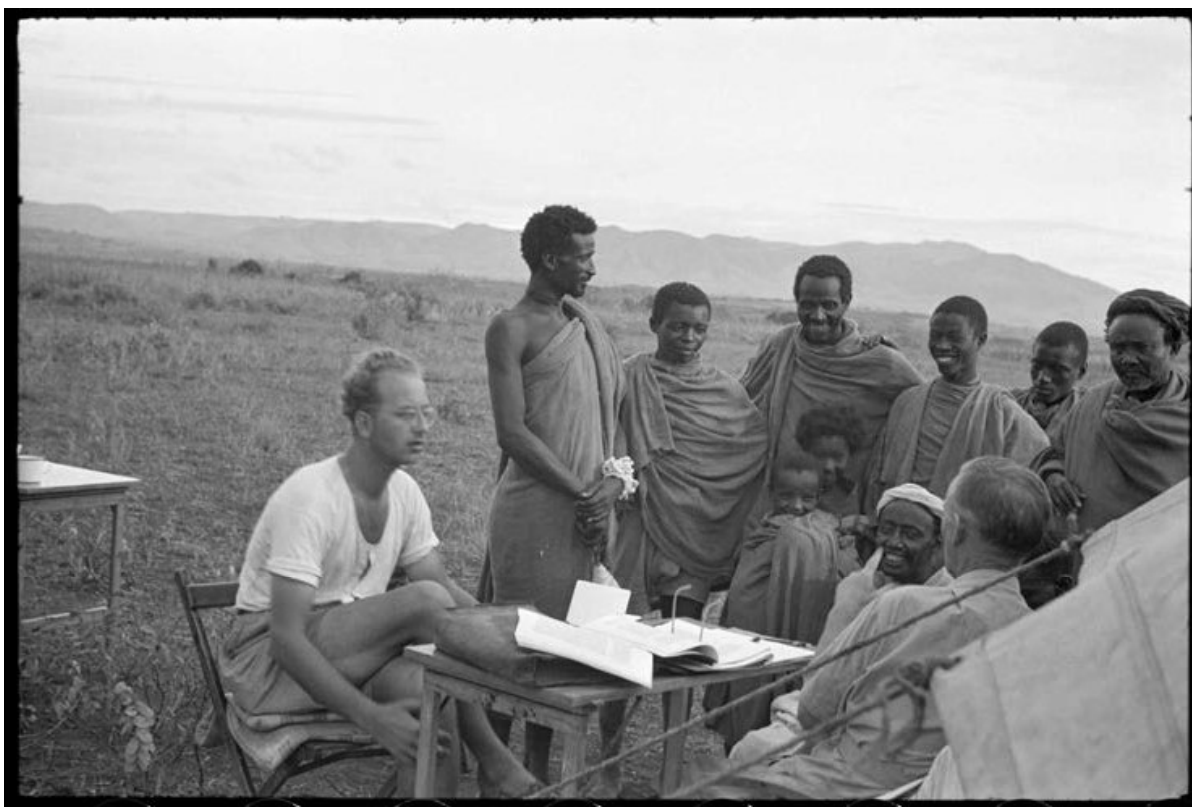


Image 2: At work with the natives in camp Maddera (Jensen on the right, Haberland on the left)

fore, these resources are today unique historical sources, remarkably significant for the reconstruction of the history of Konso.

I was introduced to the Frobenius Institute's wonderful archival materials on the Konso in 2015, when – as part of a digitizing project – I was invited to comment on black and white photographic images from Konso at the Institute. Subsequently, I made a presentation at the 19th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies on “Archival material about the Konso by A.E. Jensen – an Ethiopian assessment” in August 2015 in Warsaw, Poland. Finally, I was inspired to use the material in the Frobenius Institute to write two articles, on the transformation of social stratification and on the memorial emblems for Konso heroes (see Kansite 2017, 2018).

I recognized the potential significance of the archival resources at the Frobenius Institute, but, as they were in German, I had to rely on a colleague at the Institute translating material for me. Although I understood that it is difficult to find funds for translations, I always wanted to have the manuscript of the Konso expeditions in the 1950s translated into English for wider readers and researchers. Now I am happy to see that the manuscript has been translated, and anyone interested in Konso can easily access the material.

Jensen's ethnography of the Konso is organized into four major sections: the country and its people, social life, religious and spiritual life, and oral traditions. In the first chapter – country and its people – Jensen describes the origin and mean-

ing of the Konso name, the location of Konso, the Konso farming system (which is characterized by intensive cultivation and irrigation), crop types grown by the Konso, and soil and water conservation practices. In this section, Jensen also explains the unique character of the Konso villages and their internal structure. Interestingly, he explains that concentrating the population in a small area enabled them to contour the entire mountain slopes for cultivation purposes. Jensen also describes the social division between craft workers (weavers, blacksmiths and potters), whose livelihoods are exclusively based on craftwork, and cultivators, who have control over all the land. He explains that craft workers were comparatively poor, except for the weavers, who had the opportunity to sell their products to neighbouring peoples who do not know about weaving. Very sadly, he describes that weavers' living conditions were worsening in the 1950s as their fabrics were unable to compete with imported foreign textiles. As a result, many left the country and migrated to Borana, Burdji and other places where European fabrics had not yet reached. Concerning the market system in Konso, he explains that there were four large markets in the 1950s and on market days the villages were almost empty. Millet and fruit were exchanged for craft workers' products. People from Borana also visited Konso markets and exchanged livestock and salt for coffee beans and grain. Jensen's description of market police who protect against fraud in measurement units is interesting, as is his observation that local *poqallas* were recognized and given titles (e.g. *kanjasmach*) by the government. Interestingly, he describes the introduction of and increase in taxation by the government and the conversion to Orthodox Christianity that attended the government's penetration of the area. Konso was incorporated into the Ethiopian state at the end of the nineteenth century (1897), and law and order was subsequently imposed (Hallpike 2008). Conversion to Protestantism, which has brought about social change in Konso, only started after the arrival of Norwegian Lutheran Protestant missionaries in 1954 (Hallpike 1972).

In the second section, on the social life of Konso, the *xelta* (age grade) system and its peculiar features are described in detail. In the *xelta* order, the Konso land is divided into four districts, each with a different variation of the system. In the section, Jensen also describes the hereditary and non-hereditary offices, the nine clans of Konso (with their totemic emblems) and occupational groups.

The third part is on the religious and spiritual life of the Konso. In it, Jensen describes the myths about God and the earth and their complex relationship. In addition, he describes the Konso cosmology, including the origin and nature of humans, animals, plants, mountains and celestial bodies. The sub-section of this chapter explains the spirits and illness. Disease is believed to be caused by certain spirits due to a violation of the order of life; the remedy is in the hands of the *suaita* (the oracle), who understand the *oritta* (evil spirit) and has medical supplies.

Burial among the Konso is another important rite of passage. In Konso, following special rules, the bodies of the dead are buried in the family fields or in clan

cemeteries. Memorial statues called *waakka* mark the graves of notable persons (Kansite 2018; Metasebia 2016; Poissonnier 2014). The graves of small children and women who have no children are not marked. A woman who has been married several times will be buried in the traditional burial place of the man with whom she first had children. The death of the clan head, the *poqalla*, and his wife, *poqalteta*, is initially kept completely secret, and the people only hear about it when they are told that she/he is 'sick'. Visitors will come to ask how he/she was doing and bring food and drink which will be eaten by the people responsible for watching and cleaning the corpse (Poissonnier 2014). The bodies of the chief and his wife are mummified for several years without mourning (Poissonnier 2014; Tadesse 1992). The official announcement of the death takes place only a few days before the funeral. The chief's mourning and burial takes place after nine years, while the queen is mourned and buried after eighteen months. However, this time was in recent years shortened to less than seven months (Collomb 2003 cited in Poissonnier 2014).

The next section deals with the Konso calendar and months. For the Konso, the months are calculated from new moon to new moon. The year begins after the harvest, and the first month is in January, when important rituals of planting are performed.

The final chapter of the manuscript is on the oral traditions of Konso. The stories described are not told without purpose, but with the aim of inculcating positive discipline in the children (Kansite and Temechehn 2018). They carry meanings about cosmology, justice, telling the truth, punishment, etc.

Early ethnographers like Jensen who studied communities particularly in non-western countries have frequently worked under difficult conditions: their imperfect mastery of what were often unwritten languages, the scarcity of educated informants, the lack of adequate historical and administrative records and so on (Hallpike 2008). And Adolf E. Jensen surely encountered such difficulties. It is undeniable that Jensen's ethnography has its shortcomings, reflected in his language errors, dependence on translators and the shortness of the time he spent on fieldwork. Yet, the manuscript is an indispensable anthropological and historical source on Konso. Published too late to have laid the foundations of Konso studies, Jensen's ethnography is nevertheless an important resource, and its publication in English will undoubtedly inspire researchers who are interested in Konso culture and history. Therefore, the Frobenius Institute and Sophia Thubauville must be applauded for their work in bringing the manuscript to a wider readership.

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Editor's preface

by Sophia Thubauville

The Frobenius expeditions to Konso

Konso was the favourite research destination of Adolf Ellegard Jensen² who led – as director of the Frobenius Institute – three research expeditions to southern Ethiopia in the years 1934/35, 1950–52 and 1954/55.

In 1934/35 Jensen was accompanied by the teacher Hellmut Wohlenberg and the painter Alf Bayrle. They stayed in Konso from 21 January to 19 February 1935, first in Bakaule and then in Buso, where they carried out the main part of their research. In 1935 the major research interest of the research expedition was the 'meritorious complex' (*Verdienstkomplex*) and the associated memorial poles, or *waakka*, among the Konso. The research was directly published in Jensen's voluminous volume *Im Landes des Gada* (1936), which begins with a detailed expedition report, continues with explanations on the age grade system and memorial poles, and ends with a good number of myths.

The next Frobenius expedition to Ethiopia took place from 1950 to 1952. During this expedition Jensen and two further team members, Elisabeth Pauli³ and

² Adolf Ellegard Jensen (1899–1965) studied mathematics, natural sciences and philosophy in Kiel and Bonn. He became an assistant to the German anthropologist Leo Frobenius at the Institute for Cultural Morphology in 1923. Before the First World War, he participated in many of the Frobenius Institute's expeditions to South Africa, Libya, southern Ethiopia and Ceram (Indonesia). After Frobenius's death in 1938, Jensen was supposed to succeed him as the director of both the Institute and the Anthropological Museum in Frankfurt. However, his appointment was blocked because he refused to collaborate with the Nazi regime and was married to a Jewish woman. After the war ended, he became the director of the Anthropological Museum and finally took up a full professorship at the Institute for Social Anthropology and the directorship of the Frobenius Institute. For his research trips to Ethiopia and his important contributions to Ethiopian Studies, see Thubauville (2020).

³ Elisabeth Pauli (1906–1984) joined the Frobenius Institute in 1933 as a painter. During the Second World War, she undertook literature research in preparation for the post-war expeditions to Ethiopia. She played a central role in each of these and wrote, among other things, the unpublished expedition reports, from which we learn a lot about the expedition circumstances and methods of the anthropologists. In 1952 Elisabeth Pauli married A.E. Jensen after a previous joint expedition to Ethiopia.

Eike Haberland,⁴ stayed again in Konso. According to the travel report written by Pauli,⁵ they arrived in Mattara on 13 July 1951, having come from today's South Omo Region, west of the Woito River. From their base in Mattara, they undertook

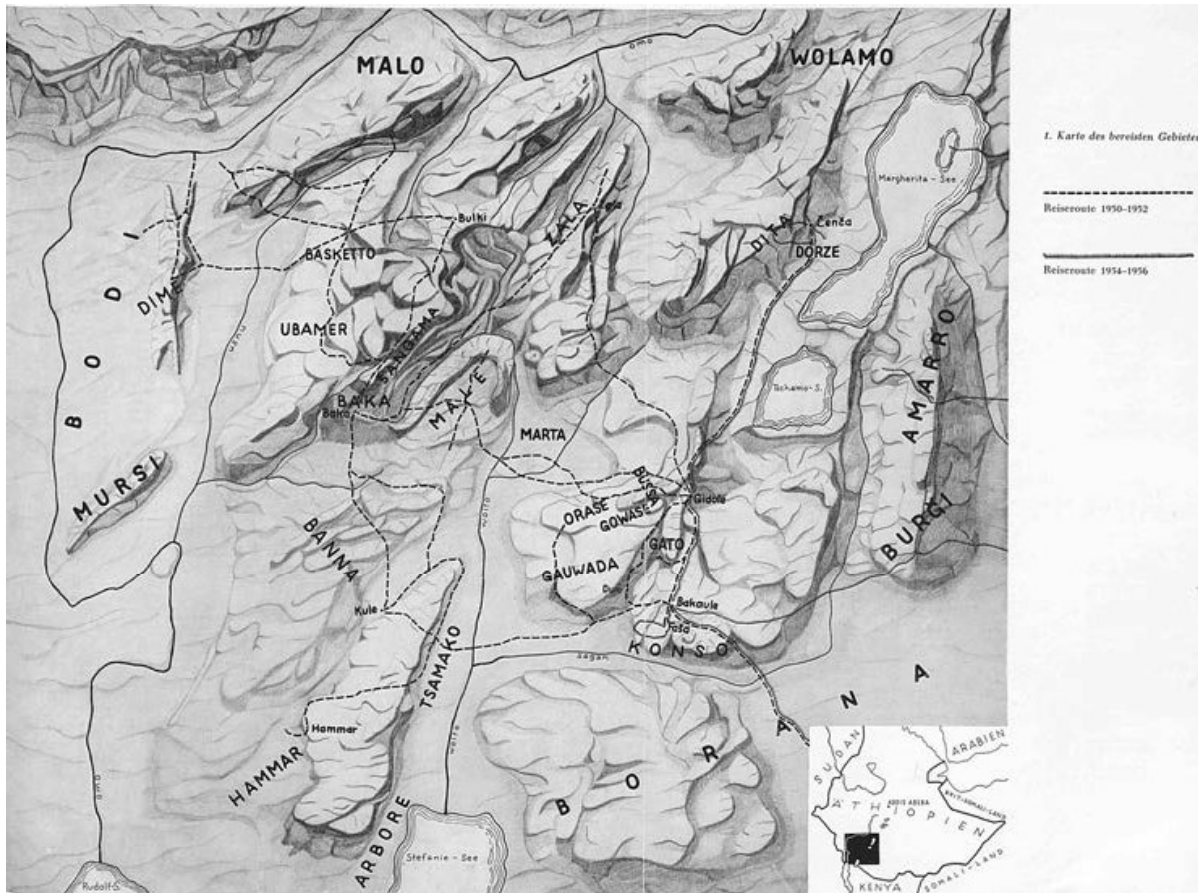


Image 1: Map of the 1950–1952 and 1954–1955 expeditions⁶

⁴ Eike Haberland (1924–1992) studied anthropology, ancient philology, ancient history and oriental studies at the Johann Wolfgang Goethe University in Frankfurt am Main. In addition, he attended courses on religious studies and African linguistics. In 1950, under the supervision of Professor Adolf Ellegard Jensen, Haberland completed his PhD thesis, *Das Gada-System der südabessinischen Völker* (The Gada system of south Abyssinian people). In the following years he was employed as a research assistant at the Frobenius Institute. Throughout his time at the Frobenius Institute, he carried out intensive field research, especially on the ethno-history of southern Ethiopia. He completed his habilitation thesis in 1962, and was appointed as professor in the Department of Anthropology and African Studies at the University of Mainz in 1965. Three years later he returned to Frankfurt where he took up a professorship in the Department of Historical Anthropology and became the director of the Frobenius Institute. In the early 1970s he continued to carry out research on Ethiopia and received the Haile Selassie prize for Ethiopian Studies in 1971.

⁵ Unpublished travel report (archival no. AEJ-41-001).

⁶ This map contains the designations for ethnic groups used by social anthropologists in the 1950s. The spelling is no longer common today, and some of the terms are pejorative and are no longer used.

visits to the markets in Duro and Bakaule. On 30 July they shifted their camp from Mattara to Godja. From there Jensen and Pauli were able to make short visits to Burkedaia, Buso, Gamole, Djarso and Lehaidi. Haberland made detours to Fasha, and Dokattu. Before they left Konso and their camp in Godja, Jensen and Pauli spent nine days in Fasha.

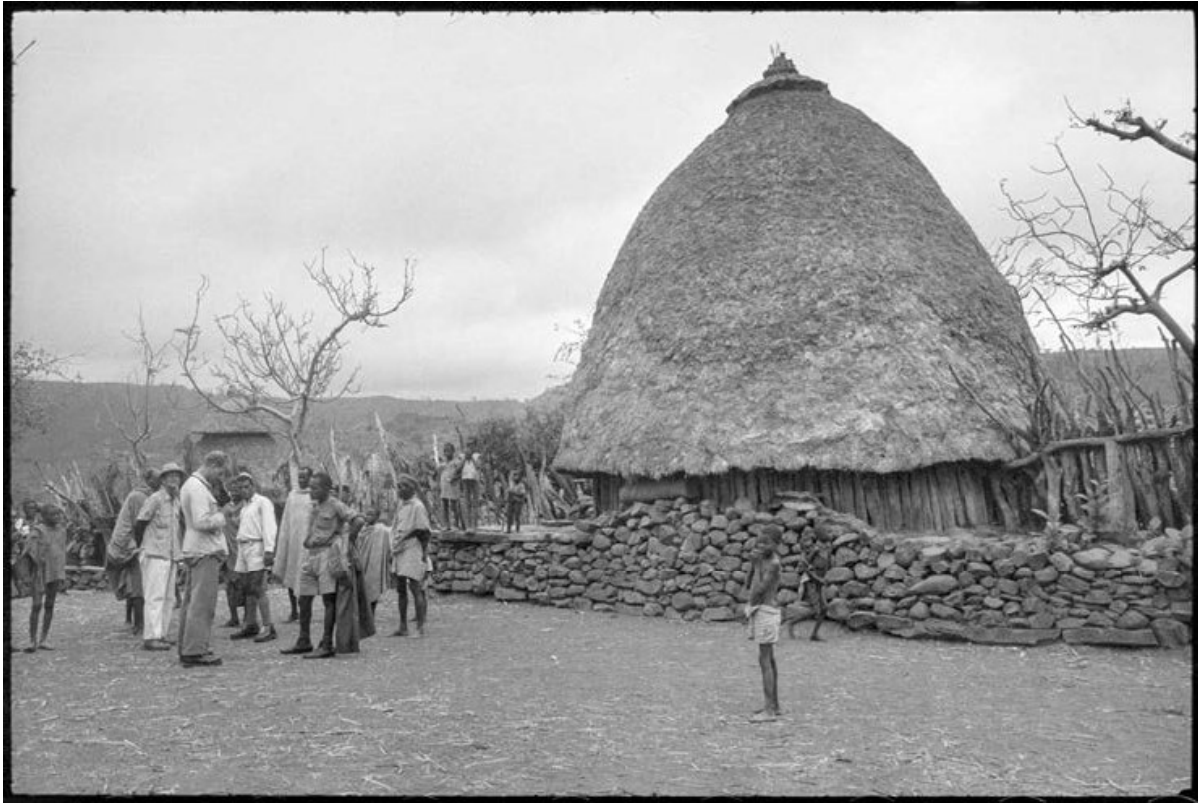


Image 2: Village Buso. The men's house at the mora place, where the expedition members stayed in 1934/35

The core members of the 1950–52 expedition, Jensen, Pauli and Haberland, also took part in the next Frobenius expedition to southern Ethiopia in 1954/55. Jensen and Pauli were by then a married couple. They were joined by the cultural geographer Wolfgang Kuls and the anthropologist Helmut Straube. During this expedition, their main focus was the peoples in the lake region of the Ethiopian Rift Valley. Again, the anthropologists went to study in Konso. The expedition reached Konso mostly by car from the north. The passable road ended in Bakaule, where they arrived on 19 March 1955, parked their car and left most of their supplies. They then split into two teams. While Jensen and Pauli went to Idigle from 27 March until 23 April, Haberland and Kuls carried out research in Dureti.⁷ The men's houses, of which every Konso town and many Konso villages have one, provided the expedition members with suitable and central accommodation.

⁷ Unpublished travel report (archival no. AEJ-61-001).

It is notable that Jensen stopped in Konso for at least one month during all three expeditions he led. In other words, he never went to Ethiopia without staying in Konso, which did not apply to any other region. This special fascination with Konso is evident in internal reports from the expeditions. In the travel report of the 1950–1952 expedition,⁸ Pauli writes for example that, after a long and tedious journey, the “association of Konso friends” had reached the “promised land”.

Konso must have seemed a ‘promised land’ from the researchers’ point of view, but also from a human perspective. Konso still stands out architecturally from its neighbouring regions, and agriculture is highly developed due to the construction of unique terraces and reservoirs. The social organization of the Konso into densely populated cities is equally unique to southern Ethiopia. In other regions, which consisted – even more so then than now – of sparsely populated hamlets – the researchers hardly encountered any people. In the men’s houses in Konso, however, the researchers were at the centre of constant social activity and informants abounded. And, while in other regions it was hardly possible to buy food for the researchers and their employees, there were numerous large markets in Konso where even cut meat was sold.

Timing and research partners

Two factors that were naturally central to the results of the research in Konso were the time the researchers spent on site and the people they were in contact with who gave them information. The first two expeditions spanned a period of change and upheaval in both Germany and Ethiopia. The first expedition happened before the Second World War; in 1950, the Frobenius Institute’s researchers were some of the first anthropologists able to go on a major research expedition after the war. They were funded by the local government and received generous donations in kind, which the hard-working researchers requested individually, from local industry (Jensen 1959:V–VI). In Ethiopia too there was great upheaval between the expeditions of the German researchers. The first Frobenius expedition took place shortly before the Italian occupation of Ethiopia, and rumours that soldiers were needed in the fight against the Italians had penetrated as far as Konso. In the 1950s, the brief Italian occupation was over and the imperial administration had already been restored. Some offices had been transferred to local dignitaries, but unpopular activities such as collecting taxes had been transferred to other local people.

Some of the local dignitaries were also the researchers’ main informants. Unfortunately, although Konso was Jensen’s most popular research location and the researchers visited three times, neither Jensen’s manuscript nor his notes or the pictures of the expedition tell us much about the researchers’ main informants.

⁸ Unpublished travel report (archival no. AEJ-41-001).

This may be because, as mentioned above, Konso was already densely populated at the time and the researchers were accommodated in men's houses in the central squares of the towns and thus did not depend on the mediation and knowledge of particular individuals as they did in other ethnic groups. Jensen suggests as much in his ethnography: "Given the density of the population and the open-mindedness of the Konso people, the informants were usually available in sufficient numbers and we were able to recruit them from all walks of life and ranks" (see page 46). However, the few key informants Jensen mentions are, typically of his way of working, elderly men. Galaida and Lamitta from Buso (see images 4 and 18) were his informants in 1935 and met and helped him during his subsequent visits to Konso. The only other informant he mentions by name is Girgitta from the village of Idigle (see image 17), an elder with a very broad knowledge who was a key informant of Jensen in the 1950s.



Image 3: Market scene. Front right, translator Bakalle Heye

The above-mentioned key informants of Jensen typify the way members of the Frobenius expeditions worked and thought in the 1950s: they were 'wise old men' (Dinslage and Thubauville 2017). Most of the informants held ritual or political offices, very few were ordinary people, and – despite his claim to have recruited from all walks of life – Jensen mentions no female informants at all by name. Jensen saw these old men as carriers of an older knowledge, and therefore not as individuals but as representatives of their culture (Bustorf 2017:147). This might also explain – but not justify – why their individual names are mentioned only

rarely in the following ethnography, and why these informants are not acknowledged appropriately, by today's standards, as partners in knowledge production. Another reason that may lie behind this shortcoming is that the expeditions followed a very tight research programme that aimed to document a then unknown land. Thus, the researchers did not stay for a long time in one place, and this inevitably led to relations with informants remaining superficial.



Image 4: In camp Godja with Galaida from Buso

In addition to informants, translators played a central role in the on-site collection of data. The anthropologists had a very basic command of Amharic and worked mostly with translators who could translate into English or French for them. Because of the linguistic diversity in southern Ethiopia, they often needed two translators, one to translate from the local languages into Amharic or Oromo, and one to translate from Amharic or Oromo into English or French. In 1934/35 the researchers had found a translator in Germany: Rorisa, an Oromo man of about thirty years old who spoke German and Danish (Jensen 1936:51) and seemed to be the perfect match. However, once in Konso, Rorisa started a revolt among the expedition workers and disappeared. During the first expedition, a second translator, Assafa, translated from Amharic to English. The translators who translated for the researchers in the 1950s were Bakalle Seyum and Bakalle Heye. Unfortunately, it is not apparent from which language and into which language the two translated.



Image 5: At work with the natives. In camp Godja

A place of many returns

As mentioned above, Konso was for the researchers a place of many returns. As Jensen himself describes at the beginning of the ethnography, the research team's visit in 1935 (Jensen 1936) was limited to the village of Buso. In 1951 and 1955, however, he and his colleagues had the opportunity to visit several villages. The group of researchers split up in order to gain a picture of Konso that was as differentiated as possible, by, for example, recording regional differences in the age grade system. Unfortunately, however, they were not able to visit the southeast of the country. Jensen regretted this missed opportunity, as he had heard that the age grade system there again occurred in a different variant.

In the 1930s, when the first expedition took place, the Frobenius Institute was not only concerned with social anthropology, but also with pre- and early history. Its researchers were aware of the descriptions made by the French archaeologists Francois Azaïs and Roger Chambard of the large number of monoliths to be found in southern Ethiopia (Azaïs and Chambard 1931). Between the 1930s and 1960s, megalithic monuments such as these were investigated eagerly all over the world and fitted into one of the major paradigms of anthropologists focusing on culture history (Braukämper 2015:210). Such anthropomorphic steles, not only megaliths, but also memorials made of wood such as the Konso *waakka*, exist in many parts of Ethiopia and mark the graves of dead heroes. They are

one element of the ‘meritorious complex’ (*Verdienstwesen*) that fascinated the researchers at the Frobenius Institute and became one of their main research focuses. According to their findings, the ‘meritorious complex’ consisted of three elements: honorary rewards for the killing of wild game or enemies; feasts of merit associated with such honorary positions; and lavish funeral ceremonies during which memorial monuments were erected (Braukämper 2015:205). In comparison with other places, the act of killing wild game or enemies was particularly important in southern Ethiopia (Haberland 1957:331). The described cultural complex was still in full bloom during the first Frobenius expeditions to southern Ethiopia in the 1930s and 1950s, but game hunting and traditional warfare were banned and increasingly controlled by the government shortly after, and the number of cattle needed for big feasts was dramatically reduced.

While their first trip to Konso in 1934/35 was focused on locating and documenting the *waakka* and understanding the age grade system of the Konso, the expeditions in 1951 and 1955 aimed to explore another of the Institute’s research interests: Jensen and his team hoped to reconstruct the cultural history of the ethnic groups of southern Ethiopia, as they understood them to be ‘fragments’ of more ancient cultures (*Altvölker*) that represented different epochs of cultural development (Bustorf 2015:185–186). The peoples east of the Woito, like the Konso with their intensive cultivation, were seen as belonging to a younger cultural stratum than the tribes living west.

With regard to their research interests and methods, the researchers around Jensen have to be seen as children of their time. In contrast to following generations, they followed a fundamental turn to the past. They tried to recover ‘what was’, while ignoring the presence of and not reporting on the changes that were happening, for example, through trade and religious conversion (Abbink 2017:172). Most of the ethnographies on southern Ethiopia published between the 1930s and 1960s by the Frobenius researchers (Jensen 1936, 1959; Haberland 1963; Straube 1963) reflect the survey-like research style of which the present ethnography is one example. They rarely spent more than one or two months in one location – still then mostly terra incognita – and tried to collect all the information they could find on the history, beliefs and livelihoods of the various ethnic groups. As there exist no other descriptions of this region from that time, their accounts are a cultural archive of great value, even though they contain occasionally superficial and patchy descriptions of the people of southern Ethiopia (Abbink 2017:171–172).

Despite visiting Konso three times, the researchers’ account of the Konso is also patchy. The time interval of 20 years between the first and the last expedition did, however, allow the researchers to make long-term observations about, for example, the succession of dignitaries or age groups. They were also able to observe how weavers and their products, still in high demand in Konso in the 1930s, had emigrated to more peripheral areas due to the arrival of imported prod-

ucts in Konso. Their repeated visits also allowed them to check their previous result, which led to the admission of some errors. For example, Jensen found that in 1935 he had overlooked the very central division of the Konso into status groups. Moreover, he had falsely described all the figures surrounding the hero in *waakka* groups as killed enemies and not, as would have been correct, mainly his wives. Finally, Jensen understood in the 1950s that many of the words that he had recorded as Konso words in 1935, among them precisely those relating to the age grade system, turned out to be Oromo words – probably the result of his translator having spoken to the Konso in Oromo.

Konso in the collections of the Frobenius Institute

The three expeditions to the Konso have left their mark in the archives of the Frobenius Institute: scientific legacies – mainly generated by Jensen, but also by Pauli and Haberland – include field diaries and notebooks with sketches, travel reports, letters from, within and to the field, scripts for lectures, hand-drawn maps, lists of collected ethnographic objects, lists of photographs taken and language notes (on vocabulary, grammar, and phonetics).

As the Frobenius Institute has always placed great emphasis on visual documentation⁹ and the collection of material culture, altogether 1,546 photographs and sketches, 70 film reels¹⁰ and 178 ethnographic objects (mostly clothing, and everyday objects) from the expeditions to Konso can be found in the Institute's various archives. A further 180 ethnographic objects from the Frobenius expeditions to Konso, including several *waakka*, can be found today in the Weltkulturenmuseum in Frankfurt (Thubauville 2012). Between 2014 and 2017 the Indexing and Digitizing of the Archival Material on Ethiopian Studies of the Frobenius Institute project, financed by the German Research Foundation, indexed and sustainably archived all written documents, selected materials and audio and video material from the Frobenius Institute's expeditions to Ethiopia with the aim of facilitating public access to them through an open-access database.¹¹

Notes on the editorial process

While many of the research results from the Frobenius expeditions to Ethiopia in the 1930s and 1950s were published, others – like the results from the second and third visit to Konso – remained unfinished in the archives of the Frobenius In-

⁹ For more information on the visual documentation of southern Ethiopia by members of the Frobenius Institute, see Thubauville 2019.

¹⁰ For a detailed description of the published and unpublished films on southern Ethiopia, see Thubauville 2017.

¹¹ See <https://www.frobenius-institut.de/sammlungen/datenbanken/aethiopien-datenbank>.

stitute. The published research include numerous scientific articles and four major ethnographies: *Im Lande des Gada* (Jensen 1936), *Altvölker Süd-Äthiopiens* (1959), *Westkuschitische Völker Süd-Äthiopiens* (Straube 1963) and *Galla Süd-Äthiopiens* (Haberland 1963). More ethnographies were planned and prepared but were not published for reasons that we can only speculate on today. Those four unpublished manuscripts comprised ethnographies of the Gedeo, Sidama and Konso written by Jensen and his team based on the expeditions to Ethiopia in the 1930s and 1950s, and an ethnography of the Wolaita drafted by Haberland following his research trips in 1954/56, 1967, 1970/71 and 1972/74. These ethnographies, all written in German, have so far only been accessible via the archives of the Frobenius Institute. To make them available to a wider circle, they are now being translated into English and published in the Southern Ethiopian Studies at the Frobenius Institute series. The first book in the series was *The Gedeo* (Jensen 2020). The ethnography presented here is the third publication in this series.

Jensen wrote up his research on the Konso in a relatively flawless 167-page typed manuscript.¹² In the following, the chapters and outline of that manuscript have been adopted exactly as the author intended in the original. Most of the footnotes are taken from the original manuscript; the exceptions are those footnotes explaining or referencing particular terms and obsolete expressions. Several changes, however, have been made in preparing to publish Jensen's manuscript. Most notably, the manuscript has been translated from German to English. Some repetitions have been omitted, and cumbersome sentences have been simplified. Nevertheless, I have stayed as close as possible to the text and have not changed, for example, the researchers' frequent use of subjective expressions. Due to the limited changes to the text, the ethnography is also a historical document showing how German anthropologists of the first half of the twentieth century worked, thought and wrote. Since the manuscript was in an uncorrected raw form, spellings have also been standardized. In doing so, I have adhered to the current spellings given by the Ethiopian government. Some of the terms used for the various ethnic groups at that time are now considered derogatory and no longer used. They have been replaced by the terms commonly used today. Value has been added to the manuscript by providing translations of local terms in brackets, including some of the photos taken by the researchers, and adding a glossary and index of names. The subtitles of the pictures are the original ones given by the researchers, corrected and/or amended if necessary by me.

I have not changed outdated or inappropriate theoretical terms such as 'caste', which were used by Jensen and his successor Haberland to describe the social stratification in many southern Ethiopian societies. Nor have I added references to more current debates on such topics. In addition, adding references to more current research among the Konso would have been beyond the scope of this project.

¹² Archival no. EH-62.

Even though much research has been done in Konso since the Frobenius expeditions by international and Ethiopian researchers, I will leave it up to others to compare their findings.

A gap in the report of Ethiopian history

Finally, one might ask why are we publishing Jensen's ethnographic account of the Konso now, several decades after his death and more than six decades after his research took place. The answer lies in the fact that the ethnographic accounts of the Frobenius Institute members from the mid-1930s (Jensen 1936) offer the first extensive ethnographic descriptions of the Konso, even though, at one month's duration, their visit to Konso seems rather short by today's standards. The visits of the Frobenius researchers in the 1950s allowed them to verify and correct some of their earlier observations and to make observations over a longer period. Since the Frobenius expedition to the area, many other researchers have studied the Konso (Amborn 1990; Hallpike 1972; Kimura 2004 Nowack 1954; Poissonnier 2009; Watson 1998, 2009), with more and more Ethiopians among them in the last decades (Awoke 2010; Kansite 2017, 2018; Lakew 1998; Meron 2012; Metasebia 2001; Ongaye 2013; Shako 1994, 2004; Wondu 2011), especially since the expansion in the number of universities in Ethiopia since the turn of the millennium. For the Ethiopian researchers studying Konso today, historical data stored abroad, such as that presented here, represents an invaluable resource that should be translated into English and made available to them. This translation and edition of Jensen's ethnographic account of the Konso can therefore be considered a small contribution toward returning to the peoples of southern Ethiopia elements of their identity and history that are not part of public accounts of Ethiopian history (Abbink 2017:172–173).

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The Konso

by Adolf Ellegard Jensen

Country and its people

The Konso call themselves Karata. In pre-Amharic times they are said to have been called so by the Borana, while the Burdji still prefer this name today. The Konso call the squirrel, which is called *kara* by the Tsamako and is the mythical hero there, *karata*. It is possible or even likely that the name of the people is related to this animal name. However, we have not investigated this. Several peoples that are neighbours of the Konso have a clan called Karati. This probably expresses that this clan originated in Konso. There may also be a connection with the word *xara*, the word for gate or door. One of the sacred places is called *xara* Hirle, which means the gate of Hirle, the highest priest of the Hirba tribe half in the *xelta* (age grade) system. But the gate is a holy place in this whole area, and plays a role in many sacrifices. A neighbouring people of the Konso, the Gora, are also said to call themselves Karkare, which is also related to the word for gate (*xara*). However, I prefer the naturalized name and will therefore only use the name Konso in this publication, because that is what most neighbours call them.

The tribal territory of the Konso is bordered by the Sagan River to the east and south, and the Woito River to the west. There is no such clear natural boundary in the north, so only its approximate course could be determined and entered on the map. The relatively large, for a tribe, residential area includes mountainous and lowland areas, which are used for grazing and, to a lesser extent, for field cultivation when water conditions are favourable. Closed settlements, villages that often give the impression of urban complexes, only exist in the mountainous regions, while in the lowlands there are only very small hamlets, so-called *fora* villages, individual farms or even only working huts. Each of the homesteads situated in the lowlands, in the so-called *fora*, is assigned to a specific village in the mountainous area, and the inhabitants own accommodation in the village to which they belong.

We got to know the country from its western to its eastern border, because we came to the country from the west in 1951, when – after our work with the Banna, Hammar and Tsamako – we joined the Konso at last. In 1955, during our stay with the Konso, Helmut Straube came to us from Burdji, i.e. from the east. From north to south, we got to know it only on the new highway, another highway from Bakaule to Fasha leads through the southwest of the country.

At the Woito, the Konso only maintain a few fields with artificial irrigation from the river, apparently using the same technique as the Tsamako. The Konso call the Woito, Dulai or Tulai. It flows into Chew Bahir (280 m above sea level). From here, i.e. from the west, it is just under a four-hour drive through uninhabited and undeveloped steppe to the first fields and cattle troughs of the Konso, where the river plain rises very gradually to finally merge into the foothills of the Konso mountains. Then you hike for another four hours to the Dalbena River, passing through an area where the inhabitants of the southwestern Konso district of Kolmi have their fields and grazing grounds.



Image 1: View from the heights above Duro to the Dalbena valley

Apart from two participants of our expedition, Kuls and Haberland, who went on an excursion to Kolmi, I only had a few men from there to provide information when I was in Fasha. Their evidence was sketchy. The announcement that Kolmi was actually the *fora*, the pastureland, of Fasha and had originally had no villages of its own was important. According to them, the pastureland (like all *fora* of the Konso) was not divided up individually but belonged to everyone – probably to each individual village and then perhaps divided up among the different clans.

Beyond the Dalbena, where we crossed the river (1,290 m above sea level), after an ascent of about 100–200 m, you reach a fertile highland and thus the actual residential area of the Konso. The northwestern part of this mountainous region

consists mainly of an elongated plateau (about 1,300–1,400 m high), interrupted only by isolated, very heavily eroded terrain that can no longer be used at all. Extensive millet fields and relatively few settlements, which only rarely take on the character of closed villages, give the country its character here. To the south and east, this plain changes into a hilly, mountainous area, reaching heights of over 1,800 m. Here, almost every slope is covered with carefully laid out terraces and stately villages, where a myriad of huts huddled together, are scattered across the mountains and slopes.



Image 2: Terraces near Gandima village

Helmut Straube describes the eastern part of the Konso country as follows:

The bottom of the Sagan Valley is located where it is crossed by the Burdji-Bakaule caravan route, at an altitude of about 850 m. The Sagan is about 5–10 m wide in the dry season and can be crossed without difficulty. Several small volcanic cones rise in the middle of the valley floor. The river course is lined by a dense gallery forest strip, which is partially marshy and crossed by water channels.

The gallery forest is followed by a sparse savannah that extends to the foot of the Burdji mountain range in the east and to the gentle ridges of the hills in front of the Konso mountain range in the west. This hilly area includes wide, flat areas that, as bulges in the valley floor, reach to the foot of the Konso mountains and have been fully cultivated; such is the Yanta plain, which is located on the caravan route to Bakaule. The entire extent of this area is covered by a network

of small square or rectangular fields, usually not exceeding five square metres, which are bordered by low earth walls. This peculiar field shape can be seen both in the Kassala area and among the Nuba in Kordofan. Nadel (1947:22) rightly sees in these 'box fields', which prevent the sparse precipitation from flowing off, a transfer of the terrace principle to flat fields. The Konso grow sorghum millet and cotton in the fields of the Yanta plain. Alongside a few large shade trees, there are man-high platforms in the fields, which are made of trunks and strong branches and on which numerous bee tubes lie. The platforms are also used to stack the harvested millet.



Image 3: 'Box fields' near Fasha village

The ascent to the Konso mountain range takes place via a wide, dry riverbed, which leads up into the mountains in endless meanders. The mountain slopes are covered with a dense, dry bush forest, in which some large Konso cattle pens lie. At a height of about 1,150 m on a slope, there are two walled well shafts, whose waters once supplied the long-abandoned irrigation terraces that run along the slopes of the riverbed.

The lower limit of the cultivated land is at an altitude of between 1,100 and 1,200 m. The caravan trail leads over several hillsides to a slightly undulating plateau on which the village of Bakaule lies. The slopes are covered by extensive terraces. The paths are bordered by high, layered stone walls. Water reservoirs and reservoirs carved into the rock, whose layered stone walls are covered with earth, supply the terraces with the necessary sprinkling water during the dry season.

Wastelands covered with bush vegetation are very rarely seen above the 1,200 m line in the cultural landscape.



Image 4: The dam (Garmoti, in the fora east of Idigle)

In the south, the terraced fields reach close to the Sagan and are only occasionally separated from it by the dense bush that marks the river plain. The Sagan is 800 m high at the place where the road passes over it. It is a small stream, only about 20–30 m wide, which is only insurmountable during the rainy season, when it floods many ditches and rivulets in the Borana steppe to the south. In the dry season it usually carries no water at all.

This is also supposed to have been the hunting ground of small hordes of hunters, who the Konso called Oroda. The Konso themselves compared these hordes with the Wayyoo among the Borana. The Oroda were armed only with bow and arrow. To mark their complete otherness, it was pointed out that they ate ‘everything’, elephants and even turtles. They are said to have left only after the arrival of the Amhara and, supposedly, nobody knows where they have retreated to. In Konso, there is a constellation called *oroda* (archer). It is located near Orion, which is called elephant (*arpa*) by the Konso.

The peoples east of the Woito undoubtedly represent a younger cultural stratum than the tribes living west and south of Ari, which are treated in Volume I of these expedition publications (Jensen 1959). The differences with the Banna and Hammar living in the west are easily seen if one – like us on the first trip – travels from the west to reach the area of the Konso. The intensive field cultivation, the

slopes covered with neatly built stone terraces, the large villages, mostly enclosed by walls, from which the massive roofs of the men's houses and the high poles erected in the meeting places stand out, the groups of stelae made of wood and stone along the paths – all this stands out strikingly from the external picture presented by the cultures west of the Woito, and already indicates that here we are confronted with a much more advanced culture with very characteristic features of its own.

Konso land feeds a population that is surprisingly large for a relatively limited area. This is made possible partly by the construction of terraces, which allows the use of the entire mountain slopes, and partly by the important role of weaving. The weavers, who make up about one tenth to one fifth of the total population, earn their livelihood almost exclusively from their craft and do not engage in either agriculture or cattle breeding. They stand out as an endogamous caste, called *xauda*, from the actual Konso, the so-called *ädenta*, who have set up all the land under them. All peoples south and west of the Konso do not know about weaving or have introduced it only very recently. As a result, there is a wide market for Konso weaving products that is reflected in unmistakable signs of prosperity in Konso: on the one hand, the frequency of the markets; and, on the other hand, the relatively large number of cattle slaughtered at the markets, most of which came from Borana and for whose meat the weavers were almost exclusively the buyers. Nowhere was the price for each type of grain as high as in the markets in Konso.

This was true at least for our first visit to Konso in 1951. When we were there again in 1955, we found it changed in many ways. The weavers in particular were much worse off, because sales of their fabrics had fallen significantly as a result of competition from foreign textile imports. They had left the country in large numbers, especially from the village of Godja, and had settled in Borana, Burdji and elsewhere. It is possible that this emigration of weavers has become stronger in recent years, but we ourselves (1951) could see the beginning of this movement among the Tsamako, Maale, etc., since we encountered Konso weavers in these areas even then. On the one hand, this emigration of Konso weavers is of course caused or at least favoured by the *pax abessinica*, which has occurred very slowly since the turn of the century. For example, when we were present in 1934/35, it had no influence on the individual tribesmen, who only very rarely dared to leave their own tribal territory. On the other hand, it is due to economic circumstances. The more Konso becomes open to fabrics of European origin, the more Konso weavers are trying to open up areas not yet reached by European markets. In the long term, this migration movement is of course hopeless. For the time being, however, it still offers the advantage that the weavers, who – as a *xauda* caste – do not have the prospect of acquiring land in the Konso country, have the possibility of switching to farming among the other tribes, where contempt for the weaving caste is unknown.



Image 5: Village complex. View from the eastern end of the village Godja to the 'lower village'. In the background on the right the holy grove

The market system is very developed and plays a major role in Konso's thinking. There are four large markets, in Bakaule, Burkedaya-Dokattu, Duro and Fasha. From the central villages – like Godja, where we had a camp – all four markets are visited, and on market days the villages are almost empty. Also at the market in Bakaule, we met many friends from Mattara and Arfaide, who came on pilgrimage from northwest Konso to the easternmost market town.

The market takes place today, after the Amhara conquest, on certain days of the Amharic seven-day week. However, there was still a clear reminder that in the past markets were held every four days, as is still the case in Sidama and Gedeo.

Apart from these four markets, which are there for the whole country, most villages have a small market, which is held only for the village so to speak. In Idigle, for example, we had such a small market, which was held on a square between Idigle and Lehaidi. The squares reserved for the market did not have the layout of the megalithic meeting places, which were clearly separated as squares by a wall or border, usually built of stone, and were also considerably smaller than the official marketplaces.

In these marketplaces, the weavers offered their products for sale and found buyers not only among the Konso but also among merchants, most of whom do not belong to any particular tribe but move from market to market with their mules,



Image 6: Poqalla homestead at the entrance of Godja. Dwelling hut and olahitta pile bundle

offering for sale what is not produced in this country and yet is in demand and buying the goods that are produced here and are cheaper than elsewhere.

Not only weavers but also the farmers, the *ädenta*, offered their crops here – almost exclusively through the women. Metal cups act as a kind of calibration system and are used as the smallest unit of measurement in the sale of millet and other fruits. The market police take particular care to ensure that this calibration is not circumvented by the use of pressed-in cups, for example, whose dents could be protected and hidden by a hand placed over them. The buyer takes particular care that the measurement is taken with a mountain towered as high as possible above it.



Image 7: Market scene. In Dokattu

Besides crops, livestock was also traded at the market, which naturally kept the men busy. For a calabash full of salt, the Borana received the equivalent of one calabash of coffee beans with skin or one calabash full of wheat or millet flour or three calabashes full of unground millet. Another measure on the Konso markets was a basket-like container made of stiff cowhide, called *ogole*, which could hold about twice as much as the usual calabashes on the market (see image below). When making it, earth is poured into the fresh, still soft coat, giving it the shape it will retain when the coat has become completely stiff. For one ox, the Borana received up to fifteen *ogole* of coffee.

In a special corner of the market were gathered the blacksmiths, who form a social caste for themselves and marry only among themselves. It is one of the most regrettable facts of both expeditions that, despite our best efforts, we failed to come into closer contact with this caste, which seems to be the most despised but is, in reality, surrounded by considerable shyness. The main reasons for this are the negligible number of blacksmiths we encountered throughout northeast Africa and the frequent relocation of their residence, which gives their life a nomadic touch. Occasional discussions with blacksmiths were of course fruitless in view of the special nature of their social position. All that remains here is the Konso's communication – which is quite similar to that of the other tribes of this area – that the blacksmiths are the most shunned of all the separate castes (cf. Jensen 1959:58 ff).



Image 8: Leather containers (ogole)

Regular visitors to the market include the potters, who live in two villages in the Fasha district. They are strangers in Konso land and are said to speak their own language even today. The clay roof tops that you see so much in Konso come, without exception, from neighbouring Gauwada.

I visited the Konso once before, in 1935, and put down the picture won at that time in the book *In the Land of Gada* (Jensen 1936). At that time, we based our communications merely on a visit to the village of Buso.

This time we have been able to arrange our stay on a much broader basis, so that the presentation from that time can be considerably expanded and enriched by many individual features, and also corrected in places. For example, the *xelta* (age grade) system proved to vary greatly in the different Konso districts. Fortunately, however, the impression arose that it was a lucky star that led us to Buso of all places, because during both visits, the spiritual life of the Konso seemed to me to have particularly lively and distinct forms in this village.

Absolutely nothing reliable could be learned about the population figures in Konso. A certain clue may result from calculations we made on the basis of the map sketch that Eike Haberland was able to take and check again and again on his many journeys through the country. If we take a village like Idigle, about 150 farmsteads are still inhabited at the time of our presence and about 130 plots of land can be identified that were once farmsteads.

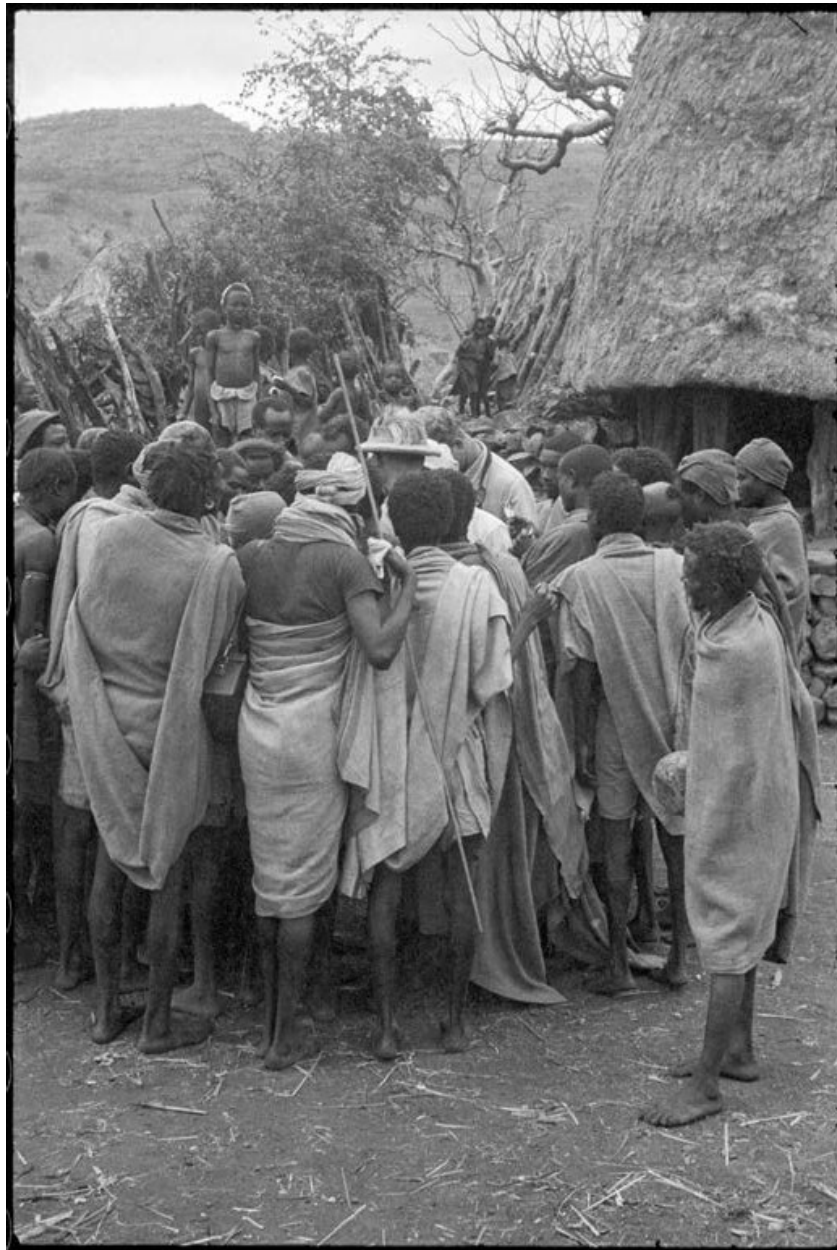


Image 9: The people of Buso look at the photos taken in their village in 1935

According to information we received, the owners now live near their fields, which are often very far away, or in the pastures. The ratio of inhabited and uninhabited land may be even less favourable in villages, according to the indigenous people. Some claimed that only one third to one fourth of the actual number of inhabitants still lived in the village and that all the others had been resettled but still belonged to the village. If we assume the number of inhabitants of a farmstead to be five on average, with six to eight huts in the farmstead, a number that is probably too low or at the lower limit, we arrive at 750 inhabitants who still live in the village today and 650 more who belong to the village and are buried in or near the village on death. Beyond the properties of these 1,400 inhabitants of Idigle, there are other properties within the walls of the village, about which it was only known that

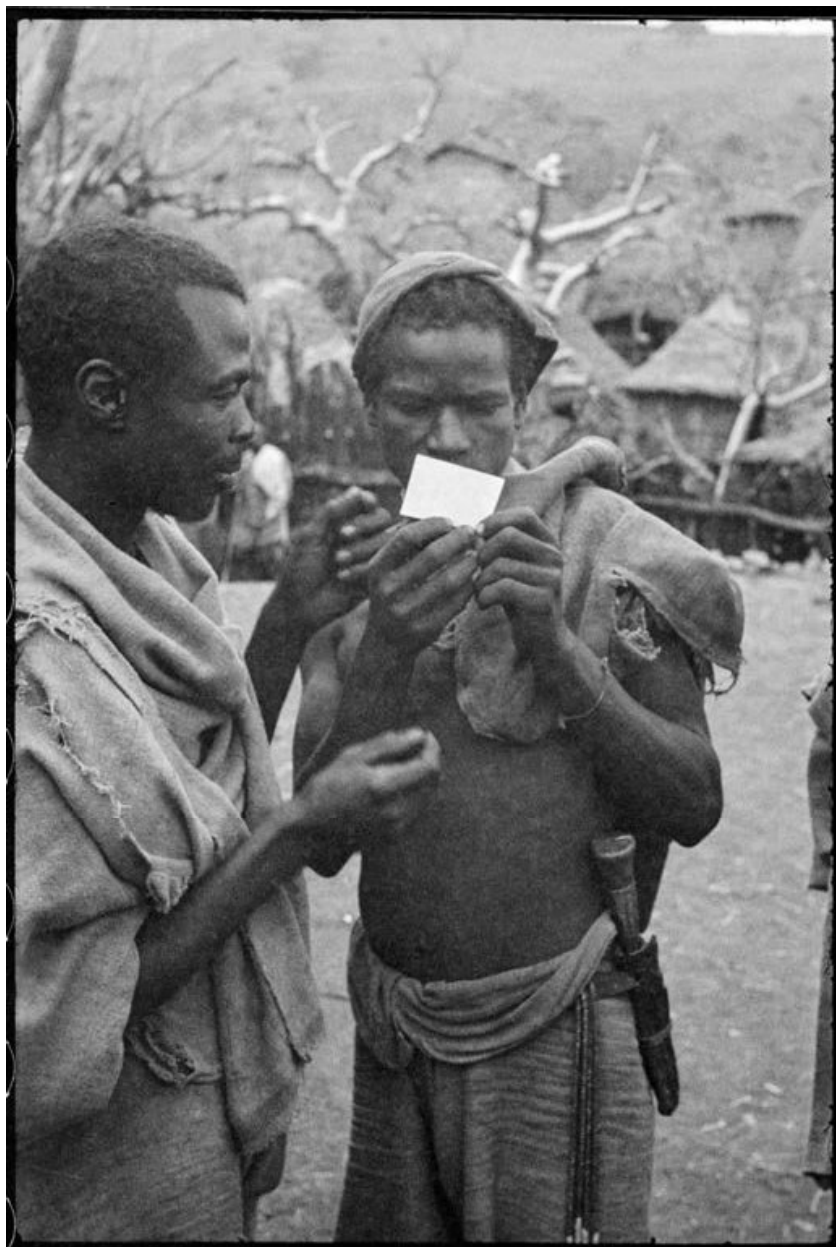


Image 10: The people of Buso look at the photos taken in their village in 1935

the inhabitants had already emigrated before the arrival of the Amhara, without it being possible to say to whom the properties belonged or who had rights over them or why the village wall had been extended further than was necessary according to the number of inhabitants.

If we assume – as we did in Idigle – about 1,400 inhabitants for each village, we get about 63,000 inhabitants from about 45 villages. *Fitaurari*¹³ Tadessa, the Amharic governor of Konso, estimated this number to be much higher. However, we remain in the dark as to what intentions guided him or on the basis of what documents he came to his number of 100–200,000.

¹³ Amharic military title; an official below the *dejasmach*.

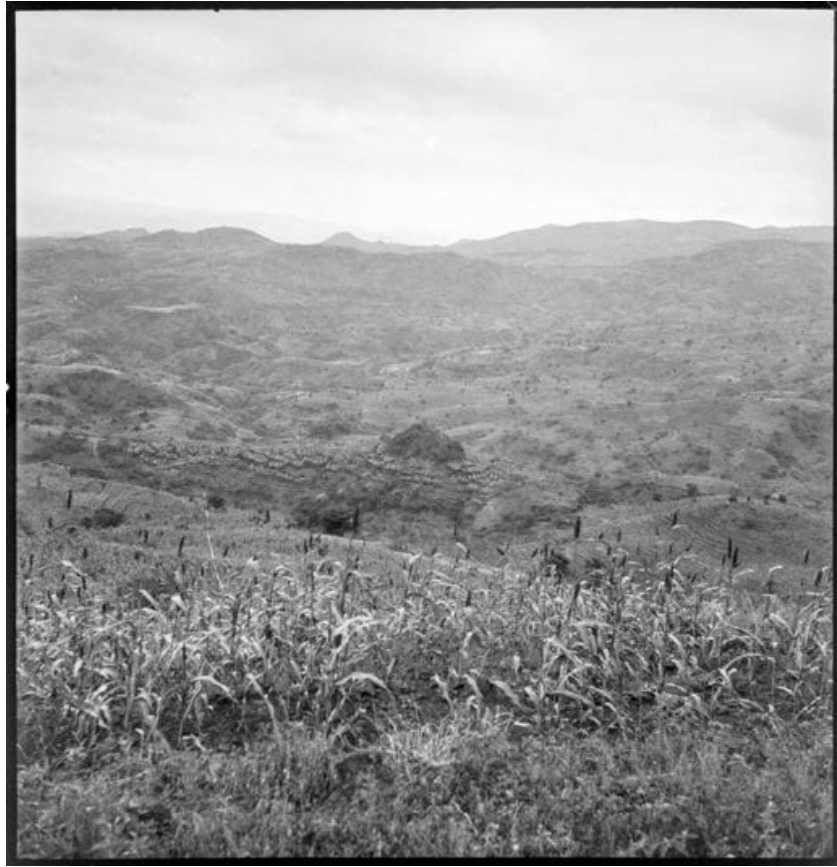


Image 11: View from Bammalle Hill to Buso

If you take the eighteen villages of northeast Konso alone, and estimate the size of the inhabited area to be about 130 km², there are about 200 inhabitants per square kilometre. For comparison, it should be remembered that in 1955 the county Schleswig-Holstein (excluding the urban districts) had a population of 107 people per square kilometre. Now it is quite certain that northeast Konso is the most densely populated area. Northwest Konso, for example, which stretches from the Dalbena to the Garaliso River and is a relatively flat area (1,300–1,500 m above sea level) with huge fields, mostly cultivated with the plough, which has been recently taken over by the Amhara, is much more sparsely populated by all appearances, as is evident from the fact that there are only four villages there. Only in this area have we seen the cultivation of teff – the main food of the Amhara – next to the millet species known by the Konso. Judging by the size of the fields, a considerable surplus of grain must be available for exchange for other goods.

The Amhara administration of the Konso land has its seat in Bakaule, the same place where we arrived in Konso in 1935. At that time the administration was still in fascist hands. However, the fact that the Yavello–Gidole road, built by the Italians, passes through Bakaule has now made this place more suitable. It is 24 km by road from the bridge over the Sagan to the village of Bakaule. On the maps, another road often connects Bakaule with Hammar. Although, as we were able to convince ourselves, it is no longer usable beyond Konso land, it fortunately



Image 12: A small part of the village Idigle

proved to be passable as far as Arfaide in west Konso, albeit with some difficulty. Another road from Bakaule to Fasha was also in good condition, so that we were able to travel in Konso by truck.

The governor of Konso, *fitaurari* Tadessa, lives two kilometres from Bakaule near the market town of Burkedaya. He is an Amharized Oromo, grew up in Konso land, and has extensive private estates in Gauwada. The Fasha district has its own district head – in our time *grazmach*¹⁴ Abebbe – who is subordinate to *fitaurari* Tadessa, who in turn is subordinate to the sub-governor, who is subordinate to the provincial governor of Gamo-Gofa in Gidole.¹⁵

The Amharic administration has divided the entire Konso area into two districts: a northern one, for which it recognizes a high priest of the Konso named Kalla, who has been given the title *kanjasmach*¹⁶; and a southern one, for which it also has a native tribal leader named Qufa. However, similar to Tsamako, in the northern district, instead of Kalla, there was a deputy in charge of matters concerning the Amhara, such as the collection of taxes and the provision of labour. This was a member of the weaver caste named Lukama, who the Amhara, supposedly at Kalla's suggestion, had made a member. He was a loudmouthed redneck

¹⁴ A military title used by district administrators and the like during the imperial regime.

¹⁵ The seat of the provincial governor is said to have been moved back to Chenchä today, where it was already in 1935.

¹⁶ Amharic military title; an official below the *fitaurari*.

who could not do enough to brag about the greatness of his dominion. Besides, he was usually drunk, sharing a weakness of most of his fellow tribesmen, who all liked to drink millet beer often.

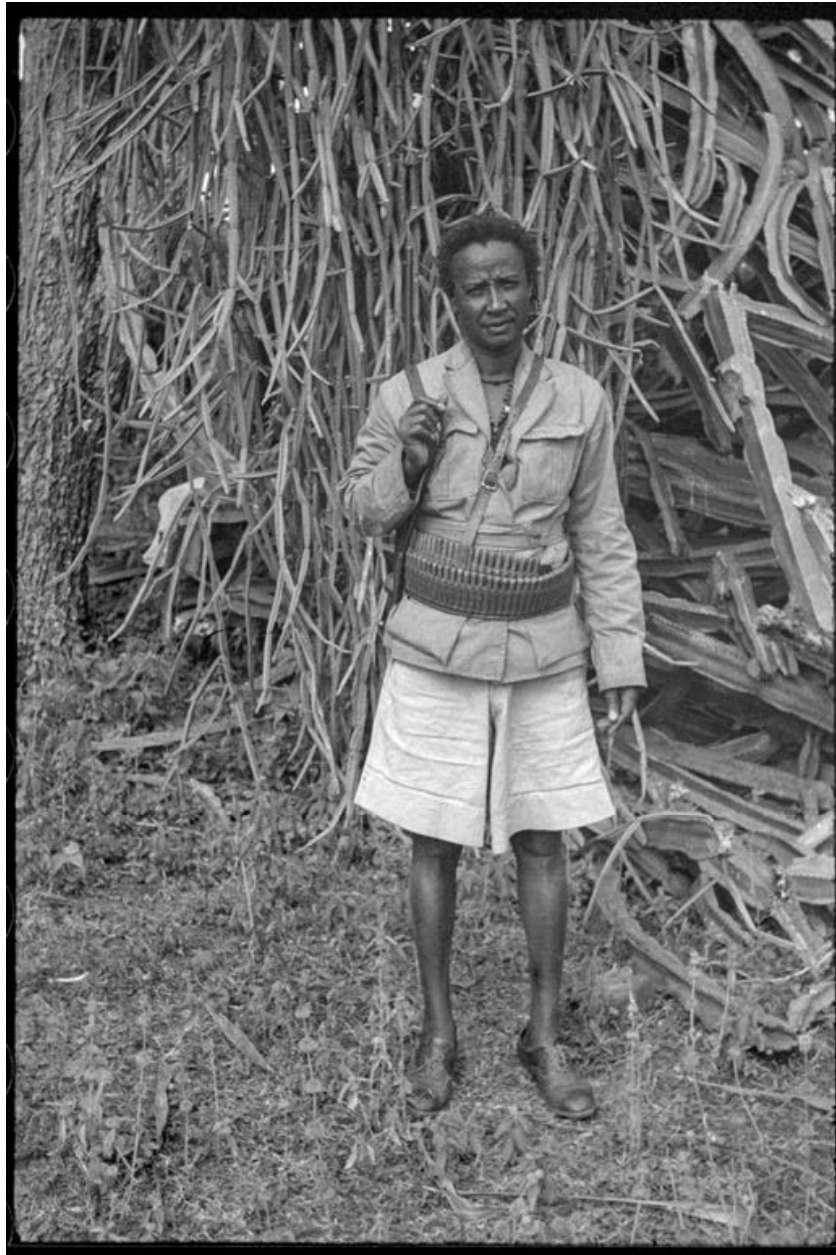


Image 13: Lukama, a xauda who holds an unpleasant office

It was obvious that Kalla had passed this unpleasant office on to an unpleasant fellow because the taxes were not coming in according to regulations. As a result, during our stay in 1951, Lukama was imprisoned in Bakaule for almost the entire time and was only occasionally released at short notice for urgent official duties. However, since he was allowed to move freely within Bakaule, he spent his time in the pubs and as a result was only found there in a tipsy state.

These pubs were, of course, also only fleetingly built huts, in which, as the highest comfort, there were only very wobbly benches and even wobblier tables. The owners or leaseholders of these establishments, where mead and beer were served, were mostly Somali or Arabs, who also provided the main contingent of chauffeurs driving the heavy trucks, along with a few Italians. The Somali people in particular are praised for sometimes being able to make even the oldest and most ruined truck drive again. Compared to 1935, a completely changed picture. At that time the motor roads were not as well developed as later during Italian rule, and the only foreign influence was represented exclusively by Armenians and Greeks, who, as in other towns, maintained small shops, of course to a much lesser extent than today.

Tax matters had just entered a new stage during our time there, which excited the entire population. The discussions on taxes therefore exceeded in duration and intensity anything we had had to endure from other peoples in this respect. The Amhara had started to levy the annual tax of 26.50 Ethiopian dollars (in our time about 48 DM) not only from the *pater familias*, but from every married man. As a result, most village chiefs were in arrears with their taxes and were also imprisoned in Bakaule.

The individual villages were mostly still ruled by the traditional village chiefs, i.e. by the descendants of the village founders, who were also the ceremonial owners of the respective village shrines. Only in Mattara in northwest Konso, which made a rather run-down impression over all, was a weaver – *grazmach* Shola, the older brother of Lukama – appointed chief by the Amhara.

To our surprise, the Konso with whom we first had a conversation (in 1951) – in the village of Mattara – claimed that they were all Christians today. At the request of the emperor, the whole people collectively converted to Amharic Christianity. In fact, the Amhara in the conquered provinces recently have a tendency to count the more advanced peoples as Ethiopian Christians.

The Gidole were also Christians in this sense. This turn of events occurred after the reconquest and after the reinstatement of Haile Selassie. In 1935, these peoples would not have been considered worthy of such alignment with the Amhara. But the whole action has a local character and goes back to the activity of the respective governors, who – as mostly very strict Christians – perhaps see in this a suitable countermeasure to the nascent influence of the occidental missions, because the missions can be forbidden from doing their work of conversion among Amharic (Coptic) Christians, while their activities as teachers and especially their medical help are still appreciated. Such an arrangement existed, at least in certain areas, for the Sudan Interior Mission.

But there was nothing to be noticed of this Christianity among the Konso. In the vicinity of the three Amhara sites, which have a Coptic church, it is said to be customary for the Konso to bury their dead in the local cemetery. In addition, Konso were occasionally seen wearing the blue necklace, the hallmark of the Cop-

tic Christians. Apart from that, however, most of the Konso knew nothing at all about the fact that they were Christians. In Mattara, we also received information several times that they had converted to Christianity at that time, but since it was impossible for them to keep the fasting periods, they had given it up again.

During our renewed visit in 1955 a fundamental change had taken place. In the battle over tax, the Konso had been unsuccessful. All they had achieved was that the whole country was surveyed and then they were to pay their taxes according to the size of the land property, as in Sidama or Gedeo. During our second time in the village of Idigle, the Land Survey Commission was busy surveying the property of this village. But in the struggle for taxes, the Konso had fallen for the idea of repealing Christianization by invoking freedom of conscience; this freedom had been guaranteed by Emperor Haile Selassie. As a result, the women again wore the rich glass bead jewellery that they had had to discard as a result of Christianization.

One evening, we experienced a typical resurgence of the ancient state of hostility and the constant wars between the individual tribes in Idigle when the Konso were mobilized against the Borana because they had carried out a cattle robbery against the Konso. The excitement among the conscripted youth was very great and was further fuelled by the brother of the village chief. They left that very night to pursue the Borana. For about three days, this warrior team constantly came and went, without us being able to ask them whether they had met with the enemy, whether other villages had taken part in the campaign, whether the cattle had been recaptured or whether there had been losses on the side of the Konso. They surrounded all this with great mystery.

They probably knew why they surrounded this war campaign, which they had undertaken on their own initiative, with so much secrecy. Soon after, the Amhara and the governor appeared in the village and stayed for over a week to investigate the matter. Two Borana were supposed to have died at the meeting. To make the mysterious Konso talk, the Amhara first locked up all the women of the village, probably assuming that the men would be more compliant during interrogations without proper nutrition. But we have not been able to discover the real background of this raid from the Konso or the Amhara. The excitement of the entire population, which lasted for more than fourteen days, was only the main disturbance to our work.

In total, we have worked at five different places (see map below) of the Konso country, each time for several weeks: in northwest Konso, in Mattara (1951) and, from there, in two further places – Arfaide and Duro; in northeast Konso, in Godja (1951), at the foot of the mountain on whose summit lives *kanjazmach* Kalla, the king of the north Konso, in Idigle (1955) and in Olanta (1955); and finally, in the southwest of the country, in Fasha (1951). Unfortunately, we were not able to visit the southeast of the country, which is under the authority of the chief Abba Roba, although the importance of such a visit is already evident from the fact that the



Image 15: The present king, Kalla

indigenous peoples only lasts as long as the old man is mentally fit. He may be as physically handicapped as he wishes, but if he is mentally beyond a certain limit, his ranting will only be acknowledged by the younger people with a good-natured laugh. But Girgitta was still spiritually on the good side of that border. Once a young man beat his wife in front of his house in a very crude way. The brute was beside himself with rage. He dragged her by the arms between the beatings, which – as I understood only later – had the purpose of preventing her from escaping over the threshold, because inside he would not have been able to continue the beating without the intervention of all the men standing around.¹⁵

¹⁵ Likewise, it is the other way round when the dispute has started in the house. If the woman can

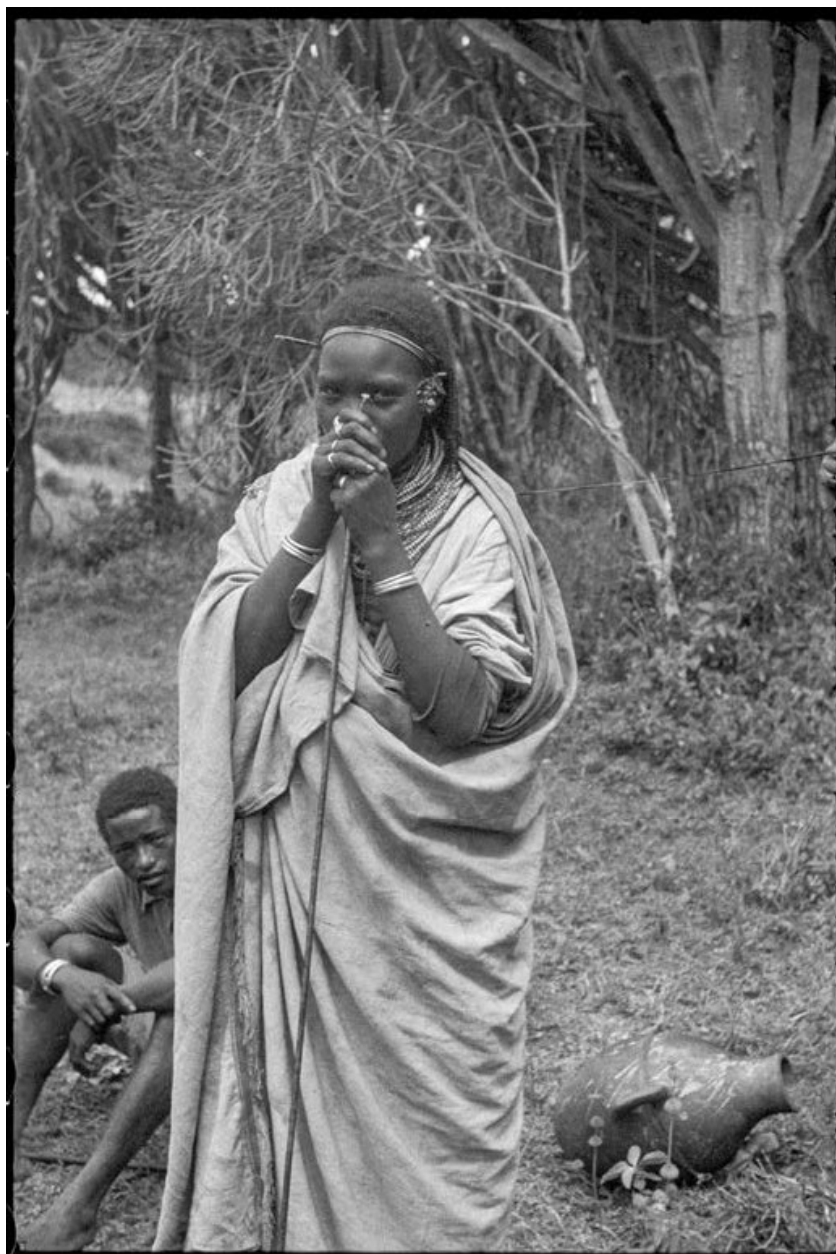


Image 16: The 'queen' of the Konso. The wife of Kalla

Bisho [i.e. Girgitta's father] interfered nevertheless and tried to bring the man to his senses by hitting his calves with a small crop, which the man could hardly feel, until he could no longer overlook it. After some hesitation, he let go of the woman. After some time, I met the angry man again in the prison of Bakaule.¹⁶ He had been abandoned by his wife and was so unpopular with the neighbours that nobody brought him anything to eat. According to Ethiopian law, however,

escape over the threshold to the outside, then it also applies that the man cannot continue the beating.

¹⁶ One must not imagine the prison in our image. It was simply a particularly large straw hut leaning against the police station, from which the prisoners were let out during the day, naturally under the guard of a policeman.

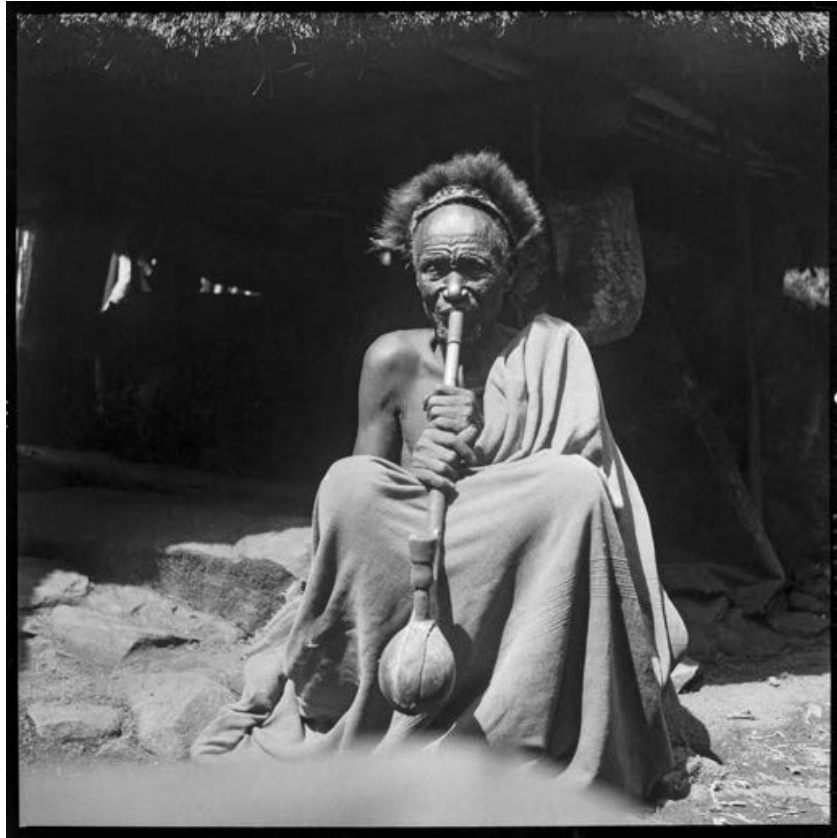


Image 17: Main informant, Girgitta

detainees must be fed by their relatives. Again to my astonishment, it was Girgitta who brought him food with his own hands. Possibly, he had to do this as the mayor of the part of the village to which he belonged. But I saw in it more the goodness of the old man, who could certainly have got someone else to do it for him.

I would also like to mention two people from Buso who were also very familiar with the tribal institutions and who were my informants as early as 1935: Galaida and Lamitta. The mutual joy of seeing each other again created a kind of trusting relationship that made working with these two intelligent men particularly pleasant. At the same time, their repeated visits to our camp offered the otherwise rare opportunity to check the information received at that time and to correct errors that had crept in during those initial investigations. For example, several of the words I had recorded as Konso words at the time, among them precisely those relating to the *xelta* (age grade) establishment, turned out to be Oromo words.

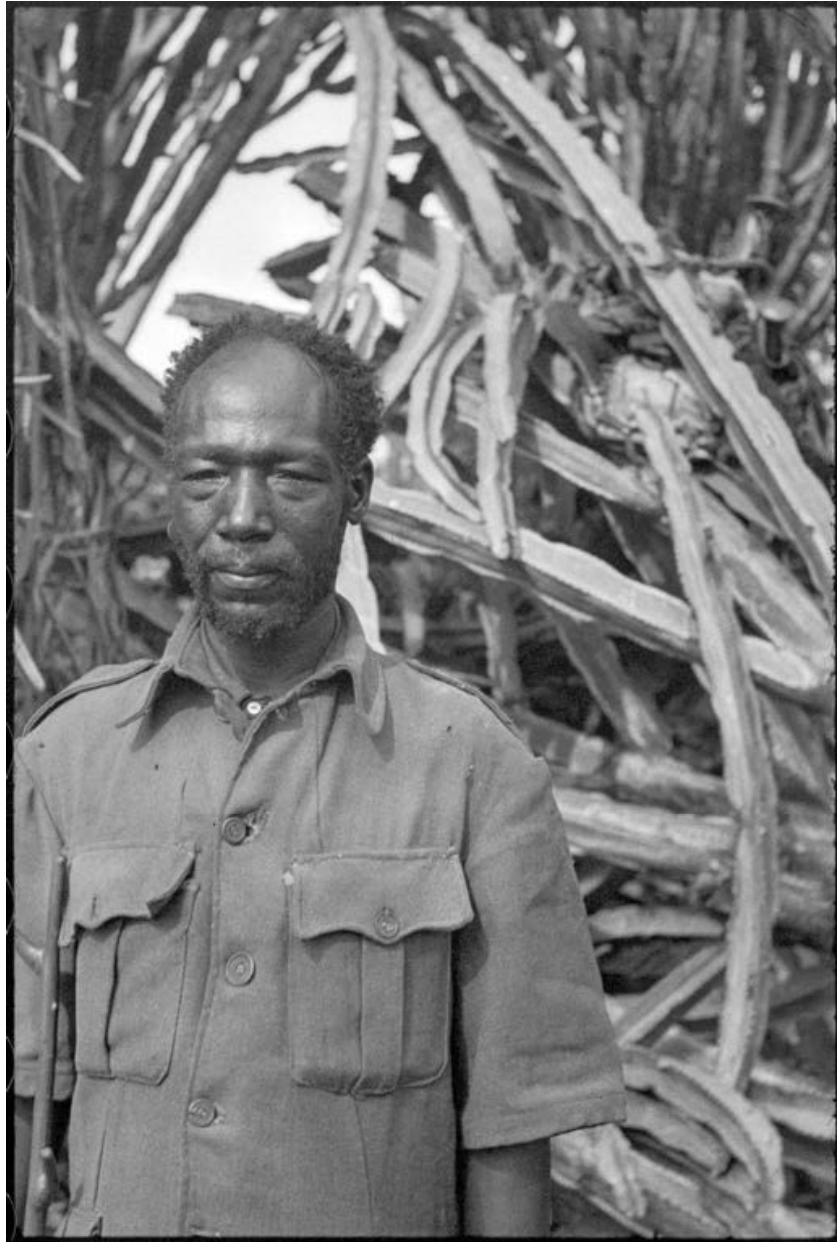


Image 18: Lamitta, an informant of Jensen from the village Buso. Already an informant in 1934/1935

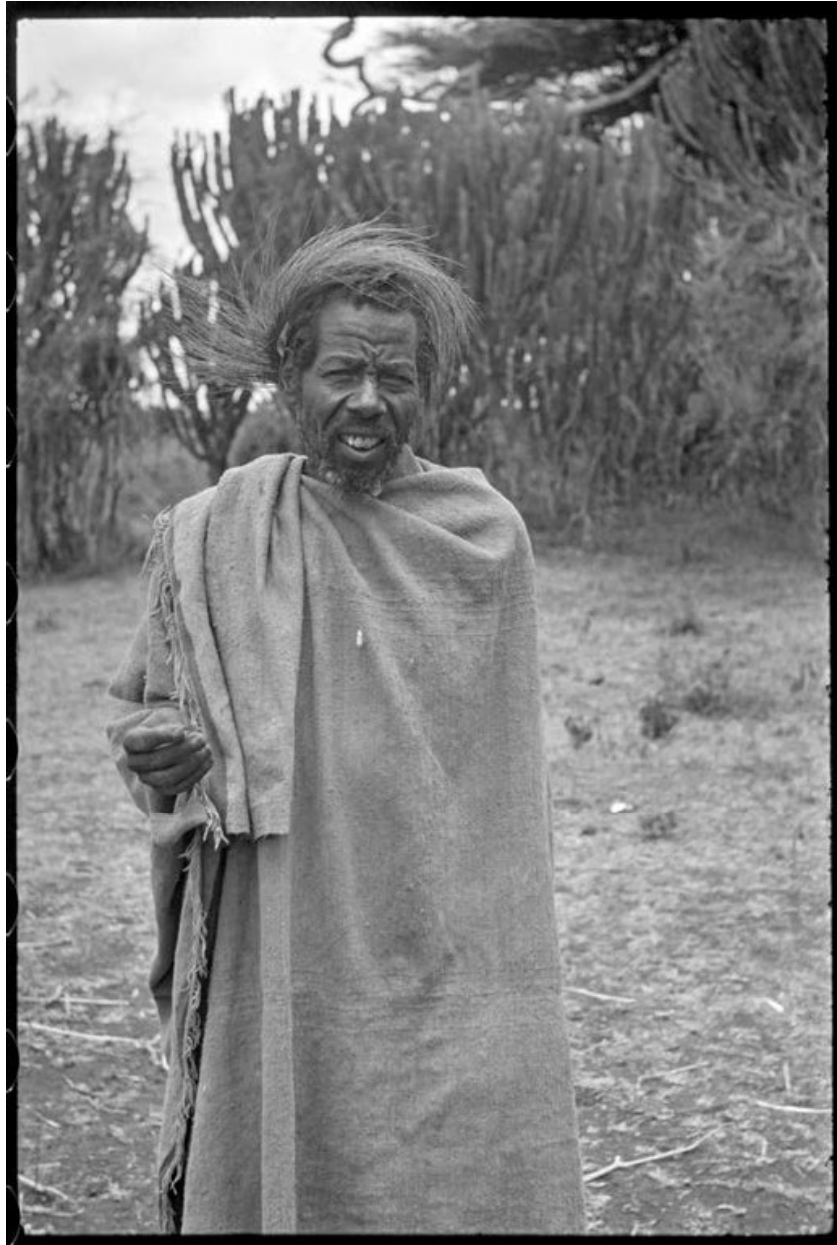


Image 19: Galaida, dignitary from the village of Buso, was also the informant of the 1934/35 expedition

Social life

The *xelta* system

With many peoples of northeast Africa, namely with almost all Oromo-speaking peoples and with some neighbouring tribes – the so-called East-Cushitic language group – a peculiar social constitution is widespread, for which the name ‘*gada* system’ has become established in the specialist science by using the Oromo designation. I have previously described the system of the Gedeo and Konso in detail and will only briefly list the characteristic features common to most of these systems.

There is an age class system in which age groups are used in years that are precisely defined by calendar; whereas, in the rest of Africa, the transition from one age group to the next is more based on emotional moments or estimates. This makes the *xelta* institution a preliminary stage of the calendar, but only in terms of counting years [i.e. in the *xelta* institution only years are counted and remembered, not months or day]. It was also used several times by the natives in this sense, inasmuch as some men were able to give their exact age by adding up the *xelta* periods that had elapsed during their lifetime, which does not happen otherwise in sub-Saharan Africa.

The distance from one age group to the next varies from tribe to tribe but is usually uniform within an ethnic group. It ranges from four years to eighteen.

The classes have certain functions. The younger ones provide the shepherds, the workers for community work, especially in the fields and on the terraces, and the warriors. The most important class represents the tribal leader and the other officials. There follows one or two classes for the older men, who no longer play a role in tribal life. All this is regulated in such a way that the sons can only enter the lowest class on the day when their father leaves the class that holds tribal leadership, so that within the system there is always a certain time distance between the father and his sons: among the Shoa-Oromo, five classes at eight-year intervals means this distance is forty years; in northeast Konso, two classes at eighteen-year intervals means it is thirty-six years; and in southwest Konso, three classes at ten-year intervals means thirty years. Within a few generations, this rule can mean that a man can only enter the lowest class when he is already an old man, which is indeed often the case.

With the Konso however, a marriage regulation is switched on. The young man can only marry after entering the *xelta* system. Thus the distance that exists within the system between father and son becomes at the same time the distance between the generations, and the grotesque shifts are not possible here, or are regulated again and again. It is thus unmistakable that the marriage provision must have originally belonged to the system. In this respect, the system among the Konso is the most perfect of all occurrences in the Northeast-African region, since this marriage regulation is not reported to us by any other tribe. The regulation, which not infrequently leads to men being in their late thirties before they can marry, is of course extremely annoying. Of course, the young men's wishes for marriage are set against this regulation. If you give in to them [the young men's wishes], the whole system is soon in complete disorder. Consequently, the marriage regulation has often been replaced with the killing of children born in a marriage before the time when the man can legally have children (cf. Jensen 1954). This practice reflects a certain transitional arrangement.

Usually, leaving the leading class is connected with circumcision, be it of the whole class or of some representatives. These circumcised persons are henceforth generally forbidden any sexual intercourse, so that the withdrawal from this class and circumcision, which underlines the end of procreative capacity, form a coherent complex here. In Konso, the circumcised person must henceforth wear women's clothes at certain ceremonies, whereby it is obviously intended to indicate once again that he or she is or should no longer be capable of procreation. It is therefore an important function of the system to determine the beginning and end of the fertility.

However, leaving the age group that holds power is in no way connected with a reduction in respect for those who have left. As a sign of the special rank awarded to these men, in one part of Konso, they constantly wear the phallic headband, the so-called *kalacha*, as a high distinction. It is certain that these old men have the most powerful voices in the deliberations of tribal affairs.

Apart from the division into age classes, the Konso, Gedeo and some other tribes have a further division into two or three alternating classes. During the first period, one class has the offices and passes them on to the other at the end of the period. Since these offices are hereditary, this means that in northeast Konso, for example, the leader of one group relinquishes his offices to the leader of the other group after an eighteen-year period. They in turn are replaced after a further eighteen years by the son of the first, who in the meantime – after thirty-six years – has moved up into his father's age group. In other Konso groups there are three such leaders who take turns, and consequently three groups into which the people are divided. Accordingly, the entire period of thirty years is divided into three stages and a new age group is added after every ten years. Thirty years is the generation gap; after thirty years, the office goes to the son of the person who held it thirty years earlier. Amongst the Shoa tribe of the Gombichu, there are five

tribal leaders who alternate in eight-year periods, so that the son of the first one can only take office again after forty years (Cerulli 1956:50).

Here, by the way, Cerulli describes another technique to keep the system in order without the inconvenient marriage regulation. If the age shifts – as very often reported by other tribes – have become so strong that the father enters the first degree of the age-group order only at an advanced age and already has adult sons, father and sons enter the system at the same time. As this scheme completely ignores an important element of the system, namely the emphasis on generational replacement, it is obvious that it is basically a cheat in order to circumvent the marriage regulation that was originally certainly in place. The offices that alternate between the alternating classes hold almost exclusively religious power and not so much political power. It is mainly priestly offices that are inherited in this complicated way.

I took up the Konso's *xelta* system in Buso at the time [1935]. It has now been shown that the system in this form is only common in a limited area and that, concerning the *xelta* order, the Konso land is divided into four districts, each with a different variation of the system. In the absence of any other designation, those districts are named here by their geographical location. The main difference between the four variations lies in the number underlying each system. In northeast Konso, the district to which Buso belongs, it is, as I said at the time, the nine. We will see that in northwest Konso the five, in southwest Konso the ten, and in southeast Konso the eight play the leading role. Now that the Konso feel themselves to be one people, the question arises as to where the difference in the numbers that determine the generation gap between father and son comes from. I am inclined to assume that this has been the case from the outset, that Konso has thus divided itself into separate territorial groups of five, eight and nine people. I come to this assumption because, in my opinion, the eminent importance of the numbers under ten for a certain cultural layer cannot be overestimated. The Gedeo, for example, have seven clans, which disintegrated into 'three houses' (clans) and 'four houses' and settled in the south and north of the country. The two groups were originally exogamous. In the north of Konso, the *xelta* order is divided into two classes; in the south into three classes. It seems to me that all of this cannot be coincidence and is probably related to the serious play with numbers under ten in these institutions. That is why I believe that it is not the product of a coincidence of historical influences that the *xelta* system is based on four, five and nine in the different parts of the country.¹⁷

Otherwise, there are no significant deviations in the systems of the Konso per se, although the names for the ranks, offices and sanctuaries are often different. In any case, in all systems, the marriage age of the sons is linked to a fixed time

¹⁷ Thinking in east Indonesia, where the five and nine people play such an important role, is quite related.

interval from the date of the father's marriage. The information I received in 1935 that a Faraita (1) who has not yet entered the system cannot impregnate a woman because his seed is like water – even though he has long since reached sexual maturity – I did not receive again this time. It was even disputed by all the informants. If a Faraita got a girl pregnant, the pregnancy had to be interrupted under all circumstances or he had to leave the country with his girl. According to some informants, he could only return when the age group to which he belonged can properly have children. In Idigle, however, I received from all the informants the information that an abortion was completely impossible, and that a couple who had been forced to emigrate could not return. Such people who cannot wait to marry until they can perform it properly are called *oshile*, and it is said that they could never return, not even on the death of their own father.

It seems unquestionable to me that with this change of faith in the inability of the Faraita to procreate, the actual foundation of the system has been shaken. When the attainment of fertility no longer depends on the great ceremonies, it will not be long before young men marry when they want to. At present, however, marriage outside the *xelta* system is impossible, and the exception I mentioned (Jensen 1936:338) must also be based on a misunderstanding.

However, in Konso land, there is a strange perception of the woman's ability to conceive. They believe with all certainty – and one may believe me that I have asked countless informants in various parts of the country because of the peculiarity of this view – that only sexual intercourse during menstruation has consequences. Just as a seed does not sprout in the dry season, any cohabitation between the menstruation periods leads to infertility. The Faraita has it relatively easy: he only needs to avoid his girl during menstruation. To my knowledge, this is extremely rarely believed in Africa. With the Pangwe (Tessmann 1913(1):91), it happens that a man has sexual intercourse during menstruation in order to make the peanuts intended for sowing particularly fertile. In general, however, there is an obligation to avoid menstruating women (Tessmann 1913(2):264). On the other hand, the Sandawe seem to have the same belief in conception. Dempwolff (1916:120) reports that a pregnancy can occur if cohabitation takes place during menstruation; from a later one of his texts (1916:121), it even emerges that pregnancy can result only from such intercourse.

I have developed elsewhere (Jensen 1954) how one can imagine the emergence of the *xelta* system. I have referred to the age groups of the westward neighbouring Nilotic peoples, which are associated with two- and three-class systems, giving them a certain similarity with the *xelta* system. There are only two things missing – albeit very decisive ones – to make a functioning *xelta* organization out of these age groups: 1) the exact number that determines the distance between father and son; and 2) the late circumcision, because Nilotic people – like most other peoples on earth who have circumcision – perform it on the young man at the time of maturity, whereas the *xelta* system has a completely different meaning of cir-

cumcision. We will come back to circumcision at an advanced age when looking at the Sidama (Jensen 2021), because we experienced it there very directly, since we were there just at the time when an age group had to perform circumcision.

The xelta system in northeast Konso

I have already described this system (Jensen 1936:335 ff). I will give a brief summary of this and make some corrections. Above all, I introduced it then under the name *jila* system, assuming that the Konso themselves called it that. However, *jila* is a Borana word, just as many other words in my report are Oromo words. They themselves speak of the *xelta* festivals as *kilana*.

Age groups

The age groups are called Faraita (1), Xela (2), Gada (3), Orshada (4), Gurra (5) and Qolulu (6). So here the names for the age groups are constant, and the man who belongs to the *xelta* system changes his name as he moves through the age groups. This is not the case in all Konso areas (see for example northwest Konso). In each age group, he spends eighteen years, and all his sons follow him according to two age groups, so they enter an age group thirty-six years after their father entered that group [i.e. sons are two age groups below their fathers]. The last two ranks Gurra (5) and Qolulu (6) have hardly any meaning anymore. They were also not known everywhere. Some people called themselves simply Orshada, even if their sons were already Gada (3) or even Orshada (4).

The three most important ranks are Xela (2), Gada (3) and Orshada (4). For example, if a man is Gada (3), his father is Gurra (5) and his sons are Faraita (1). At the next great feast, the fathers become Orshada (4), the sons become Xela (2). Those promoted to Xela (2) may marry, not immediately, but four years after the festival. This applies to all sons as well as to all daughters of a man, not only to the eldest daughters, as I had mistakenly reported. There are exceptions to this rule only in certain marriages.

The problem of how a people in the style of the Konso can oversee such a long period of eighteen years was solved very simply: for the office of the rain priest there are thirty-six hereditary ministers in each village, who take over from each other after one year. The first eighteen belong to Galgussa, the second eighteen to Hirba, as the two groups are called (on Hirba and Galgussa see p. 58). This rain priest ministry lasts one year at a time, and the order in which the ministers take over from each other is clearly defined. At least that is how it is in Buso. In Idigle, individual persons of very high standing or wealthy persons, such as the son of my informant Girgitta Bisho, enjoyed the special distinction of holding the office for two or more years. The office of the rain priest is here connected with the office of the drum administration (see p. 62).

That way, the people of Buso knew exactly when I had been there. They told me that sixteen years had passed between my first visit to Konso (1935) and my second visit (1951). They also remembered that I had been there in 1935 just before the rainy season and that in autumn in the same year, the great eighteen-year-old *xelta* festival had taken place. They told me that in the autumn of 1953, after the harvest, the next festival would take place.

Thus, in the case of the Konso, the distance between two festivals is calculated very accurately, whereas in the case of the Gedeo, for example, we found a great deal of inaccuracy in this respect.

Obviously, the Konso have a good memory, which often amazed me on other occasions as well. It happened on several occasions that when I brought up any detail to check my results at that time – for example, whether Kalla was higher in rank than Bammalle or the like – the Buso authorities would indignantly reply that they had on my first visit – sixteen years ago! – already told me.

Some people are also able to state their age very precisely if their parents paid attention to which year of a *xelta* period, i.e. in whose rain priest ministry, they were born. This is undoubtedly the case in all prestigious families. The man to whom the parents gave this data then simply calculates the number of *xelta* feasts that have taken place since then. In this way I was often given the age of Konso men quite credibly, which does not happen in Africa without European influence.

I had observed in 1935 that the *harriyada* order existed alongside the *xelta* system, and independently of it. That is not right. In Buso, they now told me that a new *harriyada* is only used in connection with the *xelta* system. Roughly in the middle between two great feasts, another *harriyada* is re-established, so that a *xelta* age group consists of two *harriyada*. But it is certainly handled differently in the different villages. In any case, after the indications in Buso, the *harriyada* is inserted in the *xelta* order. *Harriyada* is, according to the Konso, only an Oromo word for the Konso word Xela (2).

The Faraita (1) seem to be important only in a festival celebrated every year after the harvest. At the *kataita*, that multiform sanctuary which is clearly visible in many *mora* squares, a new fire is lit and all the Faraita (1) gather for one day (according to other information, for several days). The owner of the sanctuary, a *poqalla* priest, who is numerically predominant in the village, kills a calf or a cow that is consumed by the Faraita (1). After the feast, the burned wood must be replaced by the young men.

The dual system

The whole Konso people are divided into two classes of group called Galgussa and Hirba. A change from one group to the other does not happen. Belonging to one of the two groups is strictly hereditary, from the father to all his children. The dual order also exists independently of the nine clans, i.e. in each clan there are



Image 20: Mora square in Gandima village

both Galgussa and Hirba.¹⁸ Both groups each have, amongst the Konso, a supreme leader with mainly priestly functions. They are called *abba gadana*. I have already reported the original myth for this division (Jensen 1936:366). According to the myth, in the beginning, the people were divided into two parts by a voluntary electoral act. The new peoples, as the Konso express it, had immigrated to the present residential area from various directions and had brought with them earth from their areas of origin, which they now mixed together to form two clusters: Galgussa and Hirba.

In my earlier presentation I had reported that the highest office in the *xelta* institution, the *abba gadana*, is held alternately by the Galgussa and Hirba office-holders for a period of eighteen years, i.e. from one tribal festival to the next. This was also confirmed this time. I had, however, been of the opinion that, incidentally, the division into Galgussa and Hirba was no longer relevant in the age-group order, and that both groups went through the cycle together. However, there is a strict separation of the two classes. The *xelta* festival is celebrated only by the Galgussa group, and after eighteen years only by the Hirba group. At any one time, only Galgussa people can enter the Gada (3) class and only Hirba people can enter the Xela (2) class; eighteen years later, again only Hirba people become Gada (3) and only Galgussa people become Xela (2). The alternation between the two groups

¹⁸ So it is a fundamentally different dichotomy than in the peoples west of the Woito, where the division into two clans is mostly related to the clan division (see Jensen 1959:48 ff, 126 ff).

thus runs through the whole system and automatically results in the *abba gadana* office being given alternately to one or the other group, since only one of the two officials can belong to the age group associated with the office.

Children's affiliation to one of the age groups also depends on the father. Since they follow him at intervals of two periods, i.e. two times eighteen years in the age class of the *xelta* system, it always turns out that, when the Galgussa group occupies the Orshada (4) and Xela (2) age classes, the fathers are Orshada (4) and the sons Xela (2). The Hirba group, on the other hand, occupies the intermediate age groups at the same time: for the fathers Gada (3) and their sons Faraita (1). After the next *xelta* feast, this relationship is then reversed.

As already reported, Galgussa is considered the older group, Hirba the younger group; Galgussa stomps with his right foot when dancing; Hirba with his left foot. In addition, however, the two groups also have reciprocal obligations, as we often find in connection with two-tier systems. The wife of a Galgussa man can only have her first child in the house of a Hirba man who is a friend or relative, and vice versa. When a Hirba man dies, a *poqalla* (sacrificial priest) of Galgussa, but of the same clan as the deceased, must perform the death sacrifice, and vice versa. Circumcision is also performed by a Hirba priest on a Galgussa priest, and vice versa. However, there is no exogamy or endogamy in relation to the two groups, nor do they settle separately in the village.

The highest priest of the Galgussa has the hereditary name Kallala; the Hirba is called Hirle. The two of them live in the two villages furthest to the east: Lehaidi, where Kallala, the Galgussa priest, lives, even more to the east than Idigle, where Hirle resides. This probably has to do with the fact that east is the emphasized direction of life, and the class of Galgussa, who are called the older brothers, also have to live most to the east. According to some information, the two chief priests are never allowed to see each other; others knew nothing of this prohibition. I would like to assume that the rule exists or has existed, because a similar law is said to have existed in relation to ordinary Galgussa and Hirba men. The extent to which these symbolisms are also widespread among the peoples west of the Woito can be seen, for example, in the seating arrangement when eating the meat of a cow at the Banna, which is staggered from east to west, or in the frequent rule that the two leaders of the two-class systems must not be allowed to see each other (see Jensen 1959:45, 325). During the eighteen years in which he is Orshada (4), Hirle carries a stick that only Kallala is allowed to cut for him. Even if it breaks, it can only be renewed by him [Kallala]. Hirle may never enter the village of Lehaidi, where Kallala lives. This provision does not apply to Kallala. Both are not allowed to enter a house where someone has died. The house is unclean until it is made clean again by a blood sacrifice and the sprinkling of blood.

When the Galgussa people celebrate the feast and a group of them becomes Orshada (4), Kallala, the chief priest of Galgussa, also becomes Orshada (4) and

is circumcised. He is also the owner of, or the person entitled to dispose of, the highest fairground, the *abba mora*, which exists in east Konso for the Galgussa. The square, called *dammalle*, is located far from the village in an uninhabited area east of the road leading from the Sagan River to Bakaule.

This confirms my earlier assumption (Jensen 1936:368) that this place – contrary to the information I had received at that time – must be located outside the village, only for reasons of logic, which one would certainly expect in this well-thought-out system. During the eighteen years in which Kallala, the highest priest of the Galgussa class, has the rank of Orshada (4), a drum is kept with him as the highest sanctuary. At the next party, this is passed on to Hirle, who then moves up to the Orshada (4) and is circumcised. The Orshada (4) keeper of the drum is therefore probably the holder of the highest rank, and only after him comes the Gada (3), which represent the following age group.

The Konso describe it as impossible for a circumcised man to have contact with a woman. They say that the circumcised man is a woman himself. This alludes to ideas which I have not been able to realize, but which are also expressed in the custom that the *abba gadana* must come to the festival of circumcision in women's clothes. According to very many concordant reports in various villages, until some time ago, all the Konso men were circumcised when they converted to Orshada (4), i.e. they were no longer allowed to attend any woman. This must have been abolished recently, because most Konso are aware of this fact. Kallala only said that once, while half the men were incapacitated because of circumcision, the Borana carried out a very successful raid on Konso. Since that time, they had abolished circumcision for all men. Their age group comrades rewarded Kallala and Hirle – and, as we will see in a moment, a few other men as well – with numerous gifts for having now taken it upon themselves to comply with this regulation. Even though the ban on sleeping with their wives has been lifted for the Konso men with the abolition of circumcision, under no circumstances should they have more children. The Konso's strange view of their women's ability to conceive only during menstruation helps them in this.

However, if the wife of an Orshada (4) becomes pregnant, the woman is probably considered an adulteress and this probably has the same consequences for her as for a Faraita girl who becomes pregnant.

Hirle does not take part in the festival on the *dammalle* square but stays in his village, Idigle. He is the *abba mora* of a square in Idigle, one of the most imposing we have ever seen in Konso land (see image 21). The circumcision of the head of the Galgussa group, Kallala, takes place during a festival called *lehandu*, one year before the great eighteen-year celebration in the *dammalle* square, and is performed by a high priest of the Hirba group, named Hollo, who lives in the village of Dokattu. The foreskin is placed at the foot of a menhir, which is located on the *dammalle*. The circumcision of Hirle, the chief priest of the Hirba group, takes place eighteen years later, outside Idigle at a place called *chalada*. Doho, a

high priest of the Galgussa group, who lives in the village of Dureti, carries it out. The foreskin is laid down on a menhir in Doho's *mora* square.



Image 21: Mora place in the village (Idigle), directly at the east entrance

Kallala and Hirle, however, are not the only men in northeast Konso who are circumcised. Doho and Hollo, for example, also belong to the small group of people who have to undergo the operation. Various districts have two priests of their own, one from Galgussa and one from Hirba.

In each village there are the hereditary offices of leader of the Galgussa group and leader of the Hirba people in that village. In Buso, the head of the Galgussa is the village chief, whose name I reproduced in 1935 as Gildidja. But for unknown reasons only the Amhara call him that. His real name is Aidiya. His opponent from the Hirba group is Agitsha. In addition, in each village there are several *abba timba* (father of the drum) for Galgussa and the same for Hirba, and the drums are kept in a special house.

According to this, every village has drums, and it is by no means the case – as I was told in 1935 – that there is only one drum in northeastern Konso, which is kept by the highest priests of the *xelta* institution. A *xelta* festival cannot be celebrated at all without drumming. When I asked them about my previous report, they replied that the one drum that is kept by Kallala and Hirle is a special shrine that they only see every eighteen years. There is a lot of secrecy around the drums. In profane times they are not touched at all and are kept in their own houses. No one except the annually changing *abba timba* dares go near those houses.

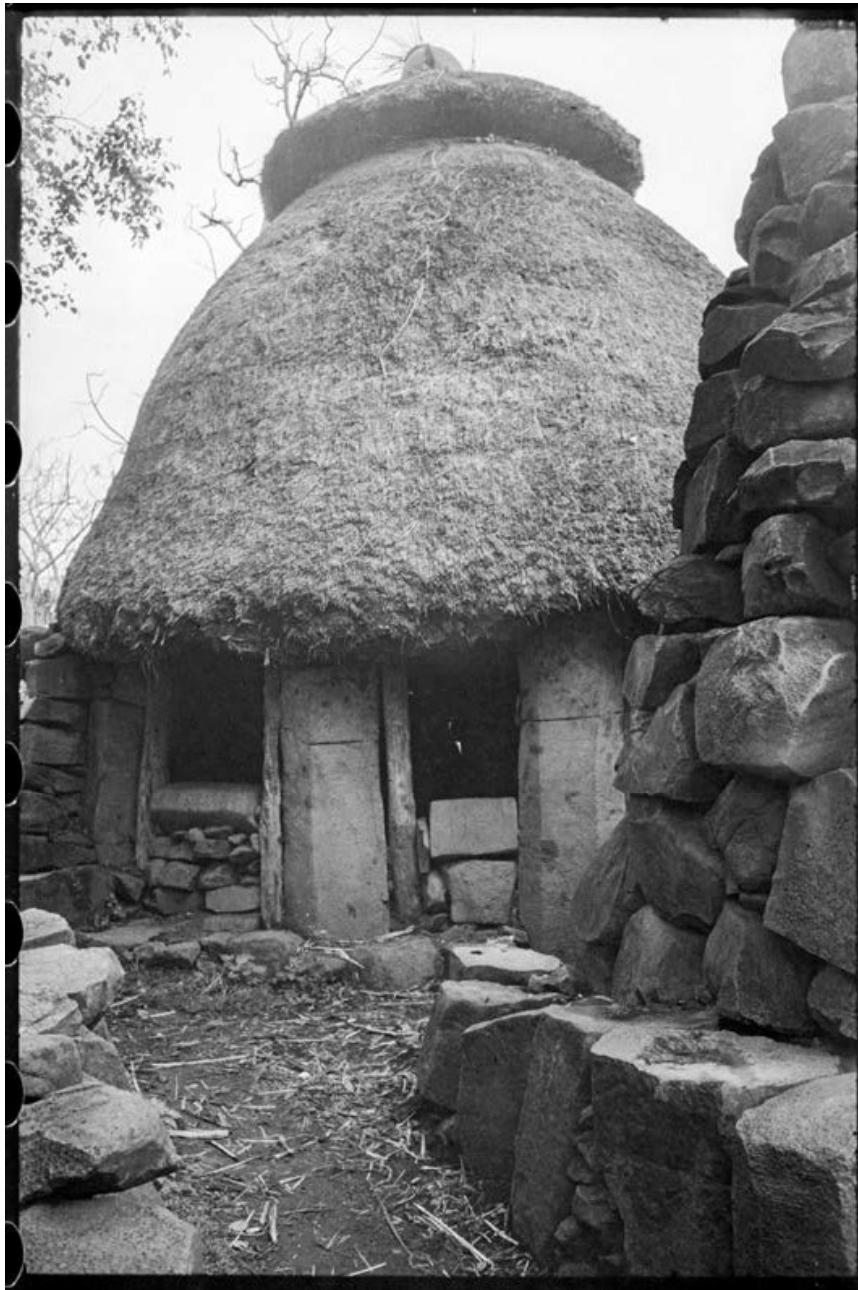


Image 22: The men's house (in Idigle). Support posts made of monoliths

Moreover, in some villages these ministers are the same ones who play a role as rain priests in each village.

Sequence of festivities

The focus of the *xelta* festivities is – despite the concentration of many people, at least on certain days, in the *dammalle* square – in the individual villages. The participants spend only one day at the biggest festival, the so-called *gadabaha*, on the *dammalle* square. However, this is the crucial day, as it is the day when all men and women move up one degree in the age group organization. One year before the *gadabaha*, the *lehandu* festival – when the highest priests are circumcised – is

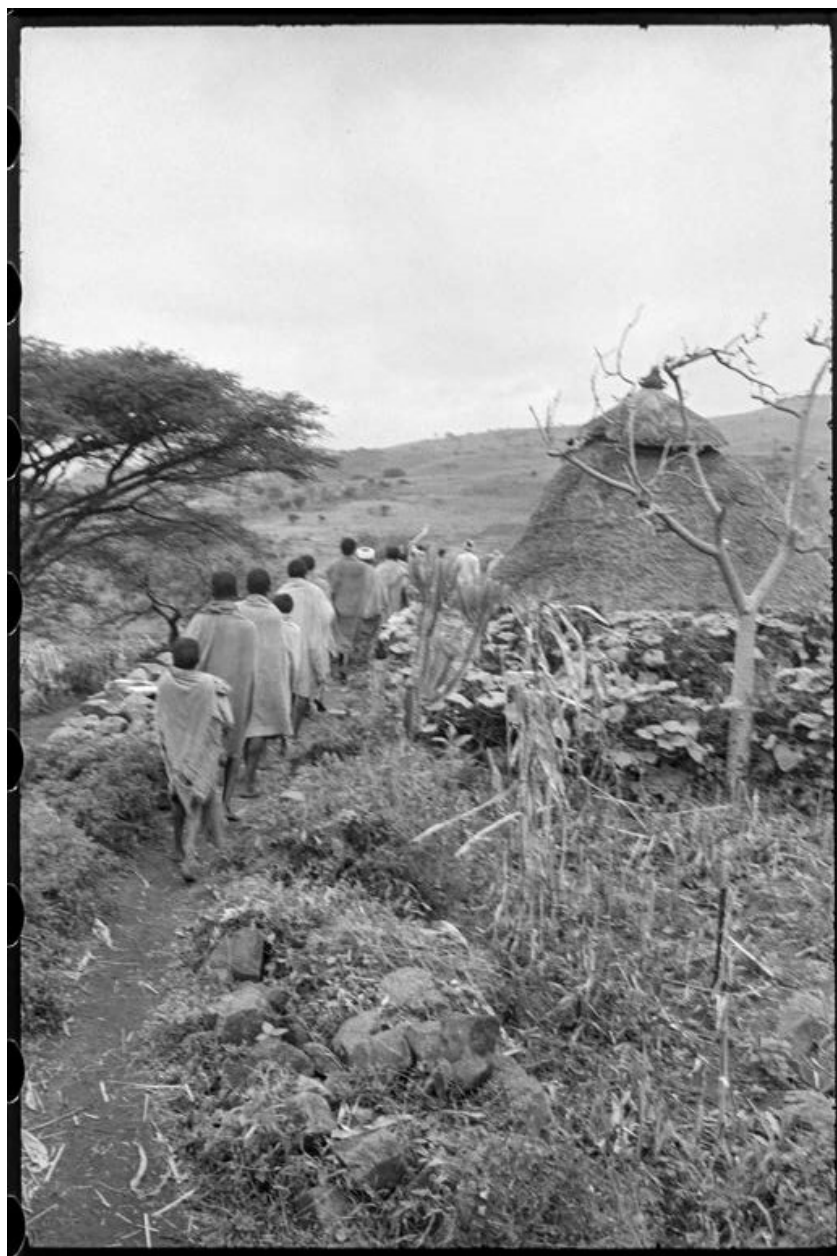


Image 23: Inside the village (Idigle). The path runs at the level of the surrounding wall

also held on the *dammalle*. A lot of people are gathered on the *dammalle* square when Kallala (Galgussa) is circumcised by the Hirba priest, Hollo. After this has happened, all the Galgussa men present must carry him home, since he is not allowed to touch the earth.

Kallala is the highest priest in east Konso because he presides over the Galgussa tribal half, which is the older and therefore the higher. He never carries weapons and one of his most important functions is peace-making. Even the Borana must respect him in this function.

When the Konso and Borana are at war with each other and face each other in a battle, Kallala steps between the two armies, unarmed but wearing the phallic headband (the *kalacha*), trying to mediate.

At the *gadabaha* feast, one year after the *lehanda* feast, Kallala and with him all the Galgussa men who were previously Gada (3) become Orshada (4). Seventeen years later, one year before the next *gadabaha*, Hollo (Hirba), who is then Gada (3), is circumcised by Kallala (Galgussa). Next year, at the great *gadabaha* festival, Hollo becomes Orshada (4).

Hirle, the chief priest of the Hirba, never goes to the *dammalle* square, just as he never enters Lehaidi, the village where Kallala lives. When the Hirba class celebrates the *gadabaha* festival in the *dammalle* square, Hollo represents the functions of the supreme priest.

The time of the *lehanda* festival, when the solemn circumcision takes place, is also important for the so-called Faraita (1) girls, i.e. the eldest daughters of a man in the Gada (3) rank. The girls have to shave their heads completely bald and move to the homestead of a high *poqalla* priest of their clan. So that no one can see their bald heads, they weave an opaque nest of leaves called *yareda* and put it on. Later, when their hair has grown back a little, they make a headdress out of dry ensete leaves, the so-called *lukalitta*, which is decorated all around with white hen feathers.

It is the task of these young girls to dance daily, early in the morning and at sunset, wearing dried sheep fat as necklaces on the *mora*, the public places. The songs they sing refer to the *gadabaha* festival.

Two days before the *gadabaha* festival, the eldest son in each family in which Faraita (1) are present kills a billy goat by placing it on its back and thrusting it through the navel with a spear. It is extraordinary that here a Faraita son receives permission to kill a sacrificial animal, a function that is otherwise always reserved for the sacrificial priests, the *poqalla* or the family elder. The extraordinary sacrifice of the billy goat is the prelude to the hare hunt, which the Faraita (1) perform, to which we will return in a moment. The special way of killing the billy goat is supposed to mean that the goat is not immediately killed by the spear thrust, and it screams loudly and miserably. Then, the Faraita (1) present also shout along, imitating the bleating of the goats. This is considered a particularly successful way of being heard by God. It is like a prayer to please God. Then the Faraita (1) eat the meat together, but they leave one hind leg for a special purpose.

The following day, the male Faraita (1) of the village go on a ritual hare hunt. Every such hunting party must hunt a hare. As I reported earlier (Jensen 1936:346), the men are not allowed to eat anything on this hunting expedition before a hare is killed. That is why they keep a hind leg of the billy goat they slaughtered the day before. The sisters of the hare slayers boil this leg and go out to meet the young men immediately after they have been hunting hares to give them the leg to eat.¹⁹

¹⁹ It does not make sense to me, however, that the storage of the hind leg of the sacrificed goat should only have this meaning. One, the hunger would probably not be so bad that you could

The ritual hare hunt is also given great importance on other occasions. Every year, the young teams of the villages, i.e. the Faraita (1), have to go hare hunting after the small rainy season, otherwise the big rain will not come. In Idigle, not only the Faraita (1) but all men capable of hunting participate. It is said that the hares are not eaten by wild animals, for God protects them like a good shepherd. The hare (*sagarita*) is strangely equated with the goat. It is therefore also called *korbaida waqa*, where *korbaida* means goat and *waqa* means god. In this hare hunt, the hare is killed in the same way as the goat is killed in the sacrifice of the Faraita (1) before the *gadabaha* festival: it is placed on its back and pierced through the navel with the spear. The green stomach contents must be given to God and are therefore deposited on the *mora daura*.

When I asked whether God, as a good shepherd, would not be angry if someone killed the animals of his flock, they assured me that God would be pleased if the Faraita (1) killed the hare, for man does this in the name of God. God would only care about the green stomach contents and these would be laid out for him. While heaven and earth are always mentioned as the deities in all prayers for rain, only *waqa*, the sky, is mentioned in the name of the hare as the goat of God.

These ideas are undoubtedly also reflected in the hangings made of hare bones that almost every marriageable girl wears on her belt and which is a gift from her lover. One hare yields eight usable tubular bones (*moqanda*), which are raised on strips of fur. When walking, the bones clatter against each other – a sound that is very popular with the girls.

However, we return to the *gadabaha* festival. The fathers of these hare slayers go to the *dammalle* square separately from their sons. Eleven villages celebrate the festival together on this square, which is located far outside the permanent village settlements. It is an established saying in northeast Konso to speak of the ‘eleven villages’ and the area of the ‘eleven villages’. These are the eight and the three villages around Bammalle and Djarso respectively. The six villages of northeast Konso grouped around Kalla’s mountain do not take part in the ceremony in the *dammalle* square but celebrate the festival at the same time in their *mora* squares.

This saying, the ‘eleven villages’, does not take into account one village, namely Darra. I have very little information about Darra at all, knowing only, for example, that it does not belong to the district of Djarso, that the local village chief is *grazmach* Shirdo and that it does not accommodate weavers.²⁰ The

not put it back until the next meal. On the other hand, it is not to be understood that the Faraita (1) necessarily have to satisfy this hunger by eating meat alone. I rather assume that goat meat – as will be shown in a moment – is equated with hare meat, and that it is important that everyone among the Faraita (1) has eaten of one of them. Probably the meat of a hare is not enough to give the whole hunting party a piece, however small, so it was wise to keep a hind leg of the sacrificed billy goat.

²⁰ This is why it made a completely intact impression in terms of the strict observance of all old customs and traditions, which is usually lost under the influence of a strong weaver group.

name Shirdo was given to me 1935 in connection with the *poqalla* priests living on mountain peaks, like Kalla and Bammalle, although he, at least today, does not live on a hill alone by himself (Jensen 1936:388). But whether the men of Darra would go to the *dammalle* square at the *xelta* festival and thus belong to the 'eleven villages', I do not know. If it [Darra] belongs to the 'eleven villages', then in reality there are twelve villages, or we must have counted settlements that in reality form a community with another village as independent settlements. This would be particularly conceivable in the case of Dureti and Badingalto, where the two villages could belong together as upper and lower village. The Konso say that these two villages were once located where the Amhara village of Bakaule is today and only moved away after the Amhara conquest. However, we cannot say all this with any certainty; all that is certain is that in the Konso's imagination, it is 'eleven villages' that celebrate the festival together on the *dammalle* square.

The night before, the men leave for the *dammalle* square; they must all stay away from their wives and must not urinate before they are on their way. Nor may they eat meat the day before.

The first festive act is the adornment of the so-called *bakasha*. What this *bakasha* actually is, I could not find out. The Konso say: the *bakasha* belongs to God, God has sent it down, unadorned it looks as unattractive as a Borana milk pot.²¹ The Faraita (1) must kill a *bakasha* bird. The *bakasha* is decorated in the most magnificent way with its red feathers. It is easy to kill the bird on that day, for God sends it down to adorn the *bakasha*.²² This is the task of the Faraita (1), who are to become Xela (2). It takes place before the departure to the *dammalle* square. The Xela (2), who return from there as Gada (3), also have the task of preparing a jewel. *Agamda* (Oromo = *agamsa*) is a wood which, like our elder, can be cut into small tubes, which are wound on a thread and worn around the ankles as jewellery. They also hold branches from the wild olive tree (*ekerta*) in their hands. When they return from the ceremony, they put the olive tree branches over the entrance in their hut. They give the *agamda* jewellery to their children, who wear it from now on as a collar.

The second act is a particularly solemn bull sacrifice, in which the bull must be given by the king of the Konso, Kalla, to Kallala, the chief priest of the Galgussa, when the group of Galgussa moves up to the Orshada (4) during the festival. Eighteen years later, when it is Hirba's turn for this particularly excellent promotion to Orshada (4), Kalla's bull is given to Hollo, Hirle's deputy.

Afterwards the proclamation of the new law takes place. At a Galgussa feast, Kallala must perform this official act; at a Hirba feast, Hollo must perform this official act. The law is ancient, as are the Ten Commandments, my rapporteurs said. It deals with the duties of a Konso man, which are now communicated to the

²¹ The Borana have milk vessels woven from grass.

²² We experienced this catching of a beautiful bird whose feathers are used for jewellery particularly vividly in Sidama, where the birds were caught at the time of our presence.

newly formed Xela (2). Every proclamation of a law is followed by the beating of the holy drum.

Other events in the *dammalle* square are related to the different ceremonial wood sticks with which the men are provided there. The Faraita (1), who have now become Xela (2), cut three thin sticks about two metres long from the wood of the *daita* tree (Oromo: *aroresa*) at the *dammalle* square, at the ends of which they attach the skin of the hare, which they have cut into pieces. These three sticks, called *dahaita dammalle*, are each tied into a bundle and carefully kept in the house after the ceremony. They will never be touched again. Since Kalla, the now recognized head of all the north Konso who does not go to the *dammalle* square, is also brought these staffs, they must have a particularly sacred significance. Probably, the most important thing about them are the pieces of fur from the hunted hare that are attached to them, since this ritual hunt is of great importance in the whole Konso country. I only mention here that the Konso also explicitly associate the hare with the moon. The connection between killing a moon being and rain and fertility, suggests a train of thought that I have described elsewhere (1951:59 f).

The fathers of this Xela (2) youth, who have themselves just become Orshada (4), also cut a stick from the *daita* tree, in the form of a fork with two tips, which they also carefully keep in the house. That is all I could find out about the events on the *dammalle* square. All men now return to their villages.

Each of the new Xela has to procure two tonewoods, which must also be carved from the wood of the *daita* tree. They are simple, roughly cut lumber of about 40 cm in length. One has a leather handle in the middle. The oldest son receives this from his father. The younger sons make new ones. The second tonewood is a simple stick without a leather strap and will definitely be newly made.

The Xela (2), that is, those who belong to the other dual class and now become Gada (3), do not go to the *dammalle* square but cut a stick called *gumma* from the wood of the *ekerta* tree. It is short, about 20–25 cm long, carved in the shape of a penis, coloured black and anointed with butter. All members of the Gada (3) age group wear this staff when dancing; they are also entitled to wear the *kalacha*, the phallus-like forehead ornament. Both are kept in the house and inherited by the eldest son. The younger sons can make a new rod and buy a *kalacha*.

After the shared day on the *dammalle*, in which only one of the two groups, either Galgussa or Hirba, takes part alternately, men and women, both Galgussa and Hirba, gather on the *mora daura*, the holy place outside their village, and dance for three days, with the new Xela (2) beating the tonewoods. When it is the Hirba's turn to celebrate the festival, they then move on to the *dammalle* for the village of Idigle, Hirle's residence, and dance in the square there for another three days. During the dance, Hirle sits on the sitting wall, laterally supported by the approximately six-metre-high wall that separates the upper and lower village.



Image 24: Dancers in the camp Godja

Accordingly, the Galgussa people then go to the *dammalle* square at Dureti on the common day, and dance there on the square of the Doho, which is called *gidoma*. I misunderstood in the earlier representation, which was based purely on the Konso's descriptions (Jensen 1936:367). The *gidoma* is not a conical tower. That description more appropriately fits the festival of the Hirba people, where Hirle sits at the high front wall.²³

The festival participants, either only Galgussa or only Hirba, gather here at the end of the nine-day festival. In the middle of the square there is a stone called *adayana*, i.e. law of the fathers. A unique ritual clockwise circumambulation forms the conclusion of the festival. The handling is done village by village, whereupon each village team moves away in the direction of its village. On their

²³ In a discussion of the 'Altvölker' (Jensen 1959) in MAN (1961, volume 116), Huntingford considered it necessary to point out this error particularly emphatically. He writes: "... that it (the book *Altvölker*) opens up an area hitherto virtually unknown from the ethnographical aspect. (I should perhaps add, provided that we can rely on the accuracy of the accounts; for one cannot but remember the supposed conical stone tower of the Konso described and illustrated in Jensen's *Im Lande des Gada* (Jensen 1936:370), which turned out to be a monolith.)" In the book (Jensen 1936:371), Jensen wrote: "Thus, with regard to the highest shrines, we were dependent only on descriptions. In the case of the inability of the natives to describe something exactly, I have to make certain restrictions regarding the security of the information about the nature of the *Gidoma* tower and the underground spaces." Under the illustration (Jensen 1936:369) (which Huntingford particularly objected to) it reads: "Presumed shape of the *Gidoma*".



Image 25: Old man performs dances and pantomime

way home, the new Xela (2) of Buso pass a certain place situated in a valley (probably the border between the fields of Buso and a neighbouring village) where they line up in a row and, with their faces turned away, throw away one tonewood (the one without a leather handle). Then they quickly leave the square and hurry to Buso. The Xela (2) of the other villages also throw away the one tonewood (without leather handle) to a certain place, at the border of the village area. The Faraita (1) of the neighbouring villages collect them there and throw them in turn over the border of their village area or take them to the Sagan River and throw them into the water there. It is unmistakable that the tonewoods thrown away by the Xela (2) must be removed from the tribal area.

With the remaining tonewood, the Xela (2) now head for their village. The men of Buso are served with food outside the village by the girls who are engaged to the Xela (2). The fathers of the girls who belong to the other group hide during this meal. If, for example, it is the turn of the Galgussa to celebrate the feast, all Galgussa are present at the meal. The fathers of the Hirba girls hide themselves so that they cannot be seen by the Galgussa men. Another avoidance rule between the two groups applies three days before the festival. It seems to represent the secret that Hirba and Galgussa have from each other (Jensen 1936:368). For three days before the feast, the Hirba men must hide in the house while the Galgussa dance in front of the house. When it is the Hirba's turn to celebrate on the *dammalle* place, the Galgussa men must of course hide. There is this ban on not seeing each other only before they go to the *dammalle* square. Afterwards, during the festival, they dance together in the square, and the Gada – and of course they are always from the other group that does not go to the festival square – even play an important role because they all appear there with the *kalacha* on their foreheads and with the newly carved phallic *gumma* sticks. This is the only example in the area we travelled through of two classes of a people not being allowed to see each other as a whole, albeit only on a certain occasion. Otherwise, we only have examples of one member, e.g. a leader of one class, not being allowed to see a certain prominent member of another class; we have already experienced this prohibition on seeing each other several times with regard to Kallala and Hirle (see Jensen 1936:360; Jensen 1959:45). However, the informants were not in agreement about the existence of the festival.

Among the sanctuaries that alternate every eighteen years between Kallala and Hirle, I had at that time [1935] also listed a clay dome over which the skin of a red calf, the main sacrifice, was stretched. Now I could not get any confirmation of the information, no matter how many people I asked about it. Nevertheless, I cannot decide to dispense with the information reported at that time. The information I received at the time about this clay calotte was so precise and detailed that I would like to assume that the clay calotte existed, at least earlier, perhaps before the Amhara period. Perhaps there is some truth in the story that the Amhara would have thrown the clay calotte into the swamp (Jensen 1936:373). Perhaps none has been used since and it has already been forgotten. At that time, only my older informants in Buso knew about it and they have died in the meantime. Maybe the mentioned *bakasha* (bird with red feathers), of which I could not get a precise description of its shape, is somehow connected with this calotte.

It remains to be mentioned that a special friendship between two villages is expressed in the fact that they celebrate the *xelta* festival together, either by dancing daily alternately in the squares of the two villages or by celebrating the whole festival alternately mainly in one or the other of the villages. The villages of Buso and Gandima, for example, have such a friendly relationship and celebrate together.

Another friendship of this kind exists between the villages of Godja and Debana. They [members of each village] do not marry each other, and every five years they celebrate a feast in the two villages, but this has no influence on the marriage of the young men or on the age groups in which the men are. This would not be possible because they have different systems. Debana belongs to the southwestern Konso district, whose *xelta* order has three classes: Galgussa, Melgussa and Hirba. Godja, on the other hand, has only the two well-known classes Galgussa and Hirba. They base this festival on a myth that a man came from Gumaide, married in Gamole and had two sons, one of whom founded Debana and the other Godja. This is probably the reason for the marriage ban, which seems pointless in so far as the inhabitants of both villages are allowed to marry their own village fellows. It does, however, shed light on the view of these peoples that friendship and marriage are mutually exclusive. How often have we received indignant answers from all the peoples we visited when asked whether this and that clan could marry among themselves: No! They're friends! How could they marry!

The festival that Godja and Debana celebrate together lasts four days. In the night from the fourth to the fifth day, a red bull is killed and consumed. It is danced all night long. On the fifth day they go back to their respective villages.

I had reported at the time [1935] that with this *gadabaha* feast all could marry Xela (2). But this is by no means the case: they have to wait another four years before they can marry. Only the girls whose fathers have now become Orshada (4) and who move as a second wife to a member of the other group can now marry and are also free to have children. If, for example, the Galgussa group has celebrated the feast and all Galgussa girls have become Xela (2), such a girl can immediately marry a Hirba, who at about this time belongs at least to the age group Gada (3). She is only forbidden to marry a Galgussa man of her father's age, that is, an Orshada (4).

In the fourth year after the *gadabaha* festival, two ceremonies are held for the Xela (2). The first one is called *edule* and takes place around February. All Xela (2), men and boys as well as girls, have to camp together at a river and cut their hair, which is thrown into the river. The children among the Xela (2), both boys and little girls who have not yet married because they are too young, return to the village that evening. They bring food to the couples, who have to stay in the camp for nine days. This *edule* feast corresponds approximately to our engagement, but is basically already the wedding; for the women are only not allowed to have children before the next feast, the *qanota*, has taken place. However, since they can be pregnant from that time on without any further consequences – although it is allegedly unpopular for the children to come too early – the *qanota* feast takes place half a year later (less than the usual nine months of a woman's pregnancy). Thus, there are in practice no avoidances for a young couple after the *edule* feast.

The *qanota* festival is celebrated for nine days in the village. Like the earlier *edule* feast, it takes place only village by village, although for all 'eleven villages'

on the same day. In contrast to all other *xelta* celebrations, which are called *kilana*, the mood at this official wedding celebration is very exuberant, even licentious. The obscene songs that I have reported (Jensen 1936:372) are sung during these nine days.

All newly married men wear a different belt, called *takitta*, made of hare fur for this festival. The fathers who are Orshada (4) and have no sons wear their own *takitta* belts, which they have carefully kept, around their right thigh. Again, the hare's fur appears here in connection with the fertility of the people, which is suggested by the celebration of the wedding.

Those Xela (2) women who married men from the opposite group four years ago, together with their husbands, do not take part in these two celebrations. They have to provide themselves with everything necessary for the *qanota* festival that takes place in the village and are not allowed to leave their houses during the nine days.

Another *kilana* festival is the *kaara* hunt, the time of which is not exactly fixed and which each village organizes on its own. All men who have become Xela (2) eat meat, drink beer and do not work for eight days; spinning is also frowned upon during this time. The hunt begins with a prayer at an umbrella acacia and leads into the lowlands of Sagan. Elephants and buffalo do not count as hunting success because they eat grass; a predator must be killed. After that, this age group will receive its name. The names are partly identical with those of the age groups in northwest Konso.

I reported at that time (Jensen 1936:340 ff) that the *harriyada* was not identical with the *xelta* classes. In fact it is not; but the people of Buso now claimed that a *xelta* age group is divided into two parts, with each age group consisting of two *harriyada*. The division of the age group into two or more *harriyada* groups is different in all villages. In some villages it was also explicitly stated that it was the *harriyada* and not the whole *xelta* class who went on the hunt.

Among the celebrations that take place only every eighteen years in connection with the *xelta* system, there is a sacrifice in the fifth year after the *gadabaha*, when most of the newly married Xela (2) have had a child. In Idigle, the festival is held on the *mora* square *doile*, which is outside the village. The *abba mora* of this course is Shake; on the course there is a *misgatta* (special sanctuary). A billy goat is sacrificed; it is not killed by the *abba mora*, nor by a *poqalla* priest at all, but exceptionally by one of the young married Xela. The skin of the goat is distributed to the participants, as well as the meat and – they must pay attention to this – no piece of meat is left behind or bone broken. All remains, including the bones, must be buried. The *abba mora* gets the right hind leg of this billy goat.

Then there is a festival that is celebrated annually as part of the *xelta* order. This is the women's dance festival, the so-called *haimolala*, which is celebrated by those women whose men have the rank of Gada (3) in the age-group order. The women dance after the first harvest in all places, including the *mora daura*.

The xelta system in northwest Konso

Northwest Konso is divided into four villages that celebrate the *xelta* festival independently but simultaneously: Arfaide, Mattara, Duro and Tishmale. Our camp was in Mattara, and I was able to visit Arfaide several times. Thus, the data mostly originates from Mattara and Arfaide. But the system is essentially the same, according to the natives and a few samples we were able to take.

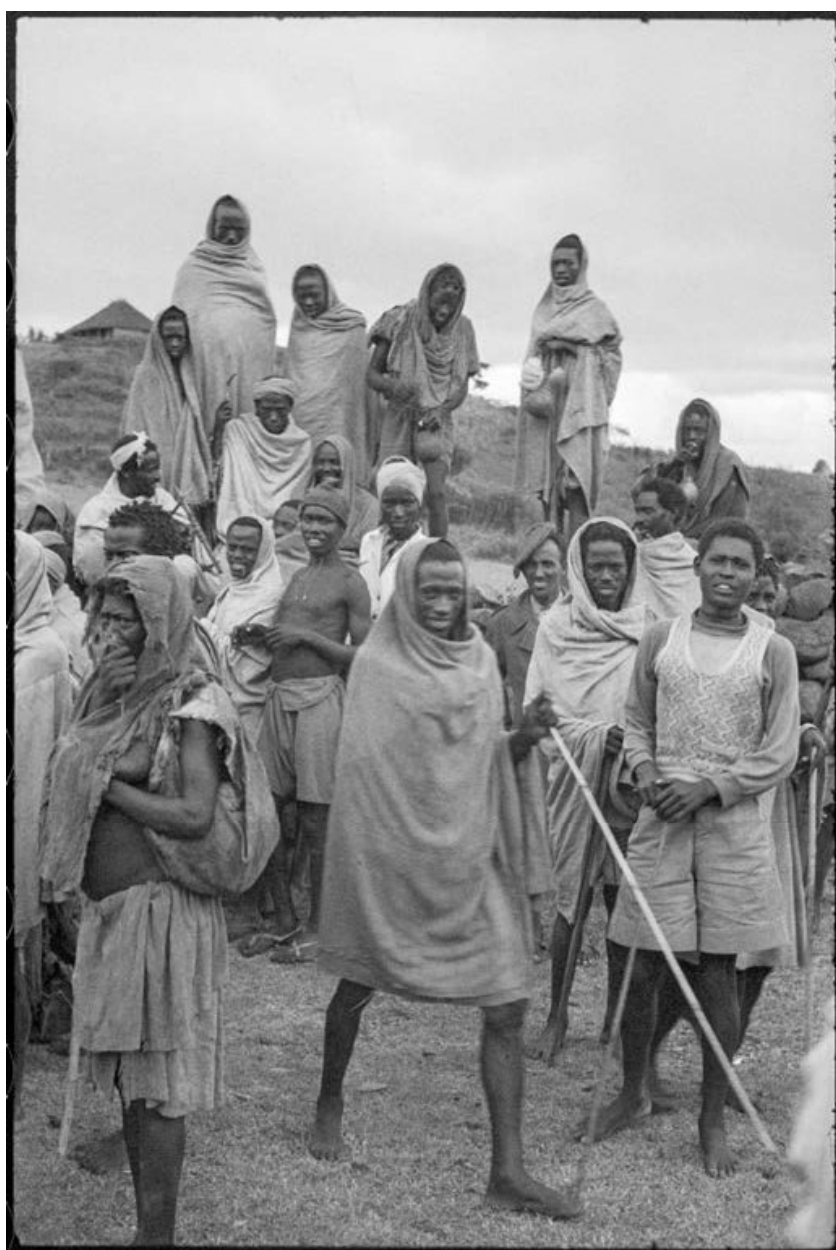


Image 26: Group of men at the market in Doho

It has already been mentioned that the traditional institutions are in a state of decay in Mattara, which can be seen from the fact that the Amhara were able to appoint a member of the weaver (*xauda*) caste as their chief.

The actual village chief, the descendant of the village founder – in all villages a very important office, whose owner is always one of the main representatives of the Konso nobility – lived in a not very distant village of the neighbouring tribe, the Gato. He was the actual ceremonial leader of the *mora daura*, the most important meeting place of Mattara, whose layout could still be clearly seen, but which was completely neglected. What events led to the fact that the actual village chief was absent from the village could not be determined.

Another sign of decay is that weavers participate in the *xelta* ceremonies only in northwest Konso; in the other three districts they are strictly excluded. But here, too, they are only involved with inferior rights. This, however, was initially kept secret from me, as my informants were weavers throughout. An *ädenta* man, i.e. a real Konso, was a daily guest in our camp, but he hardly took part in the entertainment. Only a few weeks later, when I met him again in Fasha, did he suddenly prove to be communicative, and corrected – as I was able to check afterwards – the information given by the weavers, and rightly so. Probably, the presence of the village chief and the other weavers in Mattara had prevented him from interfering.

Age groups

Every five years, northwest Konso holds two *xelta* festivals, which are called *shawalta* here. The first of the festivities takes place on a gathering place, called *aramo*, in the bush outside the village. It takes place in the autumn following the harvest. A new age group is introduced at this festival. Whether a young man is placed in this new class depends, on the one hand, on the father's position within the system and, on the other hand, on how many sons the father has, i.e. whether he [the young man] is the eldest son or a descendant. The eldest son follows his father at intervals of six festive periods, i.e. after thirty years. The younger sons follow later, which we will go into in more detail. The group of young men who celebrate the festival together is given a common name. These names and the order in which they had been given over the past decades were quite familiar to the men. They also knew exactly what name their father's class and that of all their acquaintances had been given. They are only uncertain about the names of those classes whose foundation dates back 60–70 years. In the following, I give the names in the order given, starting with the oldest but leaving out the even older ones, about which there was no agreement:

Kailola	Argaila	Dakaila
Katala	Garmola	Turufa
Gaudala	Kairanguba	Qabela
Oraila	Kasarguba	
Gardola	Kasarla	
Ormasha	Orkasaq	

There was nothing clear about the names and their meaning. Occasionally they return in the rest of the Konso area as names for *xelta* classes. Qabela was the youngest age group, so it was used at the last festival. They did not know the name of the next one yet, because it was still to be determined by the highest priest. A return of the names after a longer period was unknown to my sources.

In contrast to the three other districts, in northwest Konso, the different sons of a man do not celebrate the *xelta* ceremony at the same time, but one after the other at intervals of five years. Let us first consider the oldest sons: the oldest son follows his father at intervals of six fixed periods, which in turn take place at five-year intervals, i.e. after thirty years. Thus, when a grandfather is Kailola, his eldest son is Argaila, and his oldest son in turn becomes Dakaila. If the grandfather is Katala, the father (as the oldest son) is Garmola, and his oldest son is Turufa. If the grandfather is Oraila, then the father (as the eldest son) is Kassarguba, and his eldest son must enter the *xelta* at the next festival and therefore does not yet have an age-group name.

Before the boys enter the *xelta*, they belong to the age group Faraita. When they attend the festival in the *arammo* square, they become Xela.

After twenty years, i.e. after four ceremonial periods, the men meet again for a ceremony. This is the second *xelta* festival, also held every five years. It takes place after the barley or the first millet harvest, 3–4 months before the other festival in the *arammo* square, in another square called *kahillo*. The men wear women's clothes, which they do not take off until after the festival.

The wives also receive a common name at this feast, also from the highest priest, e.g. all the wives of

Gardola men	the name	Kapot
Ormasha	"	Oinat
Argeila	"	Aiyana
Garmola	"	Kaati
Kairanguba	"	Kaiati
Kasarguba	"	Kainati
Kasarla	"	Kawotti

The Orkasha age group has not yet gone through the second ceremony, so the wives of the men in the Orkasha age group will not be named until the next festival.

The dual system

Analogous to the division of the northeast Konso into Galgussa and Hirba, there is a division into Barbahaida and Kalebahaida in northwest Konso. Barbahaida is referred to as the 'older', and Kalebahaida the 'younger'. The principle of division



Image 27: Xauda with the female costume that men wear in Duro at certain xelta festivals

is fundamentally different from that in northeast Konso. If a father is Barbahaida, his eldest son becomes Barbahaida again, but the second son becomes Kalebahaida, the third again Barbahaida, and so on. Daughters, on the other hand, all inherit the group affiliation of the father: if the father is Barbahaida, they are all Barbahaida; if he is Kalebahaida, they are all Kalebahaida.

If a son dies before he has attended a *xelta* festival for the first time, the younger brothers move up accordingly: if the second son of a Barbahaida dies before he has attended the ceremony in *arammo* square, the third son, who previously had prospects of becoming Barbahaida at the festival, now becomes Kalebahaida, the fourth son who was to become Kalebahaida becomes Barbahaida, and so on.

If the son dies after having attended the *xelta* festival and received a name, the affiliations of the younger brothers remain unchanged. The oldest sons thus follow the father in the manner indicated above. The second son, however, does not take part in the ceremony until five years later, the third again five years later, and so on. Thus, only men who belong to the same group, namely Barbahaida or Kalebahaida, participate in the festivals.

Explained on the basis of the list of age-group names this means all Kailola are Barbahaida, all Katala Kalebahaida, all Gaudala again Barbahaida etc.

If the grandfather was Barbahaida and ceremonially received the name Kailola, the father, if he is the eldest son, is again Barbahaida and receives the name Argaila. His eldest son is again Barbahaida and gets the name Dakila. If the grandfather had a brother who was born as the second son, he was Kalebahaida, went to the festival place five years later than his older brother and became Katala. The eldest son of this man is then also Kalebahaida and becomes Garmola, his eldest son in turn is Kalebahaida and becomes Turufa.

Let us look at this system with a concrete example. A man named Gantsha who belonged to the weaver caste (*xauda*) was Barbahaida and came into the age group Kailola. He had three sons, two of whom play a special role in Konso land today. The youngest is Lukama, the chieftain appointed by the Amhara for northeast and northwest Konso. The second son, Shola, has received the title of *grazmach* from the Amhara and is the chief of the northwest Konso district of Mattara. The oldest son is called Irgacha and has no office.

Irgacha belongs to the group called Argaila and is also Barbahaida like his father. The second son, *grazmach* Shola, is Kalebahaida and belongs to the Garmola group; the third son, the chief responsible for north Konso is again Barbahaida and carries the group name Kairanguba.

It is of particular interest that the six men who sat in front of me and explained this order to me had no idea of the various consequences of this order. When all six of them had told me their father's *xelta* name, their own name and that of their eldest son, I told them that the eldest son would have to follow his father in the *xelta* system every thirty years. They stared at me in disbelief and began to calculate the father-son-grandson relationship among all their acquaintances, whose *xelta* names they of course knew. They were most astonished when there were actually always six periods between them. This may be explained by the fact that most of my informants belonged to the *xauda* caste, which I did not know at the time.

One wonders how such a complicated system can remain in order when people are not even aware of the time gap between themselves and their father, which is defined in it. In fact, each individual Konso man only needs to know the names. They only know exactly which group was at the previous feast, for example the eldest sons of the group before them. From this they conclude that at the next feast their eldest sons will belong to the new class, at the next feast the second sons, and so on. This presupposes, however, that at least the priests, who have to keep the system intact, know more about the connections than the ordinary people who only take part in the ceremonies.

Marriage in the xelta system

The system remains in order by a simple marriage rule. For a young man may not marry when he wishes but only after his father has attended the second feast. Take the example of the father of the two chiefs just mentioned. He belonged



Image 28: Grazmach Shola, older brother of Lukama, balabat of the village of Mattara

to the group Kailola. As a result, twenty years after the feast that gave him this honorary and group name, he celebrated the second *xelta* feast, in which he wore women's clothes and which was held in *kahillo* square. His wives also went to *kahillo* square at the end of the festival and were given a name. Subsequently, all his three sons could marry, already being grown up at that time, but very much to the detriment of the children that might come out of those marriages. In any case, the sons were still Faraita at that time and would remain so for different lengths of time: the oldest son ten years; the second fifteen years; the third twenty years. The eldest son was promoted to Xela thirty years after his father and was given the name Argaila. His sons can now only marry when – twenty years later – he himself takes part in the *xelta* festival for the second time. If a son was born to him

one year after his marriage, that son would already be 29 years old before being allowed to marry. But it is even worse for the son of the second brother, because he – if also born one year after his father's marriage – would not be allowed to marry until five years later, that is, at the age of thirty-four. A son of the youngest of the brothers, whose name was Lukama – who we would like to assume was born at the same time as the sons of the two older brothers – would not be able to marry until he was 39 years old.

The disadvantage that arises in northeast Konso, especially for the eldest sons because they can often marry only at a relatively high age (see Jensen 1936:339), arises here in northwest Konso for the younger sons of younger sons. In the worst-case scenario, a man might not be able to marry until he is fifty. For example, suppose that a father of five sons, born at short intervals one after the other, partakes in the *xelta* festivities for the second time when his eldest son is 25 years old and his youngest is 18; all these sons can then marry. Suppose they all have a son after only one year, then the eldest son of the youngest brother is nineteen years younger than his father; the eldest son of the eldest brother is twenty-six years younger than his father. The oldest of the five brothers then celebrates the festival in the *arammo* square at the age of thirty-five and the second festival at fifty-five. His son, who is twenty-six years younger, can then marry, i.e. at 29 years old. The youngest of the five brothers, however, does not take part in the first festival in the *arammo* square until twenty-five years later than his oldest brother, i.e. at the age of fifty-three. At the second festival, in *kahillo* square, he is 73 years old and his son, who is nineteen years younger than him, is already fifty-four before he is allowed to marry. This is only a theoretical case. In practice, such an extreme case hardly ever occurs. But the system leads to outrageous discrimination against the sons of younger sons. Most of the time, the youngest son will still be a small child, and, although theoretically allowed to marry, he will postpone marriage until he is 18–20 years old. This makes the above example calculation twenty or thirty years more favourable.

Sequence of festivities

There are naturally many small differences in the four districts of northwest Konso. As already mentioned, the data refers to Mattara and only very occasionally to Arfaide. For example, the Faraita in Tishmale are called Olasha, and the men do not go in women's clothes to the second festival.

The young people in Mattara celebrate the first *xelta* festival, which is called *shawalta* here, on the *arammo* square and they stay there for three months. It is also important across the whole of northwest Konso that all men, including the *xauda* (weavers), participate in the festival. The *ädenta*, the actual Konso, carry a large bell, the weavers a smaller bell. The weavers play a subordinate role in every respect. For example, the *ädenta* are allowed to approach a certain lying stone, which is considered to be the largest sanctuary of the *arammo* square, whereas the

weavers are not. During the three months, the young people concerned do not do any work. Any kind of work would not be good for the land: disease would come, the cattle would not thrive. The reasoning behind the ban on the young men's work is the same that we have heard time and again throughout the whole of southern Ethiopia. During this time, they [the young men] are fed by their families. The women bring the food and set it down nearby. However, the place is surrounded by a fence, so that the women cannot see inside. When the men celebrate the *xelta* festival for the second time, in the *kahillo* square, they also stay there for two months without working. They wear women's clothing, especially the belt decorated with kauri shells over the skirt, and ostrich feathers in the hair, which are not part of the women's clothing.

On the last day, the wives of the men who taking part in the second celebration also come and take part in the celebration outside the square. They too will now be given names, as mentioned above.

A woman who is divorced and remarries before her first husband has attended the second celebration receives the name with her second husband. But, once she has been given a name, it remains for life. A possible later remarriage has no influence on it.

One morning at the end of the feast, the men take off the women's clothes and give the belt to their wives, who wear it from then on not under the skirt, as is customary with this garment, but over it. Then the men go for three days to the leader of their age group, appointed by the priest. On the fourth day, they go to the watering place, wash themselves and take water with them for the millet they will plant. At home they make a furrow for the millet in the field – I was not yet familiar with the *arkatta ailin* at that time, it is therefore possible that this is a similar small garden – plant millet grains, and water them with the water they have brought with them. The fifth day is market day, and all the men go to the market and sleep with any strange woman. Only then is the man allowed to consort with his own wife again. Anyone who does not want to sleep with a woman can limit himself to walking over the legs of a seated woman.

Another square, *diga*, which is also outside the village, is included in the festivities. A sanctuary called *kataita* will be built there (and will be described in more detail later), and a new so-called *olahitta* mast will be erected.

Despite some differences in details, the four districts of northwest Konso form a unit with regard to the *xelta* establishment. In all four districts, the celebrations take place simultaneously: that of the men who celebrate the second festival (about July–August), that of the younger men who participate for the first time in the *xelta* festival, about three months later, in autumn. For the whole of western Konso, it is the same high priest who visits the festival places one after the other and gives the same name to the newly formed age group in all four districts. On this occasion he is presented with a cow and many pots of beer by the assembled community of men.



Image 29: Woman and girl kneading the porridge (for beer preparation)

Kalla, the king in north Konso, has no office in the *xelta* institution, as in the other Konso districts in west Konso. But he still receives six shillings (= 3 Ethiopian Dollar = about 5.40 DM) as a present from each group of men who go to the party together. The office of high priest of the institution is hereditary. However, unlike the corresponding officials in the rest of the Konso country, he [the high priest] has no hereditary name, which is probably explained by the lack of information of my weaver informants. The deceased office holder, who gave the old people their names, was called Kaesa. His son, who now holds the office, is called Alaida. They are both Kalebahaida – a curiosity (because the Kalebahaida people are considered to be the younger sons, who hardly had the right to provide the supreme priest) that I could not clear up for a long time. Finally, in Arfaide, people said it used to be a Barbahaida, but then war and epidemics came over the country and many died. Thereafter, the priesthood was given to a second son, who was Kalebahaida (cf. the story *The Argamaida clan* below).

The first square where the festival of young men is held is also called *arammo* in Arfaide, but it is not identical to the square in Mattara. The second square, to which the men go twenty years later, is called *daterero* in Arfaide.

The xelta system in southwest Konso or Fasha

Fasha is both the name of a Konso village and of an Amhara village to the east of it, as well as the name of the whole district. The district of Fasha represents a plateau, which looks very similar to northwest Konso, only about 100–150 m higher. To the south and also to the east, we find the country again very mountainous. In the south, the Sagan River forms the border. The Konso village of Fasha still showed clear traces of the war at the time of our visit. It was completely destroyed by fires and artillery fire and only partially rebuilt.



Image 30: House of a poqalla priest in Fasha

The south of the Konso land is today administratively grouped by the Amhara under a special king called Qufa, who is the counterpart of Kalla in the north of the Konso land. Regarding the *xelta* order, however, it splits into two districts with different systems, which we want to call southwest Konso or Fasha and southeast Konso or Abba Roba's land.

The current Qufa is a boy who went through the *xelta* ceremonies in a place called *bota*, near the Abba Roba village of Kormale. So, he did not belong to the *xelta* order of Fasha, but to that of southeast Konso. Qufa's homestead is close to that of Kalla but is not, like the three rulers of northeast Konso, on a prominent hill, but in a depression. In the layout and the solid and careful construction of its massive huts, however, it is equal to those of Kalla or Bammalle. There is also a small grove, with which the farmsteads of these rulers are usually surrounded.

One calls the *xelta* system in Fasha *chelta*, and this is the name it shares with southeast Konso. It could be related to Chelita, the name given to the young men when they have participated in the first feast, and could indicate the state of engagement in which the Chelita are then: marriage is called *hemitta*, which is also said to be related to the word Chelita.

Age groups and triple division

All boys are called Faraita as long as they have not yet participated in the system. After participating in the first celebration, they become Chelita, and remain so for thirty years. Then they will be Orshada, and one of them in each village will be circumcised after having participated in the feast in which his sons become Chelita, dressed in women's clothes. The generation gap here is therefore thirty years.

Deviating from the two systems in the northern Konso country, the *xelta* order recognizes a division into three groups both in Fasha and in southeast Konso. In Fasha these three groups are called Galgussa, Melgussa and Hirba. The festival, which takes place here every ten years, is celebrated alternately by the three groups. With participation in the feast, a man acquires the ability to marry. Before that, marriage is completely out of the question. The girls, however, are completely excluded from the system and can therefore marry when they want. But most of them will marry after the festival for lack of men; only those who move in as a second wife to a man are an exception.

At the festival, the group of men who organize the festival together is given a name. The last names that the Konso of Fasha could remember were the following:

Kusa	Galgussa
?	Melgussa
Kurschimurra	Hirba
Orissa	Galgussa
Turufa	Melgussa
Ganama	Hirba
Gamamora	Galgussa
Gagaba	Melgussa
Gardola	Hirba
Kailola or Gailola	Galgussa
Garmola	Melgussa

At the time of our presence, the celebration had already taken place six years earlier. The next festival was to take place in four years, in 1959. The Fasha people do not count the festival year itself. They express the ten-year interval from feast

to feast as follows: we have to wait nine years and in the tenth is the feast. This would give the new Hirba group, i.e. the sons of those men who had been given the name Gardola, a new name.

Officials

There are two particularly important offices in relation to the *xelta* system: the *shurrogitta* or *sorogitta* and the *mursia*, both of which are supposedly equal. Both offices, i.e. both the office and the name, are hereditary from the father to the eldest son, and there is one representative from each of them each for Galgussa, Melgussa and Hirba. In the village of Fasha, the *mursia* for Galgussa is called *irmale*, for Melgussa *tedemo* and for Hirba *musha*. They are the ones who give the age groups their names and distribute the tonewoods to the Chelita. The *mursia* also has a firewood with which he makes a sacred fire every year after the harvest. At the moment, *musha* has this firewood, because the Hirba will celebrate the festival next time. At the same time, the firewood is used to count the years, since it has as many holes as fires have been drilled. There is a *mursia* in every village, but the one from Fasha has a leading position. The *mursia* gather in front of the festival and find out the name that the group is to receive. At the feast itself, the participants gather on the *mora* square in front of the house of the *mursia* and receive the tonewoods (*ulea*). Each village receives a pair, which is given to the son of the *sorogitta* of the village, who is called *gurra*. All other Faraita then carve tonewoods of the same length as the one received by the *gurra* of their village.

The division into Galgussa, Melgussa and Hirba is justified in Fasha with the same myth that I have already reported from northeast Konso. The nine clans, who immigrated to the country from different directions, had brought earth from their country of origin. In order to merge into one people, the earth heaps were mixed together and divided into three equal parts. Everyone could choose whether they wanted to be Galgussa, Melgussa or Hirba. After this 'primeval' act, there was no more choice: all children belonged to the group of the father. The then leader of the Galgussa group, *irmale*, then chose the one pile of earth; *tedemo*, the leader of Melgussa, chose the second; and *musha*, the leader of Hirba, the third. Another version says that on the old *mora* square, which is located on the road by Fasha, a man was created in ancient times who divided all people into three classes. Galgussa counts as 'older' in every respect and has a pre-eminent position.

The other office, that of *sorogitta*, is certainly at least as important for the *xelta* institution. This official keeps the holy drums and trumpets, he is the guardian of justice, especially of the oath, and the *sorogitta* appears in women's clothes at the feast where he becomes Orshada and is circumcised. Then he wears the *kalacha*, the phallic forehead ornament, for ten years.²⁴

²⁴ *Gurra* is very probably related to *murra*, which in east Konso is also called circumcision. G or k often seem to be related to m, d or t to n etymologically.

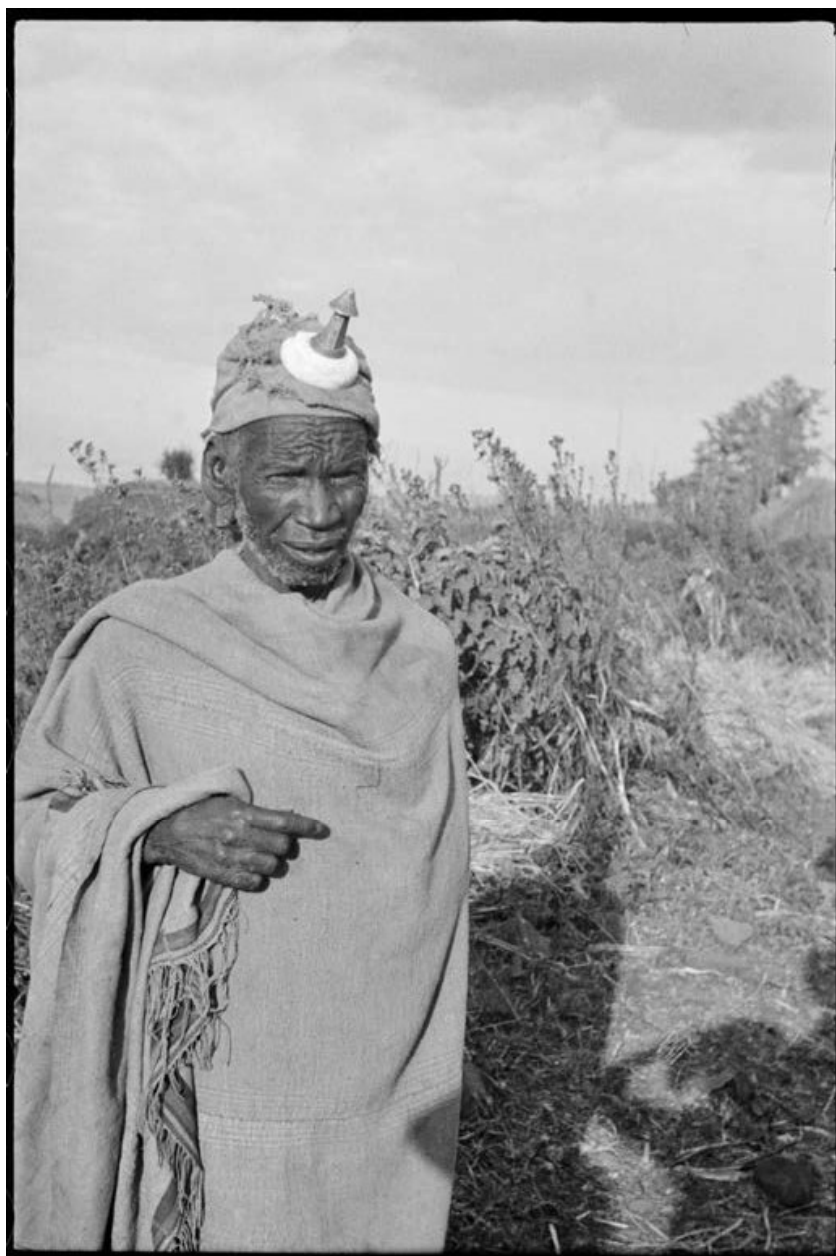


Image 31: Dignitary from Fasha with the forehead ornament called kalacha

The *sorogitta* also have hereditary names and are called for Galgussa *soge*, for Melgussa *gunja* and for Hirba *dabeno* in the village of Fasha. The drums and trumpets are the same sanctuaries as for east Konso. They must not be touched in profane times, and all unclean persons must not come near them. They are issued by the *sorogitta* at the time of the feast to those who have now taken their turn to become Chelita. All other age groups are also present at the dance and dance together with the Chelita, but the use of the trumpets and drums is reserved exclusively for those who have now been given a name. After the festival, the drums are kept in a pile hut near the *mora daura*, the holiest place. The drum is cylindrical and covered with skins. The trumpet, on the other hand, is kept in the house of the *sorogitta*. They [the trumpets] are not – as I suspected earlier,

when making an analogy with the big wooden trumpets of the Gidole (Jensen 1936:401 f.) – wooden or bamboo; those we have seen are simple antelope horns. Before the feast they are treated with sour milk.

Here in Fasha we had the only opportunity to see the drums and also the trumpets. The drums were kept in a separate hut, the dilapidation of which was revealed to our eyes. It was a typical *rakko* storage hut, but relatively small. The diameter of the storage room was at most 1.5 m, so that there was just enough space for the three or four drums. None of the men who were present were willing to take the drums out of the house so that we could photograph them better. Touching the drums outside the festival is absolutely taboo. Even the trumpets, which were kept in the roof of a hut in the *sorogitta*'s homestead, could only be viewed from a distance and not touched.

The *sorogitta* is the guardian of the law and, as such, takes the highest oath. This highest oath must be taken at a certain gate in the village of Fasha, which is called *sugenda* (sheep). The *sugenda* gate is also the highest sanctuary of the Fasha district. In the other villages the *sorogitta* can also take an oath, for example with the *olahitta* pole bundle, but these do not have the same high importance as the oath taken at the *sugenda* gate.

Like all high priests in Konso, the *sorogitta* is also responsible for the crop. It is even said that circumcision must take place, otherwise the crop will not flourish and the young Chelita will not have children. But even at harvest time, the *sorogitta* priests must first harvest three or four ears of corn symbolically before any other man can begin his harvest. The *sorogitta* must also have tasted the fruit intended for sowing before it can be sown.

Incidentally, in Fasha, all these hereditary offices also belong to so-called *poqalla* families and thus to the hereditary nobility. The owners' huts have, just like in northeast Konso, a clay roof decoration with phallic emblems. The Melgussa *sorogitta*, with the name and title *gunja*, was a very old man when we were in Fasha. At that time his son was staying in Teltele, where the Konso, according to the Fasha people, also have fields. When the time comes for this son to be circumcised – that is, when he himself becomes Orshada and his sons become Chelita – he will wear the *kalacha* for ten years, even if his father is still alive and he has not yet inherited the name *gunja* but continues to be called *gurra*. For this sacrifice for the community – and circumcision was certainly perceived as a sacrifice by my informants – he is amply compensated by his peers with gifts.

The xelta system in southeast Konso

Southeast Konso is usually called Abba Roba's land in the country. The name Abba Roba literally means 'father of rain'. However, this promising title, similar to Djarso's in Idigle, proved to be a misunderstanding. The hereditary name or title was *qoruba*. Asked by the Amhara for his personal name, *qoruba* replied that



Image 32: Village Fasha. Holy place at the sugenda gate

he called himself Abba Roba after his eldest son, who was called Roba. Since then the new name has been introduced.

Like Kalla and Bammalle, Abba Roba is one of the rulers of the Konso land, and he probably also lives isolated from the other farms on the top of a mountain. We have not been to his country ourselves, as much as we would have liked to. However, time difficulties and a lack of mules, without which it is hardly possible to enter the country, prevented us from doing so.

Only two men from the village of Foro and one from the village of Kormale were available as informants. I was not able to clear up the ambiguities of their information with them. I am sharing this little anyway, because there is no other



Image 33: Mora daura, the holiest place of the village, in Fasha

source and because I believe that at least the time interval in which the number eight plays a role is correct.

All other information, as far as I could ascertain, is largely consistent with southwest Konso. There are also the offices of *mursia* and *shurrogitta* in each village. The *mursia* together find out the name of a group, and the *shurrogitta* goes to the feast in women's clothes when he becomes Orshitta (Orshada) and is circumcised. Then he wears the *kalacha*, the phallic headband, for eight years. Here, they call a man who, despite the prohibition, marries before the *xelta* feast and has to leave the country *ganota*, (the name for a *xelta* feast in northeastern Konso).

All men of one age group celebrate the festival together on a place that is about a quarter of an hour away from the village. While the young men have to spend three months in the square, the women and girls bring them food. Before the feast they are Faraita; with participation in the feast they become Chelita for the next eight years. After that they will be Foritta for sixteen years, and then retire as Orshitta.

The festival is celebrated every eight years, alternately by the three classes: Galgussa, Melgussa and Hirba. In the past, it was only celebrated every sixteen years, so that there was a generation gap of forty-eight years. Then Qufa and the other old people consulted each other and reduced the interval between two feasts to eight years.

The ascertainable age groups were the following:

Kasarmala	Hirba
Kairanguba	Galgussa
Dinaila	Melgussa
Magaula	Hirba
?	Galgussa
Qadash	Melgussa
Orkasha	Hirba
Kasarla	Galgussa

The youngest age group, Kasarla, was the one that was still on the fairground. Young Qufa was one of them.

Among my three informants were two young men about 30 years old and one older man between 50 and 55 years old; two were Hirba and one Melgussa. The Hirba people stated that their fathers had been Kasarmala. They themselves, however, because they were younger brothers, were not given the name Magaula, but the next Hirba name, Orkasha. From the moment their older brothers were given the name Magaula, they too became eligible for marriage. For their children, however, this means that they can only marry twenty-four years after the establishment of Orkasha. The generation gap is therefore forty years.

That may yet work. It discriminates against younger sons at marriage age in a similar way to in northwest Konso. They also said that out of five sons born to a Hirba man, three sons will be born to the next Hirba age group and two will be born to the next but one. Such is the information from my informants, which does not seem plausible to me.

The third of these informants, however, was Melgussa and the third son of his father, whose age group had been given the name Dinaila. His two older brothers had then become Qadash, but he himself claimed that he had been given the name Orkasha and yet remained Melgussa. The other two confirmed that they had gone through the festival together with him. This third informant made a quite intelligent impression, so I left it at the several times repeated information in the hope of being able to undertake another excursion into Abba Roba's country, which was ultimately not possible. I then tried to explain it [his claim to be both Orkasha and Melgussa] to myself in the following way: perhaps this Melgussa man first observed the Orkasha class in order to find his correct and final classification at the next celebration, at which a Melgussa class would be established.

They reported another peculiar custom from their most important *xelta* feast. They collect enough money from all the men gathered in the festival square to hire a poor man from far away, perhaps from Duro or Kolmi, to leave the country with a billy goat without horns (*gudumaida*) and never be seen again in Abba

Roba's land. Obviously, this is a kind of scapegoat; however, I did not receive any explicit confirmation of this assumption. All men accompany this strange man with his billy goat in the direction of the Sagan River. Close to the river, everyone returns to Abba Roba's land; only this man, also called *gudumaida*, with his billy goat crosses the Sagan and thus the border of the Konso land. I was told that one had to pay 70–100 Maria Theresa thalers²⁵ for this man.

Offices, clans and caste systems

Hereditary and non-hereditary offices

In the Konso villages, it is noticeable that a few houses have a clay roof top decorated with supposedly phallic symbols (see image 31). These houses belong to the farmsteads that are home to a kind of hereditary nobility or priests who bear the name *poqalla*. The word is undoubtedly related to the chieftain's name *kalu* in Borana. Also, the chief is called *bogolko* among the Tsamako. I will come back to another name, *kallicha*, which is undoubtedly related to these chieftain names. It should only be mentioned here that, throughout southern Ethiopia, a kind of shaman is called *kallicha*, a miracle-working medicine man who has a special charisma that enables him to do extraordinary deeds. It seems to me that this charisma is common to both title holders, the chief and the shaman, and that the etymological context can be explained by this (Jensen 1959:362 ff).

The *poqalla* can also be recognized by the five narrow iron hoops they wear on the right forearm. The *poqalla* office is completely independent of the age level in the *xelta* system. The oldest son inherits the office when his father dies. Only then can he kill animals and is called in by his clan comrades for certain ceremonies that involve a blood sacrifice. It is the main function of the *poqalla* priests to kill animals with a certain sacred knife, which they also inherit from their father. They are first and foremost sacrificial priests.

For example, when the month of Oiba comes (around December or January), sheep may be slaughtered again, it having been forbidden for nine months. Each Konso family must then invite a *poqalla* from their own clan to kill the first sheep for them. In return the priest receives the right hind leg of the sheep. He speaks blessings for the family and sprinkles the blood of the animal. After that, the head of the family can also kill sheep independently. While the sacrifice of the *poqalla* takes place outside the house, the sheep killed by the eldest of the family

²⁵ The Maria Theresa dollar, also known as the thaler, was the only foreign currency to obtain extensive circulation in pre-war Ethiopia. It is not known when the thaler first arrived in Ethiopia. During the expeditions of the Frobenius Institute in 1950–52 and 1954–56, the Maria Theresa Thaler had already been officially confiscated as a means of payment in Ethiopia and the Ethiopian dollar was already in existence. In the south of Ethiopia, however, thalers continued to be used for payment.

are sacrificed inside the house. In both cases, the animal is laid down so that the head of the animal points towards the door of the dwelling house. Therefore, the door here has a similar significance as with the peoples west of the Woito (Jensen 1959:323 ff).

The head of the family in this ritual sense can best be defined negatively: it is the man whose father is no longer alive and who has no older brother. The privileges of these eldest sons are hardly conceivable for our purposes. Not only do they inherit much more of the father's property than their younger brothers but, even after the death of the father, their pre-eminence remains so strong that a younger brother may not sell any of his property without the consent of the eldest and, if he receives this consent, he must give him up to a quarter of the proceeds.

Theoretically there should have been only nine *poqalla* originally, one for each clan, and only gradually should more *poqalla* offices have developed. However, the village founders made an exception. Each village was originally founded by one, two or, exceptionally, three clans. In any case, one clan was predominant and the *poqalla* who is descended from this village founder through a chain of eldest sons is the supreme [*poqalla*] and the village chief of the village. In Buso village, for example, this was the *poqalla* Aidiya of the clan Saudata. As a result, the *mora*, the megalithic assembly place in front of the village, the so-called *mora daura* (forbidden, taboo) or *garda* (eldest son), is the highest of all the *mora* places in Buso and belongs to the clan Saudata; the *poqalla* Aidiya is especially responsible for this place and for the special sanctuary on it, the *misgatta*.

But between this traditional village chief and the simplest *poqalla*, who can only kill one animal and have the clay roof top with the phallic symbols on their house, there are other *poqalla* offices. The next one after the village chief would be the *poqalla* who belongs to another clan that was involved in the foundation of the village and is also the *abba mora* of that second *mora garda*, on which there is also a *misgatta*.

In addition, however, there are several so-called *mora kusitta* (younger son) in each village, each of which belongs to a clan and whose *abba mora* is also a *poqalla*. On each of these squares, the *olahitta* masts, which are so closely linked to the *xelta* festivals, rise up to 10 m high. There are nine *poqalla* offices which are not *abba mora* of a particular place, but which nevertheless have a smaller pile bundle (3–4 m high), similar to the large pylons on the *mora* squares, within their homesteads, often connected with a small free space in front of the pile bundle. In every village there is also a traditional leader of the Galgussa class and the same for the Hirba class, both of whom are also *poqalla*. Sometimes they are identical with the other *poqalla* offices already mentioned.

One of the main functions of the *poqalla* is the feast that each clan celebrates every year in the month of Oiba (December–January) at a holy *mora* place. Which of the offices is responsible for this festival, I have not been informed, because the information about it was too diverse. It seems that, by tradition, the office lies with

a different *poqalla* in each village and for each clan, even in those that do not have a *mora* place of their own. According to my information, a bull is almost always slaughtered, and the killing is carried out by the designated *poqalla*. Prayers are said by him for the welfare of the clan.

The question is, where do the considerable number of *poqalla* come from? Have they existed from the beginning or have they multiplied over time? The answer is as follows: no *poqalla* office that has ever existed has been lost, for example, due to the absence of an heir. Each *poqalla* ensures that he has an heir during his lifetime, possibly by adopting a young clan member. But multiplication is also taking place. The so-called *lamitta* sons (*lama* = 2) are also entitled to the *poqalla* dignity. A *lamitta* son is the eldest son of a second wife, who also inherits the *poqalla* dignity after the death of his father.

Of greater importance than the village chiefs are the high officials of the *xelta* institution, such as the high priests Kallala and Hirle and their deputies, who of course are all *poqalla* and hold offices that are strictly hereditary from father to eldest son. In this high office, two factors of Konso culture touch each other most closely: the power of the *poqalla* offices, which are inherited immediately after the death of the father; and the power that the *xelta* institution has to award according to fixed age-grades. For example, for all the influence that Kallala has on the *xelta* ceremonies as Orshada (4), his [eldest] son cannot inherit when he dies. As long as this son is still Xela (2), a different person, but also from the Orshada (4) age class, will take the place of Kallala; only at the next feast, where the [eldest] son becomes Gada (3), can he take over the functions of a Gada-Kallala.

But all these *poqalla* offices are surpassed by the *poqalla* whose homesteads lie alone on the top of a mountain. The details connected with these *poqalla* will be dealt with in more detail in the following, because they may indicate an older tribal organization of the Konso. Kallala and Hirle's villages, Lehaidi and Idigle, are located in the very east of the area of Konso where the city-like settlements are located. On a mountain, away from the villages, lives a high *poqalla* priest, named Djarso, whose position is similar to that of Bammalle and Kalla, as these priests – all of who live isolated on mountain tops – show many similarities among themselves. In the past, Djarso is said to have lived on a mountain south of his current residence called Baya, about 700 m east of the village of Idigle. Today he lives on a low mountain called Languira, in the north of Baya. But the holy grove, which all these isolated mountain-dwelling *poqalla* priests have at their homesteads, can still be seen on the Baya mountain. All the deceased *djarso* are also buried there. The village of Idigle is often named Djarso; in 1935 it had become known to me only under that name (Jensen 1936:367).

This name [Djarso] goes back to an Amhara custom. The hereditary name of *djarso* is in fact Galmalle. Like all *poqalla* priests, the holder of the title inherits the name of the last holder, which is therefore also the title, together with the transfer of office after his predecessor's death. Because the Amhara insisted on

knowing the individual name of the Galmalle, which was Djarso, at the time of the Amharic occupation, the Amhara have adopted this Amhara custom of speaking of *djarso* instead of Galmalle.

In the area of Djarso are thus the villages of Lehaidi and Idigle, home to the highest priests of the *xelta* institution Kallala (Galgussa) and Hirle (Hirba). Furthermore, the village of Geldima must still be counted among its sphere of influence, which is evident from the information that the inhabitants of Geldima, together with those of Lehaidi and Idigle, are involved in the burial of a deceased *djarso*.

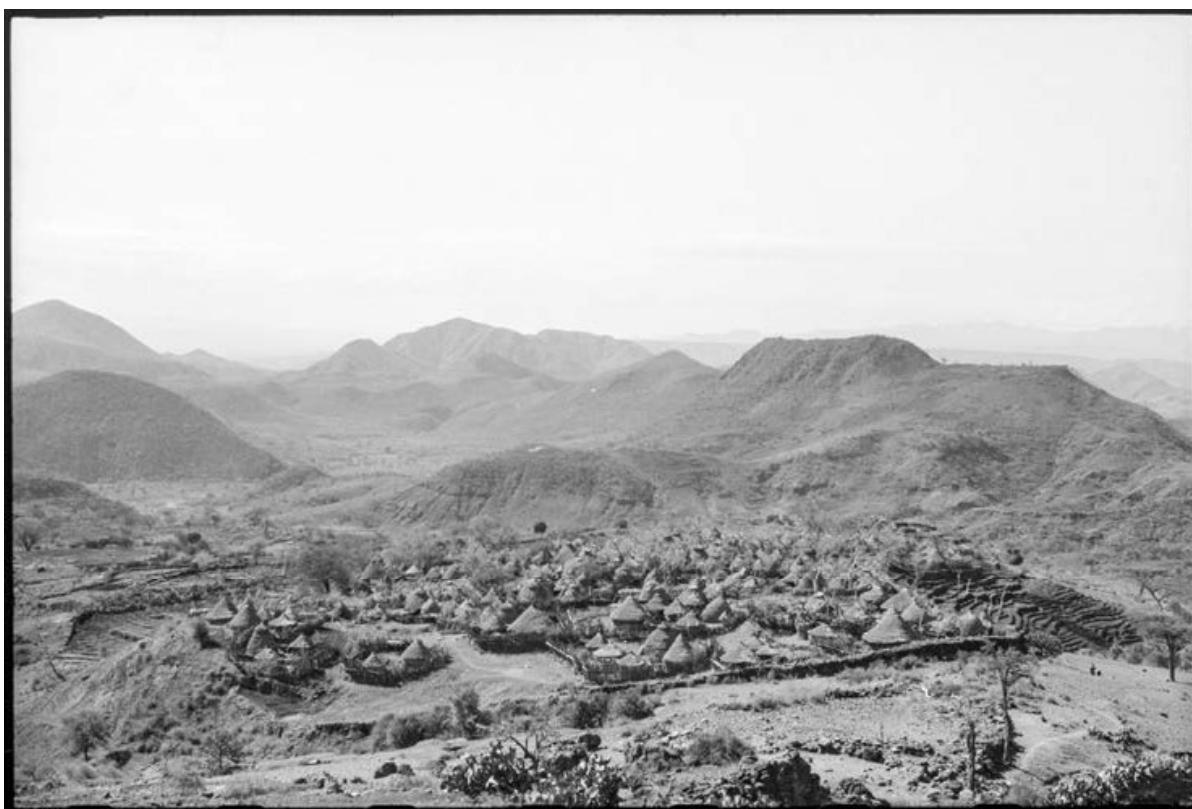


Image 34: Geldima village

In the western part of the area of northeast Konso, around the hill of Kalla, the king of all north Konso appointed by the Amhara, there are now six villages – Nagule, Daba, Sagale, Godja, Gamole and Macala – which are out of the ordinary because they do not take part in the *xelta* festival in the *damalle* square together with all the other northeast Konso, but celebrate the festival at the same time in their own *mora* squares. They have their own supreme priests, who are comparable to Kallala and Hirle in their functions; above all, they are also circumcised during the transition to Orshada (4) and must wear women's clothes during this act. There are two groups of villages, each of which has two priests – one from Galgussa and one from Hirba – who, like Kallala and Hirle, alternate in function.

Among the six villages mentioned, Godja, Gamole and Macala are explicitly in a particularly close relationship with Kalla and are described as [belonging to]

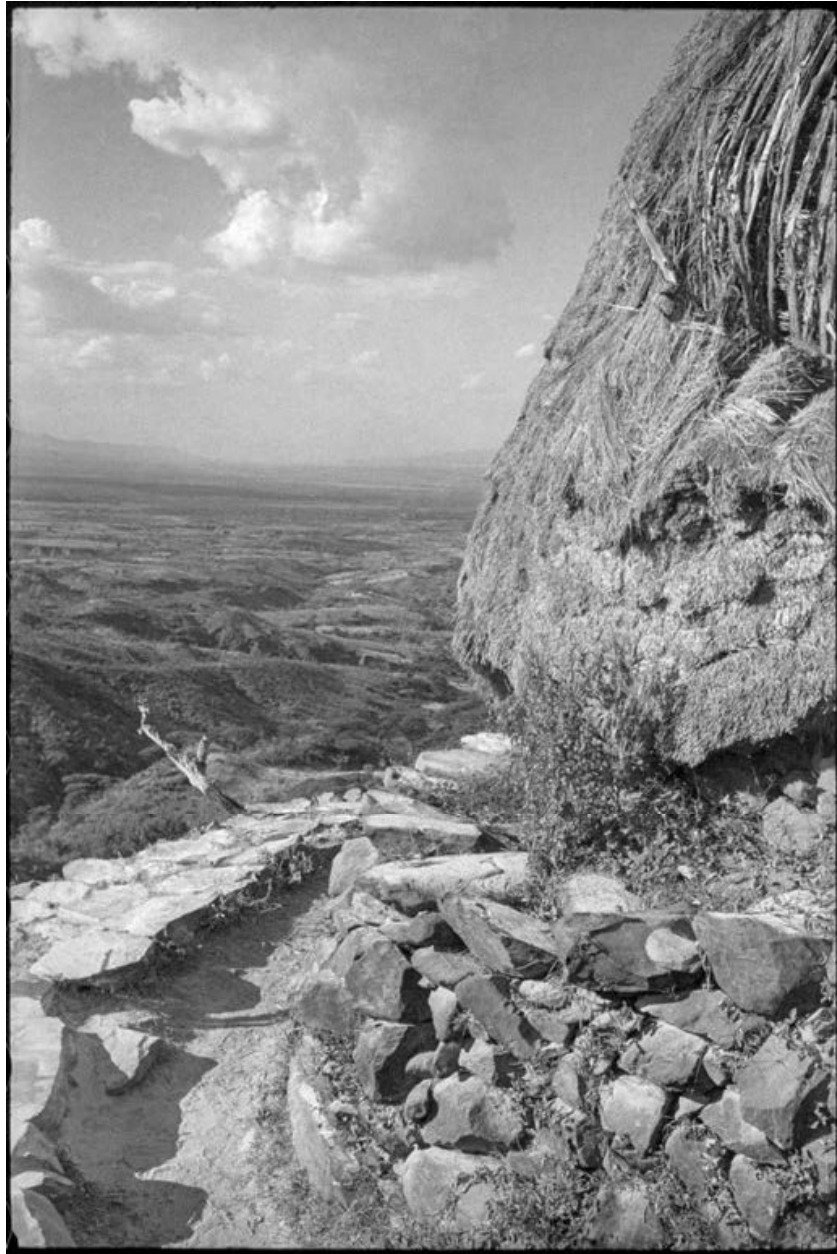


Image 35: View from the upper village in Gamole

his own district. The inhabitants of these three villages spend a night in Kalla's homestead on the eve of the *xelta* festival. The Kalla himself does not go to the *dammalle* square either. The so-called *dahaita dammalle* sticks, very important sticks that are distributed or manufactured on the *dammalle*, are brought to him from there.

Between those villages in the district of Djarso (Galmalle) and those in the district of Kalla there are eight other villages, grouped around the hill of Bam-malle. These are the villages of Dokattu, Hulme, Burkedaya, Buso, Gandima, Dureti, Badingalto and Kuile. The men of these villages go to the *dammalle* square on the first day of the festival – the highest and most decisive day of the festival – but also have two dignitaries of their own who are circumcised and wear

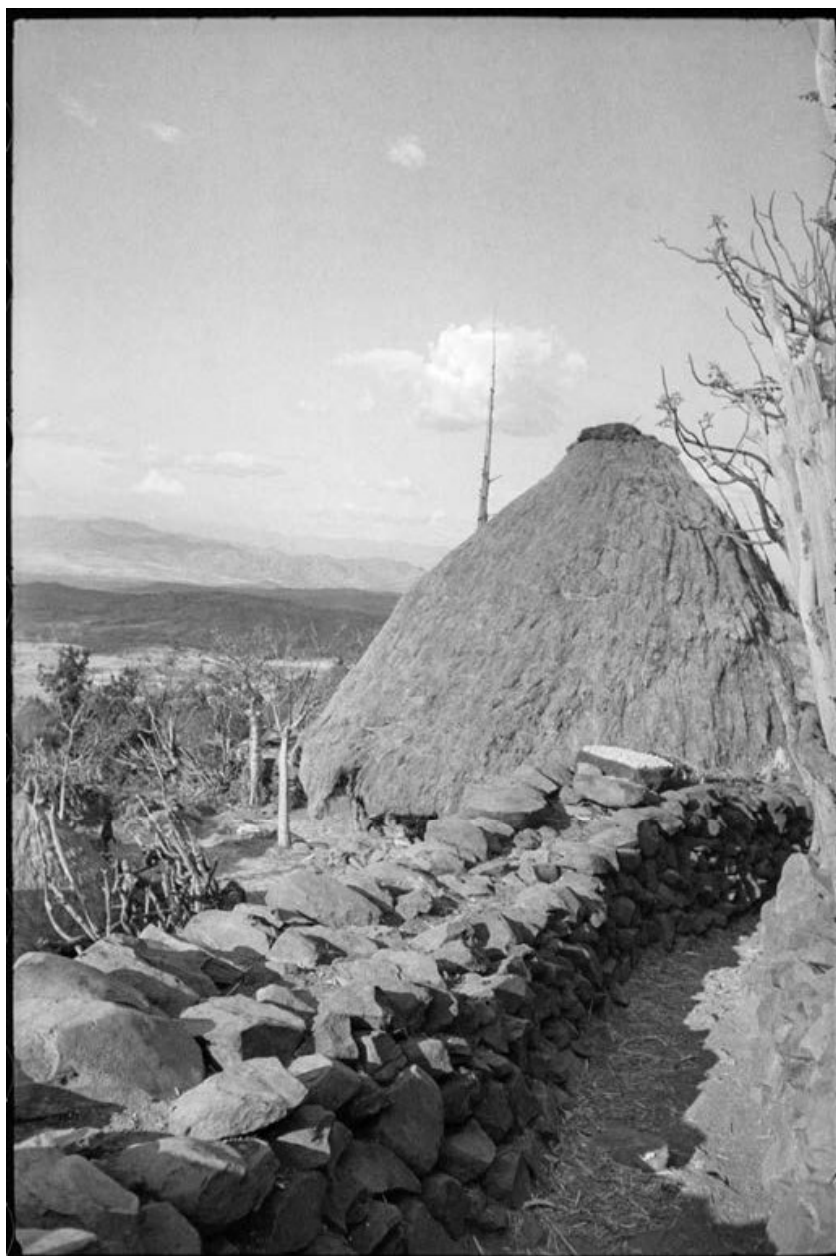


Image 36: Village Gamole. The wall that separates the upper village from the lower village

women's clothes at the feast. These are a Galgussa *poqalla*, called Doho, who lives in Dureti, and a Hirba *poqalla*, called Hollo, who lives in Dokattu.

These deviating customs at the *xelta* festival thus divide northeast Konso into three groups of villages; conspicuously to each group belongs a *poqalla* priest who lives isolated on a mountain. I think it is probable that an old order was preserved in this grouping of villages, in which Djarso, Bammalle and Kalla acted as three independent rulers side by side. We did not find out anything about the exceptional position the village of Darra might have had. We do not know whether Darra belonged to the 'eleven villages' which we counted here to Djarso (Galmalle) and Bammalle and which celebrate the festival together in northeast Konso, or whether it, under Shirdo [its *poqalla*], formed a village on its own. This assumption about



Image 37: Inside the village Burkedaya

the original rulers of Konso is, however, in contrast to the information provided by my informants, including Girgitta Bisho, who did not want to know anything about it. They said that Kalla had always been higher than the other priest kings, and the independence of the village chiefs, who are usually awarded the title of *grazmach* by the Amhara, had always existed.

Although the Amhara have now created a regulation in favour of Kalla, the hereditary enmity between Kalla and Bammalle, which occupied the minds in 1935, has by no means ceased. The old Bammalle I met in 1935, has died, as has his son and successor. His grandson, today's Bammalle, was a boy of about fourteen years old in 1951, who no longer – or not yet – claimed the whole of north Konso as his grandfather did, but only the villages of Dokattu, Hulme, Burkedaija, Buso, Gandima and Kuile, of which only the first three are attributed to him by the Amhara in so far as he is the subchief subordinate to Kalla for these three villages. Administrative difficulties often arise because Bammalle or his advisors refuse to take orders from Kalla. In Dokattu we could convince ourselves that this village actually recognizes the 'Bammalle' (Bammalle) as its king. That Buso also once belonged to the sphere of influence of Bammalle can be concluded from the fact that, on the death of Bammalle, no one is allowed to work in the fields for nine days, while the ban on field work at the death of Kalla only applies for three days. The original functions of the Kalla and the Bammalle are, moreover, of a priestly nature and relate primarily to field work. The predominance of Bammalle over Kalla, however, also results from this reconstruction.

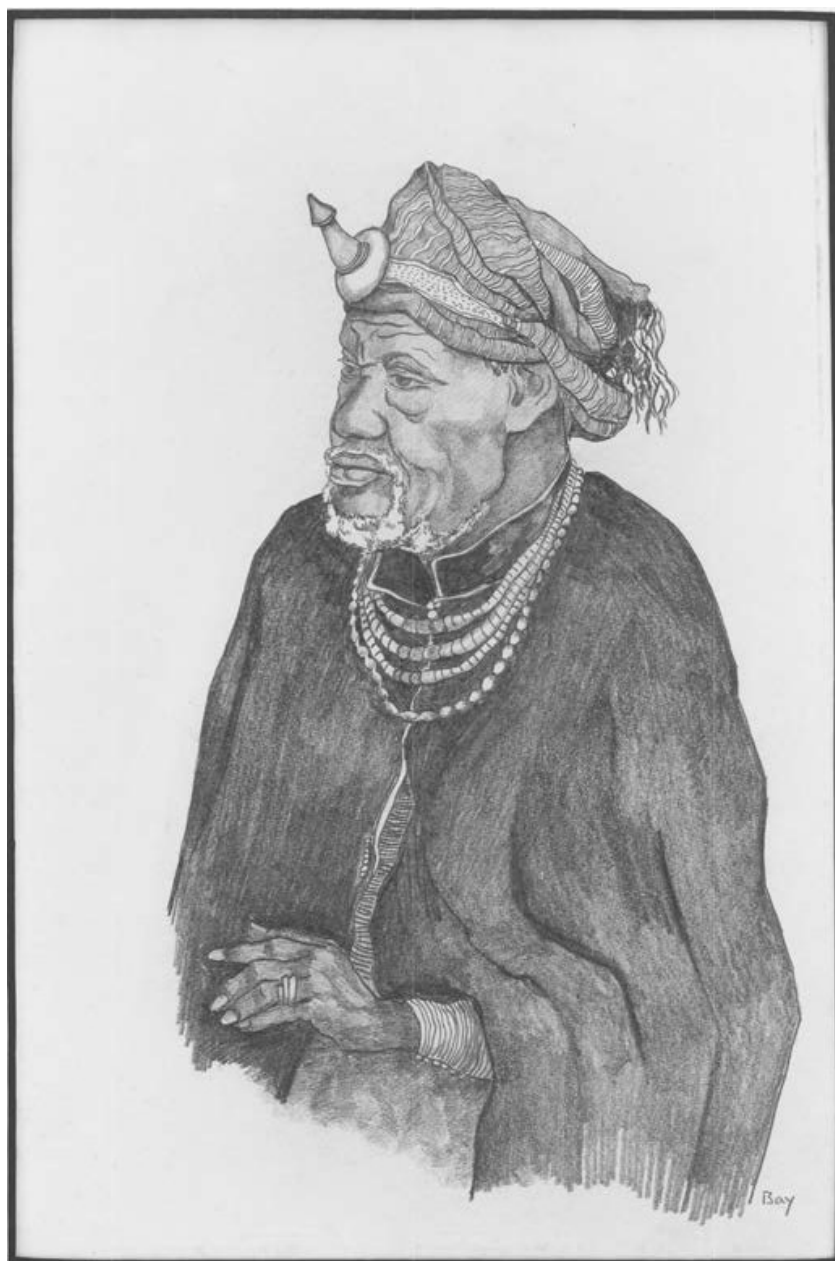


Image 38: Drawing of the Bammalle, 1935

Very similar conditions seem to prevail in south Konso. Anyway, the two names Abba Roba and Qufa are in everyone's mouth. Abba Roba resides in southeast Konso. We have not seen him or his residence. We visited Qufa's homestead but found nobody there. It is not on a mountain, but isolated and remote from the villages.

In this enumeration, northwest Konso is missing; we have never heard of these priests living alone on a mountain there. It is possible, however, that the northwest was once under a ruler in the village of Duro, which is situated on a mountain and has magnificent grounds in its megalithic plazas. But today it is largely Amharized, which is why we have limited our work there to a few visits.



Image 39: The present Bammalle, 1951

In addition to these hereditary *poqalla* offices, there is also the possibility of attaining office and dignity by election or award. The special honours connected with the killing of a man or big game will be reported below. There were, however, other honours that were not hereditary but could be acquired by choice or special ability. Three of these elected offices were held, for example, by Girgitta, my old informant in Idigle: he had been elder (*kemaida ganda*) of a part of the village of Idigle. So, as Orshada, he had been appointed to one of those eighteen priests who are responsible for the rain in particular and administer the drums of the village; he was also the owner of a well and therefore *abba ela* i.e. he owned this well as his personal property. The often very deep and walled wells were allegedly not dug by the Konso but came from the previous inhabitants, according to

some information from the Burdji. Of course, it is rare for a well to be offered for sale, but Girgitta had bought his well from a man in Darra for 500 Maria Theresa thalers (a quite enormous sum for a Konso). This was told to me by the other informants in Girgitta's absence, along with some other things about this strange, lucky man. Thus, he had only one son, who was to be regarded as the richest man in Konso land. This son had recently bought fabrics in Konso for 3,500 Maria Theresa thalers in order to sell them at the markets in Gedeo. However, the prices had fallen to such an extent that he had not sold anything and had left the goods with a friend there to wait for the prices to rise again. By the way, this son was appointed *grazmach* by the Amhara, and *fitaurari* Tadessa, the governor of Konso appointed by the Amhara, was his godfather when he converted to Christianity. Owning a well also brings considerable economic benefits, as all the people who draw water from the well have to work in the fields of the *abba ela* for a certain period of time in return.

For honour and prestige – apart from the heredity of honourable offices – wealth and thus the fortune that the Konso ascribe to the *dobitolaida* (a 'lucky person') are decisive. Girgitta's son will undoubtedly inherit the well after his death and thus become *abba ela*. But the greatest sorrow of father and son is that this son has only two daughters and no son. However, he is already Orshada and, as a result, may not have any more children. Therefore, the office of drum steward, which he currently holds as Orshada – taken over by inheritance from his father – will be orphaned and the next time it is a Galgussa's turn to be Orshada again, a new drum steward must be elected, but by the same clan (Elaita) to which Girgitta and his son belong. Then a poor wretch will certainly not be chosen, but a rich and respected man, just another *dobitolaida*.

Girgitta has also become the mayor of the one of the three parts of Idigle called Oibatale. Because this office is not bound to the *xelta* order, Girgitta still holds it today and, after his death, his son will undoubtedly inherit it. But after his death, this office must be re-elected because he has no male heir, and the decisive factor for the election will certainly be that the candidate is a *dobitolaida*.

The nine clans

As I reported earlier (Jensen 1936:348 ff), the Konso are divided into nine exogamous clans. This classification applies to the whole of Konso, including west and south Konso. Also the names are uniform, except in western Konso, where Dogomalita is, as with the Tsamako, occasionally called Barita (Jensen 1959:366). The nine clans are: Argamaida, Saudata, Kerdita, Ishalaita, Tigisseita, Dogomalita, Basanta, Mahaleta and Elaita. Kalla, the king, is of the clan Kerdita, but the name Saganota has been introduced for him and his relatives. This is a kind of sub-clan and does not annul the exogamy rule; a member of Saganota may of course not marry a member of Kerdita.

Kallala, the highest priest of the Galgussa class within the *xelta* system, also belongs to the Kerdita clan. Hirle, the leader of the Hirba counter-class, is Saudata.

The clans are divided, e.g. in Buso, into four groups, which until recently were exogamous. Now this is also beginning to loosen under Amhara influence. Today, for example, a Saudata man can marry a Mahaleta woman.

The four groups are as follows:

1. Argamaida, Tigisseita and Ishalaita
2. Dogomalita and Elaita
3. Saudata and Mahaleta
4. Kerdita and Basanta

Whether the four marriage classes were originally of greater importance, or whether it was just a special development in Buso, similar to the various accidental clan feuds and friendships independent of the actual clan system that we have encountered everywhere, can probably no longer be determined today. After all, the story about the sheep of God tells us that the nine clans of the Konso were originally descended from four people, and the story *The Argamaida clan*, which was told to me in Mattara, tells us that the three clans belonging to the Argamaida group were originally descended from a common clan founder and were therefore not allowed to marry each other. We have also often noticed that the clans felt so closely related that a Basanta man could call himself a Kerdita, or a Mahaleta man a Saudata.

In Godja I received the following information. The first man who came into the country was Didiba of the clan Saudata, who is now king in Gidole. Then Kalla came with the members of the clan Kerdita. In neither case is the place of origin mentioned in this context. Then the clan Argamaida came from Burdji under the leadership of Bammalle. The last to arrive was the clan Dogomalita, under a man named Ailo. He also came from Burdji but took the road via Gumaide and Gato to the land of the Konso. Today he – i.e. his descendants, who are *poqalla* priests and who bear the same name as Ailo – lives in Gato. Wando is the head of the branch that lives in Konso, namely in Gamole.

So, there is much to suggest that the division of the nine clans into four groups was more widespread than one would be inclined to assume under present conditions. The original legends of the clans are extremely lacking in content. The Argamaida clan, for example, has a tradition that Kalbea was the first man and founder of the clan. No information is given as to where this Kalbea came from. He married an Ishalaita woman and had a son with her. He was buried near Duro; the grave can still be seen there today. The statement that he married an Ishalaita woman, by the way, contradicts – if it should be true – the statement just made that there were only four marriage groups before, because the Ishalaita belonged to the Argamaide group.

The members of the clan Ishalaita trace themselves back to a man named Affarta. He was created at the same time as the guinea fowl (*koskorta*). Therefore, all members of the clan do not eat the guinea fowl, and cover it with grass when they find one dead by the road. Affarta is buried near Tishmale. In Tishmale there is a *mora* square, *gaiyaha*, which belongs to the Ishalaita. The *abba mora* is Amatto, the living descendant of Affarta.

The clans have totemistic relationships. The information on this varied from village to village, but they were more or less the same in believing the following. Saudata is related to the locust, elephant and monkey, Mahaleta to the hyena, Argamaida and Ishalaita to the camel, the blue colour of the sky and the hawk. Tigisseita is related to a small plant called *gunita* (*justicia ladanoides*) and to small stones. Dogomalita is related to the rhinoceros and to a certain species of sheep that has a short tail; moreover, they do not eat the nuchal nerve of any animal. Kerdita is related to the jackal, and Basanta to the pumpkin and the lion.

In order to establish the totemistic relations of the Saudata, it was argued that in earlier times many Saudata men once pursued locusts (*doraita*) to eat them. Eventually, the distance became too great and everyone returned to their village. Only one Saudata man pursued them further and further into the bush and never found his way back. He turned into a monkey. Since then, the Saudata do not eat grasshoppers and feel related to the monkey. Another Saudata man was in the lowland plantations. Then a so-called *oritta* (spirit) came and beat him and he became an elephant. Since then, they [the Saudata] have felt related to the elephant (cf. story *The monkey and the elephant* below).

Kala is the word for jackal. Originally, however, Kala was a girl of the Kerdita clan. She had a fight with her parents, which ended with the parents chasing her away. Then she ran into the forest and became a jackal. Since that time the Kerdita people feel related to the jackal.

How Argamaida came to the totemistic relationship with the falcon, sky blue and camel is told in a story (see story *The Argamaida clan* below). I could not get a story about the totemistic relations of the clan Dogomalita. Tigisseita must not eat a prepared dish if small stones have fallen on it. To justify the kinship with the *gunita* plant, they say that it originated at the same time as the first man of the clan Tigisseita.

The first man of Basanta was called Loxoba. He came out of a pumpkin that had fallen from the sky onto a field and grew bigger and bigger. My informants insisted on the truth of this story, although I objected that Kalla, who does belong to the Kerdita clan, also came from a pumpkin (Jensen 1936:385). These informants obviously knew nothing about the origin of the Kalla, but most of the Konso are familiar with the story.

On the other hand, the fact that they told the pumpkin origin of the first man of the Basanta clan speaks for the correctness of the assertion I received in Buso that the Basanta and Kerdita belong particularly closely together and were per-

haps originally one clan. The Basanta also feel related to the lion, but, while the killing of the totem animal and participation in the dances in honour of the killer are usually forbidden among the tribes west of the Woito, the Basanta men can explicitly kill a lion and then be honoured as lion slayers. All Basanta people do not eat the kidneys or liver of an animal, because the lion supposedly does not eat these from its victims either.²⁶ Otherwise, the rule is that the animal with which totemistic relationships exist is not eaten by the clan members, that its death is regarded as misfortune and mourned, and that a dead animal of this species found along the path is covered with grass.

The castes

For a long time, it was inexplicable to me how it could have escaped me so completely in 1934/35 that the Konso were divided into two castes, the members of one of which, called *xauda*, were almost entirely weavers, for the division into *ädenta* and *xauda* is in itself quite conspicuous and should very quickly be obvious to an observer. This mystery was solved when, during a visit to Buso, the place where my information came from in 1935, I found out that there were only three weavers there, so that this caste did not matter at all in Buso and could very well go unnoticed.

From the village of Darra we still have the information that it does not accommodate any weavers. Otherwise, all other villages have a lot of *xauda*, up to a third of the population. In the individual cases that we could observe ourselves, such as in Mattara and Godja, there were undoubtedly many more in recent times. In Godja the predominance of *xauda* was evident. This circumstance, and the fact that the village chief, the descendant of the village founder, (with the title and name Balgudo) lived in the grazing grounds, the so-called *fora*, and not in the village, was probably responsible for the fact that the village of Godja and its customs had gone downhill so much. Presumably, apart from the village chief, many other *ädenta* have avoided the predominance of weavers [by living] in the *fora*.

The *xauda* also called themselves *bericha* and claimed that this name was Amharic. But our Amhara and Oromo servants did not know the word and denied that it was an Oromo word. However, it is not a Konso word either, as the Konso themselves assured us. The *ädenta* also call themselves by the Oromo name *ob-bruu*. The southern Oromo also called the farmers this word (information from Haberland, also not yet clarified).

The *xauda* are mainly weavers. However, the word corresponds approximately to the *manni* of the Ari (Jensen 1959:58 ff). The blacksmiths are also called *xauda*, but they form an endogamic caste on their own. Of course, the Konso have words for blacksmithing, weaving, pottery and leather processing. The collective term *xauda* denotes the castes, separate from the actual Konso, which carry on these

²⁶ See Jensen 1959:367; in Frankfurt Zoo, the liver is particularly popular with lions.

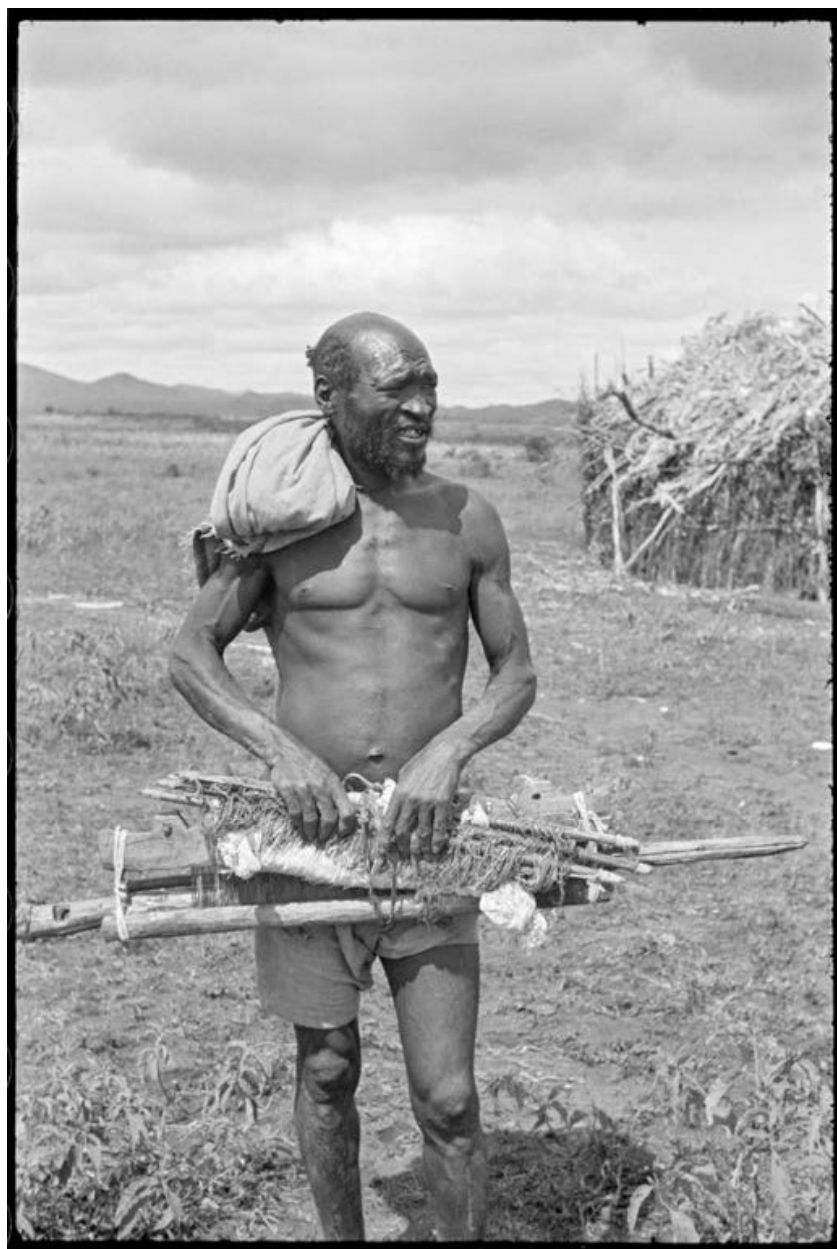


Image 40: Weaver from Mattara with loom

trades more or less exclusively and are basically just called non-*ädenta*. Potters who are Konso do not exist in the whole Konso country. But there are two villages near Fasha, Sawkame and Kundjara, which are pure pottery settlements. At least that was the information we received. We have only visited Kundjara twice. The village made a pronounced Konso impression, with *mora* squares and *olahitta* masts, so this information seems somewhat suspicious to us. The Konso say that potter families of these two villages are from Burdji, but they call them Koira, so it must remain open whether they are from Burdji or Koira.

They still speak their own language among themselves, but they can also speak the Konso language. How long they have been resident in Konso could not be determined. In any case, marriage is prohibited between all Konso and the inhab-



Image 41: Balgudo, the balabat of Godja

itants of these two pottery settlements. The pottery craft is also here only done by the women. The men work in the fields. Some of the pots and always the clay roof tops, with or without phallic decoration, also come from the neighbouring Gauwada.

Some of the weavers' wives also do leather work, especially the ceremonial clothing for the Konso women, which – unless the Konso women provide it for themselves – is purchased from them. In other words, the *ädenta* can process leather for themselves, but they cannot do it as a business. The *xauda* men also do leather work for commercial purposes, making dance shields for the Konso and selling them at the markets.

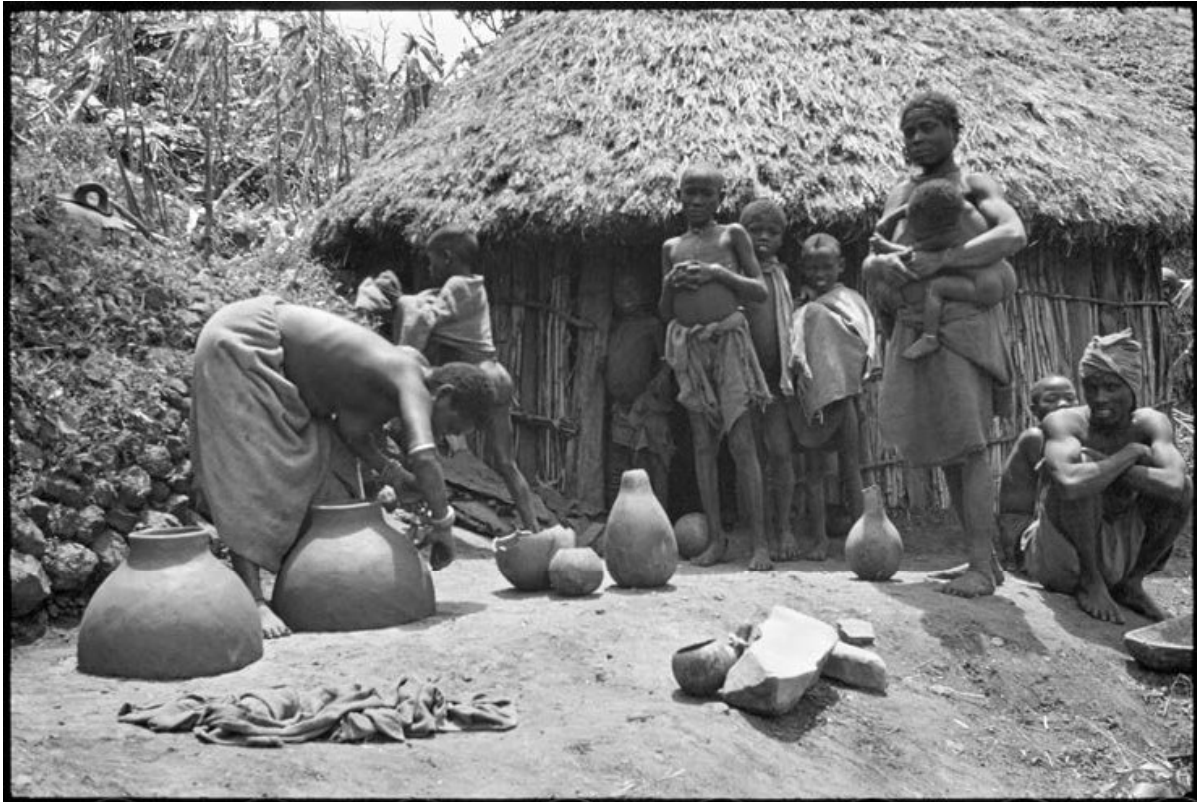


Image 42: Pottery woman at work

But the main occupation of the *xauda* is weaving. The Konso say that the field the *xauda* works is the market. The *ädenta* also say of themselves that they are connected with the right, while they call the *xauda* the left. The *xauda* are not allowed to keep any cattle, not even sheep and goats, and they have no land, or at most a small field right next to the homestead where they are buried. The *ädenta* farm cotton and may also spin it, but they may not weave. The wooden sculptures in memory of the deceased are also made by *ädenta*, who are especially skilled in this field. This trade, although also a craft, does not bring about any social differences compared to other *ädenta*.

The *xauda* belong to the same nine clans as the *ädenta* and are also bound to clan exogamy. However, in Konso land, with the exception of northwest Konso, they are excluded from the *xelta* system and are not bound to any marriage date prescribed by the *xelta* system. How little they know about the Konso shrines is shown by the fact that many times in northwest Konso I asked full-grown men who were *xauda* about the *misgatta*, the highest shrine, and in response only got a shake of the head and the remark that such a thing did not happen in the land of the Konso. This went on until I came across an *ädenta* – also from northwest Konso – who knew both the word and the shrine in question, and who scornfully added that my previous informants were all *xauda* who knew nothing about these things. In fact, in northwest Konso, the *xauda* have proved to be very unsuitable as informants about the *xelta* institution or related *ädenta* shrines. It was very

unfortunate that I did not know about this caste distinction at the beginning of our work in northwest Konso. At that time, my only informants were exclusively weavers. I then learned of the separation into *ädenta* and *xauda* and was thus able later to consult *ädenta* for information about the *xelta* system.

The participation of the *xauda* of northwest Konso in the *xelta* festivals, and their commitment to the marriage regulations of the *xelta* system is in any case secondary. The men wear bells when they are in the *xelta* squares of Mattara; the *ädenta* wear large bells, the *xauda* small ones. The sanctuary of the *arammo* place is a certain stone about which I have not found out anything else. But the *ädenta* are allowed to enter it or come close to it; the *xauda* are not. In animal killings, which take place during the *xelta* festivals, the *ädenta* are in front and the *xauda* behind. In short, their role is secondary in every respect.

Since when the regulation that admits the *xauda* to the *xelta* ceremonies has existed in northwest Konso could not be determined at all. My informants in northeast Konso were completely unaware of this special arrangement in the west of the country. It would be of interest to know whether any event in the course of the last century or so has led to this, or whether the special position of the *xauda* in the northwest has only existed since the Amhara period. However, we will have to leave the question unanswered, as our material contains nothing to answer it.

The *xauda* have their own officials who are also *xauda* and are responsible for disputes among them. In Mattara, the head is the *xauda* Lila, for whom, as for the *ädenta* offices, the name and office are inherited by the eldest son. In northeast Konso, the head of the *xauda* is Fullo. The *xauda* leaders in the individual villages are under his authority.

Weaving is an extremely profitable business in Konso, because all the other peoples in the south, southeast, southwest and west do not know how to weave and are largely dependent on the Konso. On our last trip (in 1955) we heard many complaints from the weavers, who bitterly complained about the competition from traders bringing imported textiles to the markets. This is said to have deprived many weavers of the basis of their existence, which is said to have led to a mass emigration of weavers from Godja, for example. The weavers, however, still lived far better than the *ädenta*. For example, the *xauda* undoubtedly surpassed the *ädenta* quite considerably in the consumption of meat and millet beer, both a certain luxury under these living conditions. Every afternoon between 4 and 5 p.m., for example, there was a lot of noise in most villages, a reliable sign that a group of people had moved on to enjoying beer. Beer was prepared in the farmsteads in shifts and the neighbours came to drink a bottle of beer, which was bought per gourd. It was mainly the *xauda* who took part in this, because their craft constantly earns them money, while the *ädenta* earn money much less frequently since they can only obtain it by selling their agricultural produce.

As far as the consumption of meat is concerned, we have never seen so much slaughter among any nation as among the Konso. This was also very pleasant for

us, because we no longer had to slaughter an entire animal to get meat, as we had done before, but could buy fresh beef every day, a custom that did not exist in Konso land in 1935. Now, at least one cattle is slaughtered daily in every larger village, and at least five to eight cattle are slaughtered at the five large markets in Bakaule, Burkedaya, Dokattu, Fascha, and Duro. However, the main customers [for meat] were also weavers. On the other hand, for the *äidenta* – as for all the other tribes we visited, including the most abundant ones such as the Banna and Hammar – the consumption of meat is limited to feasts and other sacrifices, and these probably occur on average at most once a month. One of the main products imported into Konso were herds of cattle, which were mainly driven to Konso from Borana and Banna.

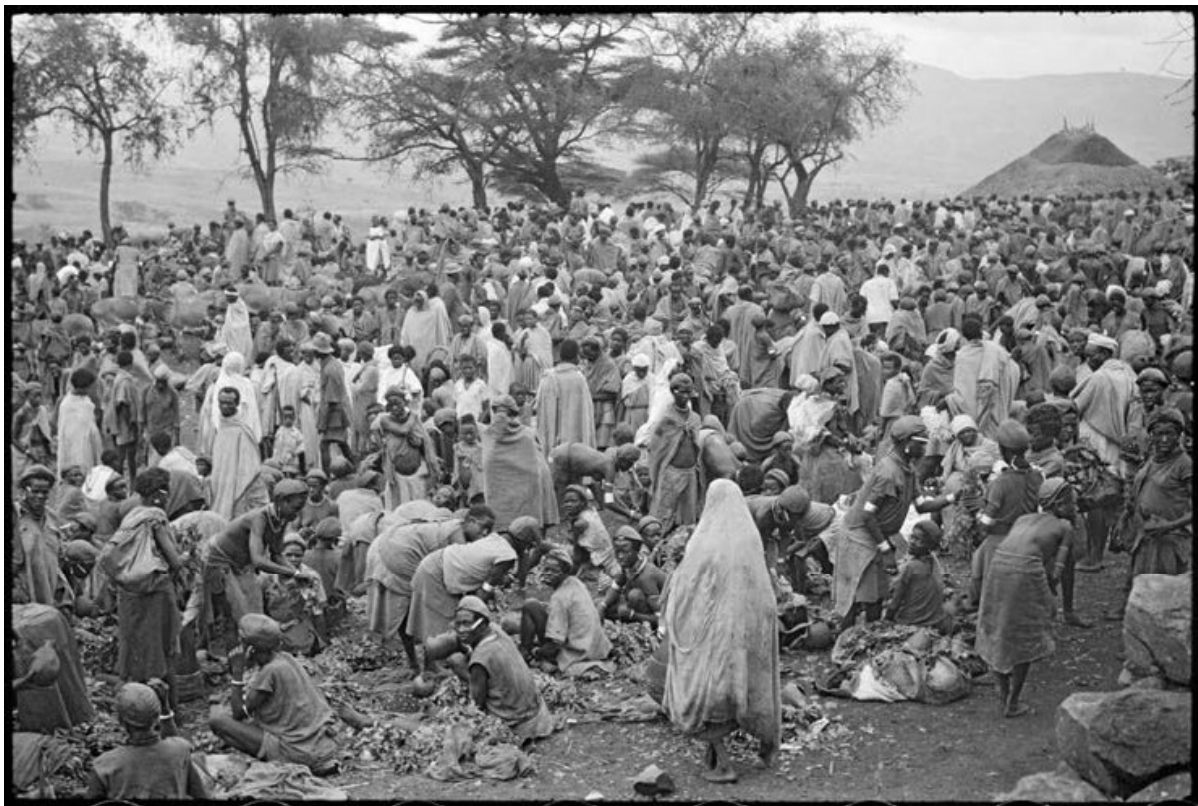


Image 43: Market in Bakaule

In each village there was a more or less large number of weavers' pits, spread over the whole village and covered with a roof to protect against sun and rain. They seemed to be common knowledge, for soon a weaver could be seen weaving at this pit, soon at that one. In the evenings before the markets – and this was twice a week in Godja, because they were all feeding the markets, since they were all about the same distance away – you could hear the beating and knocking by which the coarse-threaded fabrics that predominate in the markets quite decidedly are smoothed and at the same time treated with a white powder to make them more attractive for sale. Prices are far too high compared with world market prices (even in Addis you sometimes pay only half the price), but this is largely true for all

domestic products. So, the weavers make no profit from the enormous prices they achieve, because they also have to overpay for grain, milk and honey. Only meat, although priced higher than Addis Ababa prices, is priced significantly lower than world market prices.

From our expedition material, we have little to contribute to the question of the origin of the weavers in Konso. Straube (1963:125) is of the opinion that weaving was first spread by the Amhara and that its introduction in southern Ethiopia is connected with the medieval conquest of this region by the Amhara. I am afraid I do not agree with him. The linguistic connections could be cited above all, since all the words the Konso use in connection with weaving are not Amhara words. That things are different in Dorse and many other places could perhaps be explained by the stronger Amharic-Christian colonization, while the Konso were probably never affected by this early Amhara wave. It is also hard to see why weaving in our travel area should have been limited to three tribes – Wolaita, Dorse and Konso – while the Sidama, for example, were also, and particularly intensively, influenced by the Amhara in the Middle Ages yet have no weaving. I would suggest that the impulse that led to the introduction of weaving in these areas was of a different nature. They may also have been inspired in more distant times, perhaps by one of the Cushitic kingdoms of the Kaffa or Wolaita. Even with this assumption, however, it is difficult to explain why the Maale, who have taken on many a trait from these sacred kingdoms, did not know any weaving. Therefore, one can probably only say that we have too little material to answer the question asked above.

Under no circumstances should the problem of the weaver caste be thrown together with that of the *manni* layer, the potters and blacksmiths, by saying that originally only these two crafts were connected by an endogamous layer, which then, when for some reason weaving appeared, also took over weaving. On the other hand, there are general cultural-historical considerations which place weaving at a younger cultural-historical age than, for example, the separation of the Baka from the *manni*. In any case, weaving is a foreign asset even to the Konso and is very probably younger than the main cultural heritage of this people.

I am therefore not inclined to regard the *xauda* as an autochthonous stratum that was overlaid by the *ädenta* and forced into an inferior social position. More likely, I would like to think of them as immigrants who were linguistically and culturally assimilated, but remained sociologically segregated. In general, the members of the artisan castes in Ethiopia, since they do not own land, are easily prepared to change their place of residence if more favourable earning opportunities or other reasons make this seem advisable. We have also given examples of *xauda* (p. 34).

The amazing thing about Konso is the large number of weavers, which can be estimated at a third of the total population. Maybe it happened here because an extremely fortunate symbiosis was created here: the *ädenta* grow the cotton

and also partly spin it; the *xauda* weave the cotton and find a market for their products that is not saturated all around and that, as mentioned, has only recently been affected by imported goods.

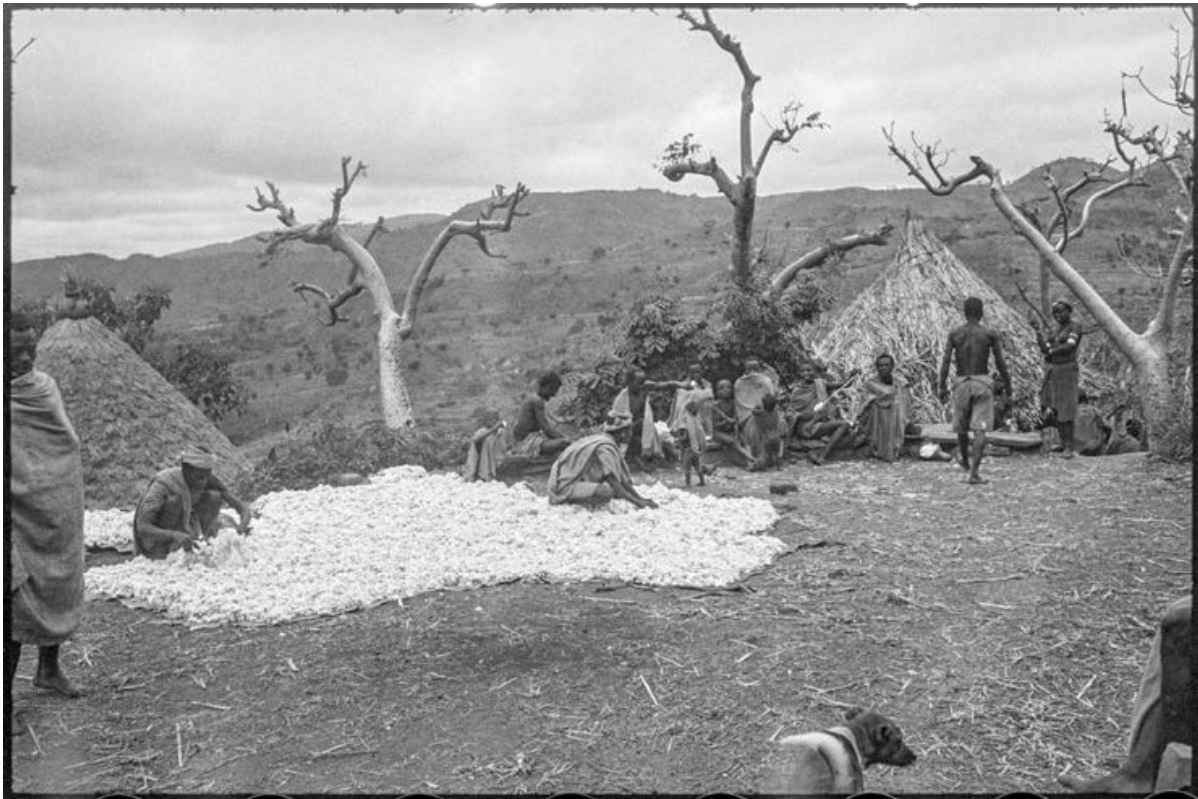


Image 44: The harvested cotton is spread out to dry on the mora square (in Buso)

We did not encounter any signs in Konso – such as the ritual offices that the *manni* hold with the Ari (Jensen 1959: 58 ff) and as we will also report from the Haditsho among the Sidama (Jensen 2021) – that suggest the original residence of the *xauda*.

The Konso have a narrative with which they justify the division into *ädenta* and *xauda*: one woman had two sons, *ädenta* and *xauda* by name, one of whom held a field hoe in his hand at birth, the other of whom was born with a weaving device. So, she said to them: You, *ädenta*, shall always be a peasant, and you, *xauda*, shall be a weaver. Since that time *ädenta* and *xauda* did not marry each other. In one variant, however, the origin of blacksmithing is explained in a very similar way. It is a common motif in the narrative art of northeast Africa that a newborn child already holds the characteristic device or natural product in his hand that determines his future life.

It is true for the entire northeast-African region that land and livestock ownership is generally more highly valued than crafts and trades, even if this ownership only permits a miserable existence. All the peasants in this area have a deep-rooted prejudice against any kind of craftsmanship, i.e. against making a living solely from crafts.

In any case, weaving offered the *xauda* a way to exist without land and livestock. However, weaving also offered the *ädenta* a new opportunity: the cultivation of cotton. It was probably only in connection with the emergence of the weaving trade and the cultivation of cotton that such a division of labour emerged, resulting in the *xauda* no longer owning any land or livestock at all. This probably coincided with the intensive construction of terraces, which, due to the enormous increase in population, divided the land up to the last square metre between individual owners. In any case, the Konso no longer know the land ownership of the clan, which distributes the use of the land among themselves (except for the grazing land in the lowlands).



Image 45: Coring the cotton with the rolling stick on a flat stone

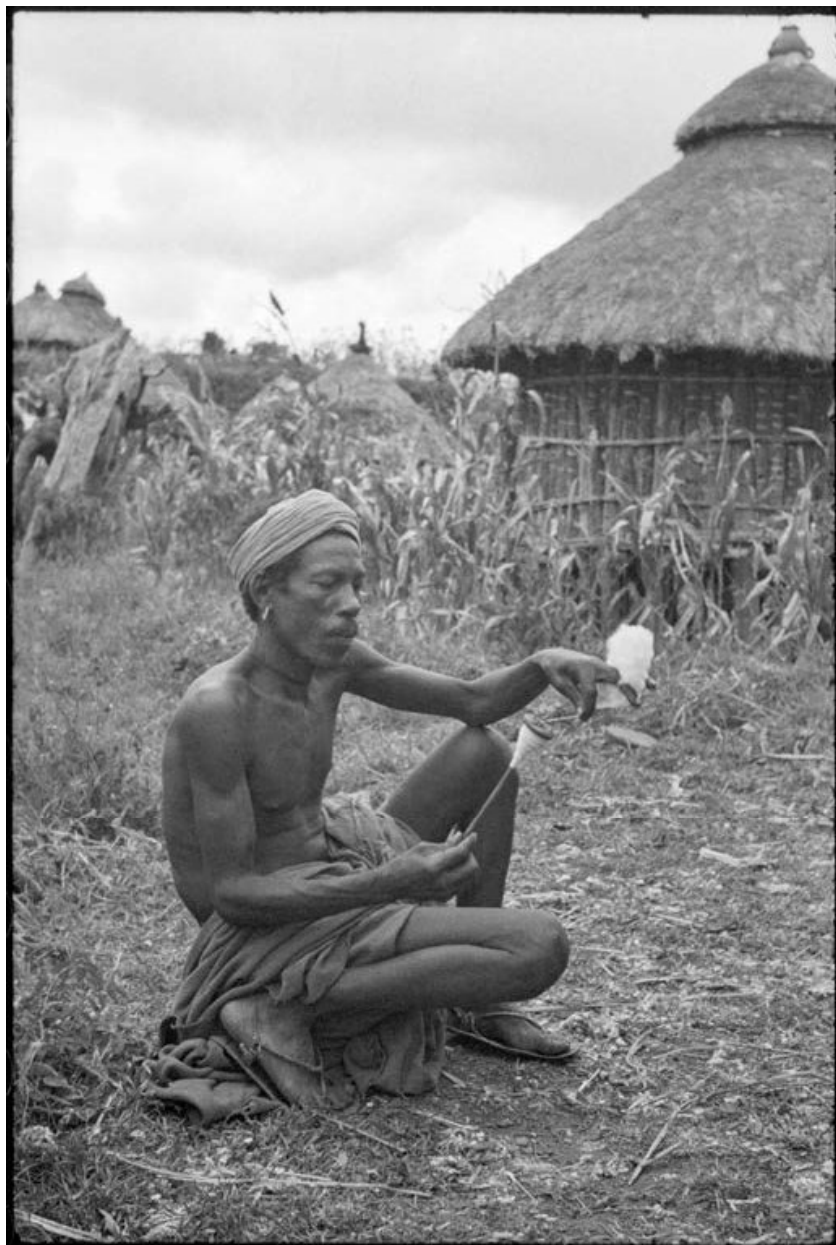


Image 46: Spinning Konso man

However, all this must remain speculation as long as so little is known about the neighbouring areas. The Dorse on the mountains at the southwestern end of Lake Abaya are as well known for their weaving as the Konso (see Straube 1963:148 ff). In Kaffa and the neighbouring areas to the east, the weavers also apparently belong to the shunned castes (Cerulli 1956:17). All this requires much more intensive investigation and comparison with other continents – including early Europe – where weavers also have a special position before one can come to a reasonably plausible conclusion about the origin of the special position of weavers.

Another possibility could be – and the Konso themselves often put it this way – that the *xauda* came into the country later than the *ädenta* and already as weavers in very large numbers. The fact that the presence of such a large num-

ber of weavers, who far exceed the Konso's own needs, was tolerated could then be explained by the cultivation of cotton, which also considerably exceeds the Konso's own needs. But the *xauda* can hardly have come as conquerors, because how could they then have become a despised caste?



Image 47: Weaver of Mattara at work on the tread loom

Religious and spiritual life

The idea of God

In most prayers the Konso address heaven and earth with a fixed formula, *waqo ga bito*, where *waq* is the Oromo word for God and heaven and *bito* means earth. The visible sky is also called *latta* in the Konso language. The two deities are probably also referred to as *abo aye* (father mother). Heaven is considered the husband of the earth. The rain is regarded as the seed that the earth receives.

Waq and *bito* both originated at the same time, and originally neither was more powerful than the other. At that time the earth was still without mountains and as even as the sky. One day there was a dispute between heaven and earth about who was more powerful. The sky made it rain for a day and a night and threw down great stones and mountains, which did not exist on earth at that time. When the earth saw her changed face, she bowed down and praised the mightiness of heaven.

It is said in another version that whenever people put a pot on the fire, the earth moved so that the pot fell down. Man complained about this to heaven, and that is why *waq* threw stones and mountains upon the earth so that she could no longer move.

On the other hand, the Konso tell that two gods lived in heaven. One was well-disposed toward men and from him all good things came. The other, however, did not want people to have a good life, and from him all evil and bad things came. Others say that the two gods have only one form but with two mouths. If one mouth tells it to rain, the other mouth tells it not to rain. If it rains gently all day or night, it is a sign that there is peace between the gods. When a thunderstorm announces itself, it comes from the good god, and the thunder is his language. The evil god often sends a storm after it, so that the rain spreads again. Then the evil one wins over the good god.

The evil god throws iron at people to destroy them. According to others, he throws dogs and donkeys at people. This observation was maintained by several rapporteurs, even when I doubted its accuracy. If he has not hit anyone, he usually sets a tree on fire and returns to heaven.

When the sky is red in the evening, people say to each other: Look at the red god. However, they did not want to know anything about an identification of

the evil god with the red colour. On the other hand, the correct or good god is called *waqa bora* (black god). They pray to the right god to keep the other, the wrong (*chachate*), away from people. The information about the red and black god among the Konso is unmistakably similar to the corresponding stories among the Masai.

Sun and moon are considered to be the eyes of God.

In the beginning, God lived on earth with man and animals. At that time the sky was as close above the earth as the roof of a house. When he [God] announced his desire to leave the earth, man was sad. He asked how he would live without him. Then God showed him how to drill fire and dig wells; so, he left the fire and the water to the people.

Ever since God left the earth, man has been trying again and again to restore the old condition and live in community with God. The Konso also see the invention of the airplane in this context. The European tries to fly into the sky with it but always stays in the space between heaven and earth and cannot reach God.

According to the faith of the Konso, a man who no longer has sexual intercourse is especially suitable for praying for rain and for any conversation with God. That is why circumcised priests, who must abstain from all sexual intercourse, are particularly suitable for all kinds of prayers. In Idigle, a man called Borre, who was the deputy of Hirle, one of the highest priests, often visited the village. All Hirle's people had died; the only living representative was a small boy. Until this boy grew up and could take on his official duties, Borre held the office of Hirle. He was a drunk and an exceptionally stupid man, so he was not taken seriously by the Konso. He had a fine nose for houses in which beer was being prepared, for he, like every circumcised priest, had the right to receive a cup of beer without payment.

In his hair he wore so-called *hansabita* blossoms, by means of which he could attract the rain. He stood on a raised place when it rained nearby, picked up his *hansabita* flowers and repeated endlessly his formula, *waqo ga bito*. When the rain reached our village, he proudly asked us if we had seen how he had brought the rain.

But not only those priests circumcised in the *xelta* ceremonies are pleasing to God, other people who voluntarily refrain from having sexual intercourse are just as suitable for talking to God. Thus, during my visit to Konso in 1951, I had the impression from Galaida in Buso, who had already been my informant in 1935, that he had risen to be a very respected person among his village comrades. During my visit to Buso in 1955, he told me that he had vowed never again to associate with a woman. In connection with this vow, he had been elected priest in his village. He did not fail to add to this communication that the people had only decided to vote after they had found that he always spoke the truth. Galaida was probably 53–58 years old at the time he took his vows.



Image 48: Borre, the current Hirle with the Hirle staff

The concept of uncleanness also plays a role in the relationship of priests to God among the Konso. Strangely enough, among the Konso – in contrast to all other peoples we visited – only sexual intercourse with a menstruating woman is considered promising. In this respect, the woman is not considered unclean in this state because it is not forbidden to have sexual intercourse with her. This is connected with the special view that women conceive exclusively during menstruation. But women – and especially menstruating ones – are nevertheless not allowed to approach the especially holy places, e.g. the house where the drums are kept. A woman who is sexually ill is unclean. One must not accept food from such a woman, otherwise one will also become unclean oneself.

Simple contact with a member of the weaver caste does not make you unclean, as we have come to know with the Baka and other peoples (Jensen1959:283), but sexual intercourse with a *xauda* woman does. When I asked whether an *ädenta* woman who gets involved with a *xauda* man also becomes impure, the Konso said that such a woman would probably be killed by her husband. But a man becomes unclean when he sleeps with his father's wife or with his half-sister.

The house of a deceased person is unclean, and the priests may not enter it. The blood of a sacrificial animal cleanses the house again. A woman also becomes unclean through adulterous intercourse. Apart from the fact that the adulterer has to pay (20–40 Maria Theresa thaler), the husband can only have intercourse with

her again after he has performed the so-called *bakarnäshe* ceremony with her. He must take her to the Sagan River and kill a goat. Then he makes a mixture of the mud of the river, the stomach contents of the goat and elephant droppings with which he rubs her and his body. Only with a bath in the Sagan is the uncleanness removed from the woman.

Someone who slays someone of his own clan is considered the most impure; he cannot go through a purification ceremony and is cursed forever. No one touches his property, in order to have no part in the uncleanness. Manslaughter of a member of a foreign clan can always be put right by payments, or one must live in constant fear of the blood revenge of the other clan. But killing within one's own clan precludes such negotiations.

At Idigle was a dilapidated farmstead abandoned by a relative of Djarso who had beheaded his own brother. He had been expelled from his clan, apparently considered the worst punishment by the Konso, and had left the country. But before he left, he had attached a spear to his gate and pronounced a terrible curse on the village. This curse was rendered ineffective by the village community through an expiatory sacrifice. But nobody was allowed to touch the spear on the homestead entrance. All this had happened many years, if not decades, ago. When we asked if we could remove the spear to incorporate it into our ethnographic collection, the elders initially agreed completely. They even seemed relieved that the emblem of that curse would disappear. But when we actually went to remove the spear, this undertaking obviously became scary for them, and our friend, old Giggitta, came and asked us – from a respectful distance of about thirty metres, by the way – to fasten the spear to the gate again. He feared that the wrath of the exile might harm his relatives and that the spear might bring misfortune to us too. So, we reattached the spear to the gate, but no one could help us because the whole homestead was considered unclean.

Priests who abstain from all sexual intercourse, avoid all uncleanness (which to a large extent already happens when the first requirement is fulfilled) and always speak the truth were considered to be particularly suitable for speaking to God. Their prayers are very short and very similar in content to those of the other peoples we visited: may God keep sickness away, may God give us rich child blessings, may God let the crop grow or may God let the cattle multiply greatly.

The narrative material of the Konso is also largely dominated by the idea of a God in heaven. In one case of the stories all good things come from God, but so does just punishment. God gives wealth, but God also takes it from the unworthy. Another part of the stories mixes these clear statements with ideas that may have been fed from many sources. There is the sheep of God, who destroys the whole man's property in cases of carelessness; or a helper of God appears, who has some features in common with the heavenly girl Geli among the Baka (Jensen 1959:36 f.). So the idea of God does not become much clearer either by consulting the narrative material.

It seems to me that the idea of a God in heaven, which is most reminiscent of the idea of God in the Old Testament, has come most recently to the Konso. It defines their culture today and most narrative material is also influenced by it.

The idea of a pair of gods, heaven and earth, presented as man and woman, seems like an older formulaic remnant, and includes the myth that heaven used to be very close to the earth and that the two were separated. Almost exclusively in prayers for rain, which is interpreted as the heavenly seed, this pair of gods is addressed in fixed formulas. This notion occurs also among the peoples west of the Woito, who almost all have an earth deity next to the sky god, and this speaks for it being part of an older idea.

The Masai idea of a red and black god in the sky does not seem very vivid among the Konso either and is undoubtedly an older idea. But how it is connected with the other two ideas or whether there is no connection at all can hardly be deduced from the Konso material alone.

At that time [1936], I had reported that the *xelta* system was headed by a spirit being named Dauruahellu, whose name should not be mentioned in profane times (Jensen 1936:370). However, this was a misunderstanding, as *dauru wa hellu* is the beginning of a song sung during the *xelta* festivals. *Dauru* or *daura* plays a considerable role in the religious life of the Konso. It means 'forbidden' in the sense of 'taboo'. Every priest is called *daura*, especially those who are circumcised and no longer have contact with women. The lyrics of the song that is sung at the *xelta* festivals vary in the different districts, but the song is always named according to its meaning: it is taboo for the young man to mention the name of the song. This song seems to be very important at certain *xelta* feasts and roughly reflects the content of the *xelta* feasts for the common man. It is strictly forbidden to sing it in profane times. However, the custom today has already loosened up a lot, as I could only bribe one man in 1935 to tell me the beginning of the song with Dauruahellu. The Dauruahellu (as I understood it then) seems to be used by the men as a representative of all *xelta* ceremonies. Which spiritual being is connected with the *xelta* order, that is, which is spoken of so much in the songs, was the subject of many conversations I had with the men. They never spoke of God (*waq*), but they did not know how to indicate another man either. The song clearly seems to refer to a woman's vagina, whose name should not be mentioned and which is actually not mentioned. Which superordinate being is connected with the *xelta* institution – and there is nothing to suggest that one of the ideas of God outlined above is meant here – must, if it exists at all, remain a mystery for the time being.

Myths of origin

God created the first human couple from mud. The Konso do not have names for this first pair. The Konso are said to have been created in Aylota on the eastern slope of the Gumaide Mountains; the Borana in Liben. Some Borana came to Konso land and adopted the language of the Konso.

The weavers were created in the Konso land, in Duro. According to another version, Ondjalo, the first weaver, was captured in a war. His sons came looking for him. They then all settled in Konso and practised weaving. Still others said that originally there had been no weavers at all; rather, these had only emerged from the blacksmiths.

The real Konso, the *ädenta*, were born with the field hoe; the other castes of the *xauda* were born partly with weaving tools, partly with blacksmiths' tools and partly with leather processing tools.

In the beginning, all humans, animals and celestial bodies spoke the same language as God. At that time, there was only one sun shining on the earth. She complained to God about all the work she had to do alone. God then called all the people and animals together and asked them how they could make the work of the sun easier. The forest cat said: "The sun still wants to be helped in its work. It's so hot already. If she gets any more help, it'll be unbearable for us." God decided: "The only rest I can give the sun is that it should die every evening and a new sun should come every morning." Since then it has remained the same, that every day a new sun comes. In contrast, the moon is always the same, passing and returning.

When God departed from the earth, people only fed on the fruits of the forest. They complained to God about it. On his next visit to earth, God brought millet from heaven and, at the same time, a cow came out of the earth. God gave the cow to the Borana because they were the older ones and gave the millet to the Konso.

According to another version (northwest Konso) the king, named Kalla, came from a calabash. When he came out of the fruit, he carried millet in his hand. Since then, the people have had millet.²⁷

The wife of a Konso man died and left behind a boy. The husband instructed his second wife to feed the boy together with her son. But she wanted to get rid of the strange boy. So, she regularly gave him two tubers growing wild in the forest, which she thought were poisonous, while feeding her son with millet bread. But she saw that the son of the deceased prospered better than her own. This is how people learned to cultivate the tuber fruits.

Sheep did not exist on earth before. At Mount Esi in Borana there was a sheep, but nobody could see it; only sheep manure was found there from time to time. At that time people did not celebrate the *xelta* feasts. When they celebrated these feasts, the sheep could be seen and came to the people on such a feast day. All

²⁷ When questioned, the informants said that the calabash did not fall from heaven but grew on the earth.

sheep are descended from this sheep. That is why the sheep is still closely associated with the *xelta* ceremony and is considered sacred. Usually the Konso say *laha waqa* (sheep of God). If you want to say something very praiseworthy about a person, especially about his character, you say he is like a sheep. In a sheep sacrifice, the soul should go directly to God and pray for those who killed the sheep. God grants the sheep his petition, then the soul of the sheep returns back to the body and it is supposed to move again as a sign that the soul has completed its supplication. This should not be the case when killing goats. A sheep is never used as a sacrifice for the dead. It is used for the *xelta* ceremonies and for prayers to God. The sacrifice of the dead is in fact addressed to the deceased. One can offer both cattle and goats as sacrifices for the dead.

My informants did not know where the goat came from. However, there is no fundamental undervaluation of the goat compared to the sheep as is the case with most other peoples of southern Ethiopia. What has to be sacrificed is usually explicitly stated: a sheep or a goat. It can sometimes, but by no means always, be said that goat sacrifices are of lower rank than sheep sacrifices.

Spirits and illness

One of the elements that mark the Konso culture out as different from the culture of the peoples west of the Woito is the belief that disease is caused by spirits. It is true that the Konso are also convinced that a violation of the order of life causes illness, especially epidemics; this is almost the only cause of illness among the peoples west of the Woito. For example, all the priestly ministers of the *xelta* system say that their work is directed against the outbreak of diseases and epidemics. It is therefore necessary that these priests should be as faithful as possible to their functions. Any deviation from tradition is considered a possible cause of illness, but also of other misfortunes such as livestock epidemics, freaks of nature and the like. For example, the priest of the Barbahaida group in northwest Konso had been deposed on these grounds [i.e. for deviating from tradition] and replaced by his brother of the Kalebahaida group.

Where the possibility remains to look for the cause of an illness in an intentional or unintentional violation of the law of life, the so-called *oritta* spirits play a greater role in the everyday life of the Konso as the cause of illness. Some even seem to regard this cause as the main one, or at least one that can be fought. It was the subject of a long and solemn speech that Galaida, one of my informants from 1935 who had meanwhile risen to a powerful position in his village, gave me in the *mora* square in Buso. He asked me even then whether the Europeans, with their almighty knowledge, did not have a remedy for the diseases caused by the *oritta*. I would have denied it to him at the time. He wanted to ask me again now

that we had made such decisive progress that we could fly like a bird in the air.²⁸ Unfortunately, I could only answer him again that people in Europe also suffered from diseases.



Image 49: Groups of people at the mora place in Buso

The *oritta* are a community of invisible beings that live especially in the lowlands, but also often come up to the Konso mountains. Like humans, they are divided into nine clans, and have the same names for the clans. An *oritta* of the clan Argamaida can not only be dangerous to, but also spare, a person of the same clan or vice versa. Rather, an *oritta* can attack all people, no matter what clan they are from. The *oritta* carry spears and sometimes you can see their glowing tips at night (probably fireflies). It is good to hide then, as they are hunting and you could easily become their victim.

The Konso tell a similar story as the Sidama and Oromo about the origin of the *oritta*. When God left the first human couple alone on earth, he visited them even more often. During one of these visits, the woman had hidden half of her children and, when asked by God how many children she had, [she replied] only half. Then God cursed the hidden half of the children: man should never see these children again and they should only do evil to men. Those children who were hidden from God became the *oritta*.

²⁸ The Konso did not see the first plane until after 1935.

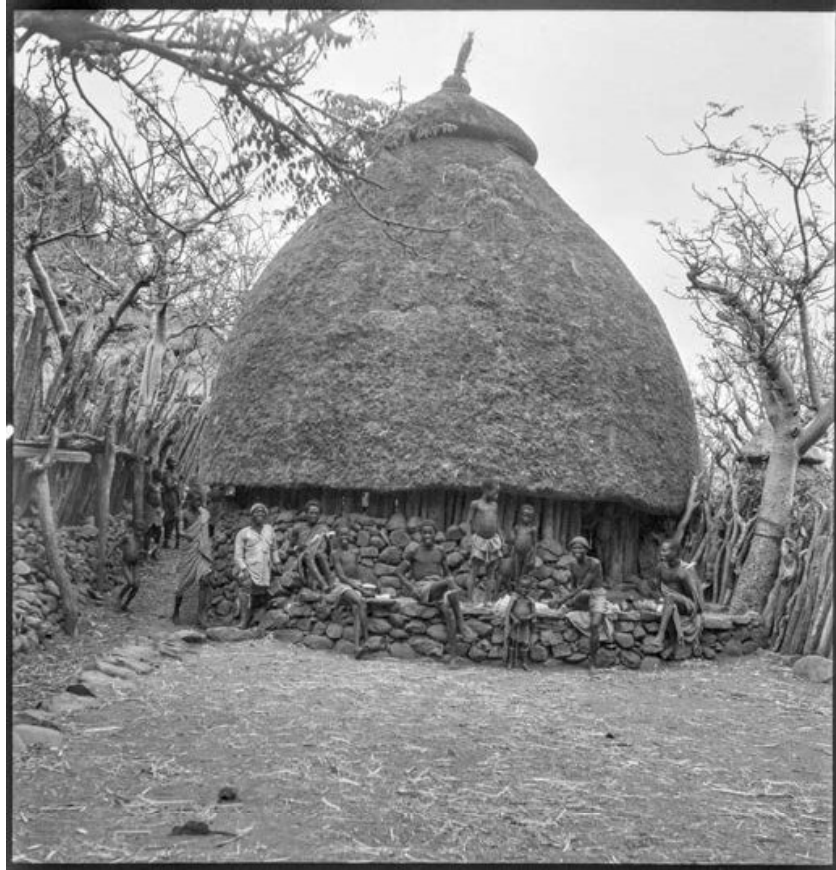


Image 50: Mora square at the northern entrance of the village (Buso) with men's house

I have not been able to determine how the Konso imagine the cause of the disease in detail, as the information is often contradictory. The *oritta* beats a person or stabs him with his spear or drinks from his blood, which comes out of his nose. However, the most common indication is that a sick person is possessed by the *oritta*.

The *suaita* is the man who understands the *oritta* and to whom you turn when you are ill. First, he makes an oracle with twenty or thirty coffee beans, from whose position in relation to each other he reads the answer to a question asked.

The sandal oracle (Jensen 1959:328) is also known in Konso to determine the cause of disease, but there is supposedly no one left who can practise it. In Borana country, however, it is said to be very much in swing. It is very important for the natives to find out where and when the disease started. It is important for the *suaita* to know how, when and where the *oritta* attacked the person: whether it attacked the person while sleeping, whether the attacked person stood under a tree so that the *oritta* could attack from there, whether the *oritta* hit a stone, or whether the man was attacked by the *oritta* while gutting a beehive.

In many cases, a conversation between the *suaita* and the *oritta* should then take place, but the patient does not understand it. The *suaita* also has medical supplies available. Unfortunately, we did not succeed in reaching a *suaita* in Konso.

Their work is shrouded in mystery. Men who just reported that they were being treated for an illness at a *suaita* could suddenly not think of anything to say when asked where the *suaita* lived.

The office of *suaita* is hereditary. Soon after the final funeral feast for a deceased *suaita* has been held, an event occurs by which the son becomes a *suaita*. Usually, it is a dream in which the deceased father appears to the new *suaita* and teaches him the art of *oritta* treatment. He then takes up his activity as a *suaita* and can speak with the *oritta*.

Another medicine man, mainly responsible for wounds and internal pain, is the *harmita*. He usually treats the diseased areas by burning them. It could not be determined whether the Konso adopted this custom from the Amhara or whether it is an old Konso custom. In any case, burning is used on a large scale. Today's Konso did not know anything more of the other names for medicine men (Jensen 1936:405 f.), like *sibilla*, *yuba* or *gurasha*, so they are possibly based on misunderstandings. *Gurasha*, a man who was a weaver and had died, was the personal name of a *suaita* in Buso. *Yuba* is (according to Haberland 1963) a kind of medicine man among the Borana.

Incidentally, the *oritta* are not only dangerous to humans. In at least one case we were told that their work also involved healing the people. In a river in south-west Konso that carries warm water (probably from a hot spring), an *oritta* that heals sick people is said to live. However, they may only approach it in the 'pure' state. When unclean people bathe in the river, the *oritta* makes them even sicker than before. Here the tapeworm is explicitly included in the symptoms of 'impurity'. But this is probably Amharic influence (cf. Walker 1933:75).

At the entrance to a village one very often sees a very unsound construction of thin sticks, which are supposed to represent a gate, to which a calabash is attached. Inside this calabash are small gifts, such as salt, tobacco or khat (*Catha edulis*, leaves with a stimulating effect), which are intended for the disease, which is obviously a quite tangible thing. It is always imagined to come from outside. It [the disease] then knows that this calabash is meant for it. If it finds something in it, it praises the village as particularly friendly and turns back. It is possible that this idea of disease also goes back to the very concrete ideas of the *oritta*, so that the narrative of the disease coming from outside would refer to an *oritta* coming from outside.

Strangely enough, a certain man capable of healing named Fuduga, who lives in Gandima, is explicitly not called *suaita*; he has no title at all but is called the greatest friend of the *oritta* in Konso land. A man in Idigle told me how this friendship came about: Fuduga was originally a very poor man who drove cattle from Borana to Konso on behalf of the merchants. On one such journey, he met a Borana man who asked him for some milk because he was thirsty. Fuduga gave him a milk vessel and the Borana milked a cow. Then he drank the milk from the jar, drinking from it for so long that he could have emptied three jars. When

he handed the milk vessel back, Fuduga saw that it was still full and realized with shock that he was not dealing with a Borana but with an *oritta*. The *oritta*, however, said that he had nothing to fear because he wanted to be his friend, because he liked the poor people. From then on, he was to heal people of their illnesses. In doing so, he should refuse to attempt to heal those people that he sees have been hit by a spear of the *oritta*; in other words, he should keep his hands off hopeless cases. On the other hand, he should speak to him [the *oritta*], his friend, if the spear of the *oritta* had only touched the person.

Since then, Fuduga had become a rich man through healing. The *oritta* always appears to him anew and gives him many medicines for healing diseases. What these drugs are remains his secret. Most of the time, he says they are leaves of plants, but he always crushes them so small that absolutely nothing can be seen. The patient must either take or smoke these leaves or wash his head with them.

When the patient has recovered, he has to prepare beer and kill a billy goat and invite Fuduga. The billy goat is then cut into little pieces, roasted and put down for the *oritta*.²⁹ Fuduga takes a calabash of beer home from the meal and places it in a special place. Then the *oritta* comes and drinks from the beer. Fuduga drinks the rest the next morning. When other *suaita* get into conflict with their *oritta*, Fuduga can reconcile them, so warm is his standing with all *oritta* through his friend.

One of the tasks of the *suaita* is to protect the men's houses. This is necessary because both *ädenta* and *xauda* boys and bachelors sleep there. The *suaita* determines which plants must be hung in the men's house. Mostly juniper twigs, leaves of khat (*Catha edulis*) and the yellow solanum fruits hang there. If the threshold is taken from a certain tree, the name of which was not given to me at that moment, it can protect the young men sleeping in the men's house from illness.

A completely different kind of healing is particularly widespread today in Konso land. It is connected with a special medicine man, who is called *kallicha* by all southern Ethiopian tribes (Jensen 1959:362 ff). In this type of healing, a medicine man falls into a trance in a special compartment in the hut. According to the faith of the natives, a 'messenger of God' then speaks through him. The Konso are said to have known of this special kind of healing and prophecy only since the Amhara period. This is also plausible, since this particular *kallicha* species occurs in all the tribes of southern Ethiopia in quite a characteristic form.

There are different names for the spirit that speaks through the man in the trance: *abba ayana* or *maramme* (Maria). But the name *waqo burdji* is needed for all together, because this is a spirit of Burdji and, according to Konso opinion, it came to them together with the Amhara from there. These cults, which are usually associated with the name 'Maria' throughout, but which are nevertheless

²⁹ When I asked if it was possible to kill a sheep instead of a billy goat, the informant said that this was impossible because the killed animal was intended for the *oritta*, while sheep were only allowed as sacrifices to God or as part of the *xelta* feasts.

performed by men, have most likely only recently come to the southern Ethiopian tribes. Girgitta, my informant in the village of Idigle, who was himself a *kallicha* and generally very reliable in his statements, assured me that was the case. But there are now many in Konso. Some use drums, which is part of *kallicha* practice outside Konso. As a result, you can often hear the drums beating in the evening and at night. Of course, in Konso, such drumming is very unusual, because the drums are only used during the *xelta* festivals. But these drums are, by all accounts, other than the sacred drums of the *xelta* ceremonies.

Girgitta described quite vividly how he became possessed by this spirit for the first time, although he too was not willing to let us participate in one of his nightly sessions. It was at a time, after the war with the Amhara, when quite a few of the Konso were haunted by this spirit. He was attacked by the spirit so many times until he agreed to make available his possession by the spirit for healing and prophecy. Since then, every week on Friday (longer intervals are also possible), he [Girgitta] keeps some sick or other worried people with him in his special hut; withdrawing to a special section of his hut, he listens to the spirit until he becomes unconscious. From then on he knows nothing. In truth, he gives instructions on what the sick person has to do, for example, kill a goat or a sheep because someone is angry with the sick person and has to be reconciled. Through the sacrifice, he is then reconciled and the illness goes from him. Girgitta left no doubt that he struggled in vain against the spirit and that he found it terrible to be the victim of that spirit. He seemed to think that only a replacement would bring him relief and that he hoped that the spirit would soon take hold of his son and then let him go.

I was astonished to hear that such a medicine man, whose practice has nothing to do with traditional religious customs and who is, so to speak, newly imported, slaughters in his house female sheep (though also goats), which, according to my previous information, were reserved solely for sacrifices to God and in the *xelta* ceremony. It was explained to me that the sacrifice was held for the messenger of God, that is, for the one who speaks through the medium of the medicine man, and not for the *oritta*. This medicine man has nothing at all to do with the *oritta*.

The sheep (or goat) is placed on the right side of the house, inside the house with its head facing east. The stomach contents are then brought out of the house, to the *arkatta* (small garden where a ceremony takes place).

To this kind of medicine man also belongs a special sacrifice, which they call *aftari maramme*. The one who is possessed by the spirit of the *maramme* wraps cotton threads around an umbrella acacia and lays coffee and honey at the foot of the tree. This custom also only came into the land with the Amhara.

If someone has been plagued by a bad dream and wants to prevent that dream from coming true, he – if it is a man – lifts a stone in the morning before he has urinated, spits on it, whirls it around his head a few times and then throws it away. A woman takes tobacco leaves mixed with ashes instead of the stone.

After all, the Konso also have an idea of the lucky. *Dobito* is the term for luck and they call a person who has great success in hunting, whose fields bear more than those of others, who has a son soon after his marriage and who will be very old etc. a *dobitolaida*. Such luck is given to him by God and a *dobitolaida* must always be aware of this fact. The opposite of him is a person who does not succeed in all these things. For him there is the name *digmalda*.

Death and burial

I have already described the burial forms in detail earlier (Jensen 1936: 412 ff). Men are buried in a squatting position on the right side, women on the left, in the side niche grave, with the niche always on the western side of the grave. The corpse is wrapped in ox fur or, more frequently nowadays, in cotton cloths. In the vicinity of the Amhara villages of Bakaule, Fasha and Duro, it is said to be customary to bury the dead in the cemetery near the Christian church. In the rest of the Konso lands, however, they continue to be buried as usual in the family fields or in clan cemeteries.

In many villages you can also see facilities that resemble cemeteries. These are the traditional burial places of a clan. In Godja, we once watched a team of about ten young men leave a corpse at the entrance to the village, telling those around Godja that the deceased was so-and-so, who came from Godja, before they went on their way again without any further greetings. The old men of Godja received the message very unwillingly, perhaps because the deceased had long since left his home village. But it was no use, they had to bury the man, for which purpose some young men finally started to work after 2–3 hours. There was something dismal about seeing the corpse on its stretcher all the time, but later on one would see older men who would speak vividly to the bier and who would be busy with the corpse. Apparently, the deceased had no relatives in the village or had once left the settlement in the unrest.

Women are rolled up in the festive garment that every woman who has given birth to a child owns. In northwest Konso there is a difference compared to northeast Konso: on the grave, not three notched stakes are fastened, but, in the case of a man who has already taken part in a *xelta* festival, a thick mighty wooden block and next to it a thinner one, both about 40–60 cm and with a diameter of about 30 and 10 cm respectively. The wood for these logs is taken from the forest. For married people, the thick wooden block shows as many beginnings of knots as the deceased had children. The graves of people who have not yet participated in any *xelta* festival are not marked with anything like this. After the feast of the dead, which takes place as soon as the family can afford it – very soon for the rich then, and up to a year and a half later for the poor – wooden replicas of the shield and spear are often placed on the grave of those who have already taken part in

a *xelta* festival. Strangely enough, the spears usually have two tips, although the Konso claim to have never owned such spears. The relatives then gather at the grave. White earth is rubbed into powder on a grating stone, producing a paint with which the wood-carved monument is painted. The mortar bowl usually remains at the grave, but the spears and shields are painted only this one time and never touched again.

Graves of women who have given birth to a child are marked with a thinner wooden stake, also about 40 cm high, for which wood was removed from the house stakes or the ground fencing around the yard. Small children and women who have no children do not receive any such markings on the grave. A woman who has been married several times is buried on death in the traditional burial place of the man with whom she first had children.

Frequently, small menhirs are also erected in front of the grave, and a number of smaller stones (about 10–20 cm high) are placed in the earth in two pointedly colliding rows in front of it, symbolizing the number of fields the deceased had newly acquired during his life.

The burial form and monuments are the same for the weavers as for the real Konso. At least that is what northwest Konso does. We witnessed a funeral of a weaver in Burkedaya that seemed like a pure celebration of joy. The youths were painted white as if they were at some festive dance, but their faces were blackened, which, when questioned, they described as an utter joke. An elderly weaver had red dots on his face, which he pointed out with pride, pointing out that he had killed animals in his life. The deceased was a man who had become very old and had children and had seen his grandchildren as grown men and women.

We even, with the right *ädenta*, saw a funeral procession from afar, in which the running pace with which the procession moved was conspicuous; the youth were painted white and ran to the grave with great noise and much cheerfulness. As justification for the exuberance, we were again told the high age of the deceased woman.

Burial of the Kalla

The death rites culminate in the burial of Kalla, the king in north Konso, which by far exceeds the already described burial of Bammalle (Jensen 1936:420). At the time of our presence, Kalla's wife had been dead for seven months, but had not yet been buried. The related rites are largely the same as those for Kalla's death; we were able to observe some of them, and some of them were described to us as follows.

Death is initially kept completely secret. You let the moon in which she died and the next one pass by without anyone except the homesteaders knowing anything. Then the people are told that the queen is 'ill'. The people know about it, but everyone always talks only about the illness of the queen. The burial always

takes place after the harvest. In any case, there must be at least one year between death and burial. So, if death takes place, for example, half a year before the harvest, she will be buried only a year and a half later. The official announcement of the death takes place only a few days before the funeral.

The lamentation for the dead only begins on the day of the funeral and the mourning period, during which it is forbidden to dance or marry, among other things, now lasts another 1 ½ years. At the time of our presence, the message had been sent around the villages that those who wanted to marry should do so before the official mourning period began. This applies naturally only to the weavers or older people wishing to remarry, as marriage is compulsory for all others under the *xelta* system.

Immediately after death, a special hut is built for the corpse in the homestead, since time immemorial always in the same place. The hut has a special shape, a kind of double hut with two conical roofs, so it has an approximately eight-shaped ground plan. However, the passage from one hut to another is almost as wide as the diameter of the hut, so that together they form an elongated space (4.30 m long). The rear hut, at the back, borders a farmstead wall, which here is about 1.20 m high and has low stone seats along it. In the middle, in front of the stone wall, is the frame on which the body is placed. It is a kind of stool on four legs with a thick round wooden plate (65 cm diameter) as a seat. The wooden plate has an approximately fist-sized round hole in the middle. Around this seat there is a frame made of rods taller than a man, which converge conically, but remain open towards the front to the width of the corpse. The frame is used to support the corpse [in an upright position]. A rod is inserted horizontally under the knees of the stool corpse and fixed in the frame.

To prepare the corpse, they first use an iron hook, which they insert through the hole in the wooden plate to pull out the intestines through the anus. The man is supposed to do this so skilfully that he can also pull out the tongue. The entrails are placed in a closed pot, which is half dug into the earth under the stool. The clothes and jewellery of the deceased hang on a rack. Their household goods (calabashes, pots, sandals and the like) are placed in the front hut, along the wall or hung up in the roof. After the burial, everything goes to the daughter-in-law, i.e. the first wife of the new Kalla. The corpse is repeatedly rubbed with honey and butter in turns. For this purpose, it is taken out of the hut and placed in the sun. There are always two death watchmen with the corpse, with old men from the clan of Kalla (Kerdita) taking turns. They also have the task of anointing the corpse and stretching out its arms and legs from time to time so that it remains mobile, since it must finally be buried in a stretched-out position.

The burial place is in the sacred grove of Kalla. From time immemorial only Kalla and his first wife have been buried there. The gravediggers are the men from the three villages that are specially associated with Kalla: Godja, Gamole and Macala.

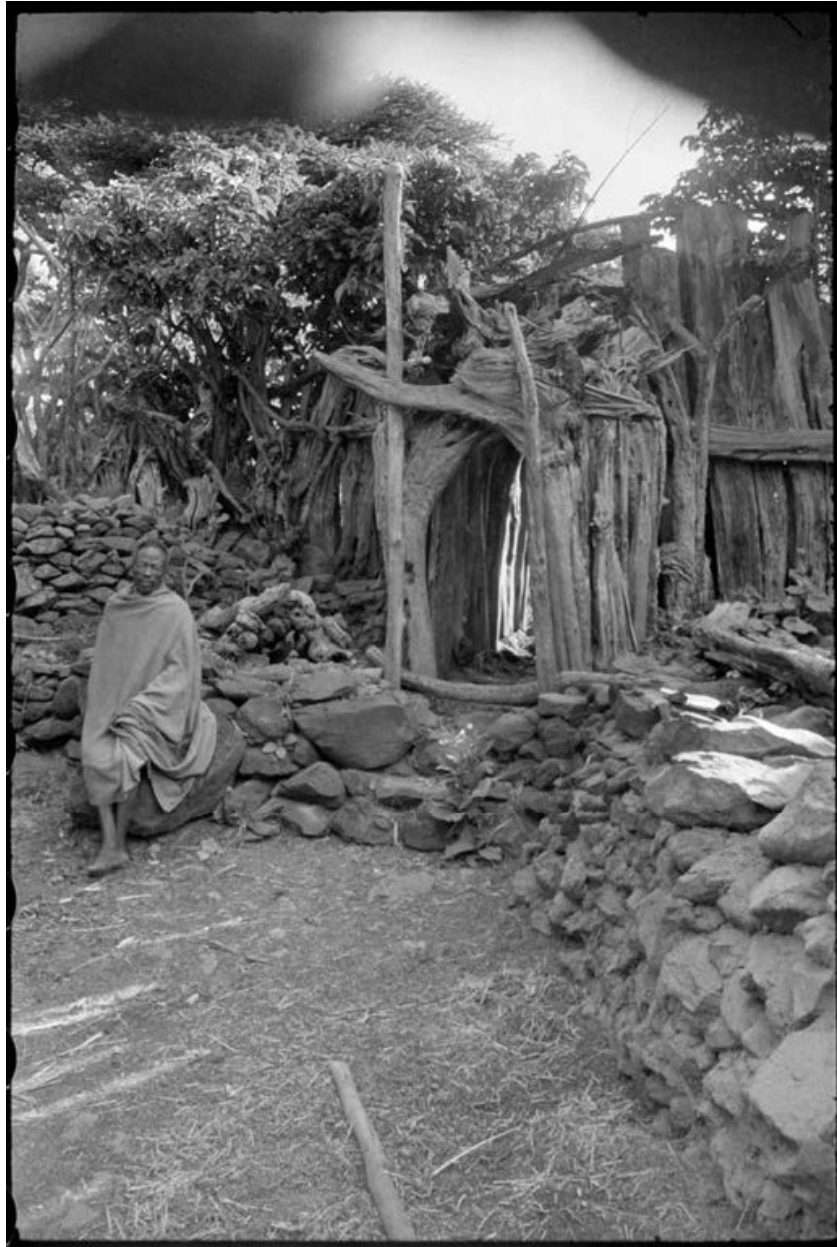


Image 51: Entrance to the homestead (of the Kalla) seen from inside

Here perhaps the information I received from Djarso's funeral, which is undoubtedly similar to that of Kalla or his wife, can be inserted. After that, the village of Lehaidi has the privilege of carrying the body out of the house. When the men of Lehaidi set the body down, a battle between the villages of Idigle and Geldima begins as to who should now carry the body. The fight takes place without weapons but is nevertheless very bitter. Whoever wins the victory may carry the corpse onward first, and the members of the other village may only carry the corpse onward after they have dropped it.

The grave is also a side niche grave. The vertical pit is about 4–5 m deep. From its base, a long horizontal corridor about 1.60 m high is dug into the earth – in this case about 7 m long, in other cases longer. When the body and the pot



Image 52: (In the homestead of the Kalla) Storage huts

of entrails are laid down at their extremities, this corridor will be closed with a wooden board three times, at intervals of 2–2.5 m, so as to create three rooms in a row, the first two of which will be empty, while the last one represents the actual burial chamber. The vertical pit is filled up again after the burial and a hut is built above it, which is left to decay over time. The body is carried to the grave in a seated position on the shoulders of a man; it is dressed in the clothes and jewellery kept in the morgue. The corpse is decorated with these for the funeral, but they are later taken away from the body. In the burial chamber, it [the body] is placed on a 2 cm-thick iron plate specially made for this purpose, resting on stones and covered with a colourful Konso cloth, and covered with another cloth. These cloths should be made in Gamole and are called *kahurra*. Recently, they have also started using imported clothes purchased from traders.

For the funeral, all Konso come to the Kalla's homestead. Those of Godja, Gamole and Macala are served by Kalla, and nine cattle are slaughtered for the men and six for the women. The others slaughter cattle they bring with them. Only the people from the three villages mentioned go to the burial place, but nobody goes from the Kerdita clan, not even the new Kalla.

The corpse hut (*aläta*), where the corpse is laid out for the long period of time, is destroyed immediately after burial, and its parts are taken far away. Only the guards are actually allowed to enter the hut. If Kalla wants to go inside himself,

which he does from time to time, he has to donate beer to them. The members of the expedition were also able to enter the hut by paying a small fee to the guards.

When a Kalla dies, his death is kept secret for nine years. Only the immediate surroundings and the funeral priest, who comes from the Kerdita clan and also bears the title *daura*, know about it. The body is prepared and exhibited in the year of burial. It would then look exactly like the Kalla when he was alive. All nine clans participate in the completion of the tomb. They are ordered in shifts by the priest, so that in this way the tomb takes about a year to complete. The grave is laid out in the same way as the one for the queen. Important then is the animal disguise, which is done with the corpse and which took place at Kalla as well as at Bammalle and Djarso. The fur of a black bull is taken, together with the head, from which the eyes have been removed. The corpse is sewn up in a squatting position in this fur and thus placed on the iron plate in the grave. It seems that the people in high places were buried in a seated position and the common people in a reclining squatting position. However, I do not dare decide whether the stretched-out position of a corpse occurs only among Christians and is an Amharic influence, or whether this situation was intended for the queen from the beginning.

The old Bammalle, who I described earlier (Jensen 1936:389), has died in the meantime. His grave was shown to us. It lies in the sacred grove on the mountain where his farmstead is. It consists of a flat stone tumulus on which a wooden figure in the usual style stands, and behind it two notched posts and three low posts with a notch – they are declared to be ‘monkeys’. Around this group, on the stone pedestal and over the back of the figure, a decayed straw rope winds its way around the figure, which the men carried in a long line one after the other when they brought the figure to the tomb to erect it; perhaps this is a ‘representation’ of a megalithic transport, since menhirs are actually erected in place of the wooden figures and possibly even more frequently in the past than today. The descriptions that the people of Idigle gave us about the transport of the strikingly mighty menhirs on *xara* Hirle, however, do not fit this idea. It is said that these menhirs were all carried by men, with the stones being tied onto massive wooden frames to give many men the opportunity to get involved. In front of the stone pedestal of Bammalle’s grave, about fifty small (10–20 cm high) stones were stuck into the earth. They represented the fields that Bammalle had bought during his lifetime. The spears had nine notches each.³⁰

Incidentally, a detailed description of the commemorative figures has already been given (Jensen 1936:420 ff). It is only to add that, in western Konso as well as in the west of eastern Konso and in Fasha, the wives of the deceased are also portrayed, which I have never seen in eastern Konso. If, for example, a man had

³⁰ Only short poles with six notches each are made for women’s graves.

five wives, they are depicted on both sides of the central figure, so that he and his wives alone form a stately group of figures (cf. fig. 35).

Another curiosity, which I had not noticed during my previous visit, is a figure with two heads, one of which looks backwards. This figure is supposed to represent a *bulgu* (Oromo), i.e. a man-eating creature with a pair of eyes on the front and back of the head. The *bulgu* do not live in Konso land but elsewhere. According to one statement, the deceased had once been outside the Konso land and had seen such a *bulgu*, an experience that is now immortalized on the monument. Others said that such a *bulgu* had once come to Konso land and the deceased had killed him. Also new to me were accompanying figures with helmets and cartridge belts representing killed Amhara.

In west Konso, just as in east Konso, a menhir stands in front of the stelae, which, as they say, serves the permanent memory of the deceased. In fact, in many villages, e.g. in Godja and also in Buso, the road leading to the village is lined with a whole series of menhirs (80–100 cm), behind which the stone base is still preserved, on which once stood groups of stelae or lances that have now disappeared due to decay.



Image 53: Group of stelae near the village Matshalle

In Arfaide in west Konso, I saw fresh cow dung lying on such a menhir, which stood in front of a group of wooden figures. *Xalala* leaves were wrapped around the stone, just like around such a stone in near Darra in east Konso. They say it was done by the deceased's relatives, as her way of 'speaking to the dead'.

The Konso know very little about life after death. The soul is called *sadata*. They say that after death she goes to God, who in this case was simply called *waq*, to heaven. This statement probably comes from very young Christian Amharic ideas.

Other ceremonies

I once described in another place (Jensen, 1951:59 f.) that the ceremonial hunt of the Konso, in which the candidates for the Xela degree have to kill a hare, could originally have referred, like other ritual killings, to the myth of the killed deity that is widespread in plant cultures of the earth; here the hare has taken the place of the deity. This deity is linked in many ways to the moon or is even identified with it in worldwide myth. At that time [1935], I could only base my speculation on the fact that, in the mythology of many African peoples, the hare has lunar features and the moon or moon spots are called hare, but I did not know whether the Konso also had ideas of this kind. Therefore, I was naturally interested in all questions related to this hare hunt.

First of all, it should be noted that even among the Konso, the moon spots are interpreted as a hare (*sagarita*). *Sagarita* (in Oromo *tarra*) sits in the moon, they say. The ceremonial hunt in northeast Konso, and probably very similarly throughout the country, takes place in the following manner. The Faraita, who are to become Xela, go hare hunting about three days before the festival. It is a community hunt; each team belonging to a *mora* place moves out together, even taking along small children who still have to be carried. Each such community must hunt down a hare. The Konso assured us this time that it was not difficult and that there was probably no community that could not do it. It can often take longer than a day and for this purpose they have food for the very young children with them. However, it is strictly forbidden for the big ones to eat anything. Back at the *mora*, the dead hare's skin is peeled off, his head is cut off and the rest is buried in the *mora* square. From the fur, the Faraita youngsters cut themselves small finger rings, which later, when the Faraita (1) are at the fairground, are put on the *dahaita dammalle* sticks. The head is hung on the *olahitta* poles and remains there even if it has become a dry skull.

Hares are hunted even without a ritual occasion and their meat is eaten with pleasure. The fur, so I was told in Mattara, is good for burns.

The dwarf antelope or the dik-dik (in Konso *gumanta*) seems to be related to the hare by the Konso. Even Gergidda Bisho, my main informant in Idigle, said that it was almost impossible to tell the hare from the dwarf antelope when the animals were young. I went to a lot of trouble to get the hare's native name really clear. Finally, I asked the governor of Konso, who kept a dik-dik antelope, which very often ran into the parlour, in his homestead. This man, who has lived

in Konso since his earliest youth, told me that the dik-dik we could all see was in Konso *gumanta* and that the hare was called *sagarita*. There were also several Konso people present when this information was given. Meanwhile Rosen (1953:52) states the name for dik-dik in Harari is *sagari*, in Somali it is *sagar* and in Danakil *sagerra*. I must insist that the name for hare is *sagarita* in Konso.

On the *olahitta* poles, besides the heads of hares and dik-dik, you can sometimes see the heads of monkeys and perhaps other small animals. Apart from the statement that monkey heads are hung up because of the intelligence of the monkeys, we have not found out what this is all about.

In Arfaide, I was told that this one hare hunt before marriage was the decisive one and that no *ädenta* in the whole Konso country could marry before he had taken part in such a ceremonial hunt. Although the *xauda* participate in the *xelta* festivals in northwest Konso, this hare hunt applies there exclusively to the *ädenta*. Apart from this ceremonial hunt before the *xelta* festival, another one has to take place every year to ensure sufficient rain. On this hunt, the young team has to kill a hare, whose head is also hung on the *olahitta* poles. Every year before the rainy season, the Faraita (1) (in Idigle other men also take part) therefore leave the village through the 'official' village gate to kill a hare in the lowlands. How much the concern with rain – as well as marriage – is one of the reasons why the primeval killing of that deity, which is connected with the moon among other things, must be repeated, I have explained elsewhere (Jensen 1949:439 f.). The newly acquired details of the hare hunt thus fit in meaningfully with the presumed connection to that myth; however, it cannot be fully proven that this myth once existed also with the Konso or that the ceremonial hare hunt in particular can be traced back to it. In any case, however, the rite of the killing of the hare, which is seen as immensely important by the Konso without them being able to give an explanation for it, seems to me most understandable if it owes its origin to the ideas connected with this myth, of which we can at least suspect that they must have once been spread over large areas of the earth as part of a peculiar world view.

Just as strange as the idea that the Faraita (1) must have hunted a hare in order to become Xela (2), is the idea – which, however, can only be deduced from a custom – that the Faraita (1) cannot or may not hunt big game. If a Faraita (1) has shot big game, the otherwise associated honouring of the hunter does not take place. If one realizes that in northeastern Konso the Faraita (1) often reach 35 years of age, i.e. they are fully grown men before they reach the Xela (2) degree, and if one also considers how extraordinary and how highly valued the honouring of a big game slayer is in this culture, a peculiar way of thinking that is undoubtedly rooted in the *xelta* institution must have led to its being denied to the Faraita (1). It seems that the killing of big game by a man who has not yet entered the system is in every way inadmissible and must therefore be ignored.

In most of the villages we visited, the slayer honouring took place at the highest shrine, the *misgatta*. We have come across the occasional exception to this rule. For example, in Arfaide, where a kind of menhir, but only about 50 cm high, stood in the square in front of the traditional tree, on which the successful killer had to stand in order to receive the honour from his village comrades. Bells play a very important role in the jewellery of the Konso, but a very large bell may only be worn by a person who has killed a man or a lion. Around his neck, he wears a canine tooth from the wild boar as decoration, which he later hangs around the neck of his most beautiful cow, which from then on bears the name *galota*.

It is said that Burdji and Konso have always been such friends that they never killed each other. But all the other tribes living around were the victims of the drive for higher status. According to various sources in many villages, women were never killed. Also on market days, there were exceptions to this general state of war for all traders who wanted to visit the Konso markets. Even for the Borana, with whom there was a special kind of hereditary enmity, it was true that on market days they could drive their cattle to the markets scot-free.

There was a regulation that a big game slayer was not allowed to work for some time (up to one year) after his success. He went from village to village and was celebrated. His clansmen had to slaughter cattle for him. The number of pieces was precisely defined: three cows had to be sacrificed for a leopard, five cows for an elephant and nine cows for a lion. But there was no slayer honour for killing a giraffe among the Konso, although the Borana also perform a dance for the killing of a giraffe. Unfortunately, I have not determined how the cattle to be sacrificed was distributed among the clan members.

The successful slayer does not go home but, as it is reported in most villages, to the *misgatta* of his clan. His wife has already rushed towards him and kissed his knees. Then, first of all, in the square, which is always associated with a *misgatta*, the dance and festival in his honour take place.

Calendar and other

The Konso only have the simple peasant calendar known by the people west of the Woito. I would like to assume that this used to be different, because they stated with certainty that they used to have a four-day market week. Among the Sidama and Gedeo, who also have the four-day market cycle, there were at least some men who knew the names of the twenty-nine days that together form a month. Since I suspect that this monthly bill and the four-day cycle belong together, I assumed that the Konso also had this knowledge of the day names. But we have not found a man who remembers it.

For the Konso, the months were calculated from new moon to new moon. The year begins after the harvest and the first moon is called Bardubi. The names of the months are:

1. Bardubi
2. Kishu
3. Oiba
4. Olindala
5. Boringa
6. Sagano Gamma
7. Murranno
8. Pelalo
9. Harda
10. Tola
11. Olxo Lasha
12. Sesaysha

The name of the ninth month, Harda, is identical with the Konso name for the artificial ponds that are built according to the principle of our dams. Every village has such ponds in the so-called *fora*, where the cattle graze, and cleans them once a year.

Planting begins in the month of Sagano Gamma (March to April), and harvesting begins in the month of Sesaysha (September to October).

The views of the sun and the moon are, as already mentioned, very different from each other. While the Konso consider the moon to be always the same one, which dies when it is removed and reappears as a new moon, the view of the sun is that every day a new sun appears (see story *The origin of death* below).

Sheep may only be killed for four months from the month of Oiba to the month of Sagano Gamma in the dry season. In the month of Oiba, around December or January, the *poqalla* priests start the ritual killing of sheep at the *olahitta* piles. After that, all other family elders are allowed to kill sheep as well. It is considered unfavourable to slaughter a sheep on the sixth and ninth days of a new moon. On the sixth day, it is dangerous for the women; on the ninth day, for the men.

The custom of cutting arm rings or finger rings from the fur of each sacrificed animal is very common. These are worn for a while by the killer and those involved in the sacrifice, but then are by no means thrown away, but kept in the house and bequeathed to the sons even after death. The penis and scrotum of the sacrificed male animal are preferred for this. Preparations for the planting work begin in the month of Sagano Gamma, and no sheep may be killed from then on.

In the case of the Konso, the period from sowing to harvesting, called *sorora*, is extremely sharply separated from the rest of the time, which is called *bona*. The *sorora* time is announced in the village by the crier several times in advance and is then finally – as we experienced it on 21 April 1955 in Idigle – announced as

started. From then on, it is forbidden to slaughter sheep and to go hunting outside the cultivated fields. Similarly, no honey may be collected outside these limits. It is also forbidden to play *guraila*, the popular ball game (see p. 139). In the *sorora* period, a woman will also think twice before leaving her husband because he beats her, because she cannot return to him before the harvest is complete, even if she has only slept outside her house for one night.³¹

Even though a Konso is allowed to beat his wife in the *sorora* period, two men are not allowed to fight under any circumstances. If it does happen, the culprit must leave the village and may only return to the village after the end of the *sorora* period. He has to leave the land of the 'eleven villages' that go together to the *dammalle* square during the *xelta* festivals in northeast Konso and look for a domicile beyond the borders of this district. If he were to return in the *sorora* period, the crop would not flourish, and anyone would have the right to slay such a culprit within the borders of the eleven villages. At the end of the *sorora* period, he is then reintroduced to the village by his friends with singing and dancing.

Incidentally, we ourselves experienced a case that did not comply with this strict regulation. In the village of Godja (a settlement inhabited mainly by weavers), a young weaver was accused by the old people of being guilty of a brawl. He was expelled from the village and went to the neighbouring village of Gamole for some time. However, both villages, Godja and Gamole, did not belong to the 'eleven villages' of northeast Konso. So the banishment did not take place according to this strict regulation; the man also returned to Godja after 2–3 weeks, within the *sorora* time. It may be that this case is connected with the generally observed decline of the Konso custom under *xauda* influence or that this strict custom did not exist at all outside the 'eleven villages'.

It should also be mentioned that the Konso, regardless of these two seasons, which correspond roughly to our understanding of the rainy and dry seasons, still have a yearly division that depends on the position of the sun. For all important projects, such as building a gate or fence around the homestead or a men's house, only the time when the sun is moving upwards – i.e. from the end of December to the end of June – is suitable. With the view to the east (*chaddin*) as the main direction, south is called the right side (*disi arkita*) and north the left side (*disi bitita*). By the way, we had already got to know how important the eastern direction is in the thinking of the southern Ethiopian peoples with the tribes west of the Woito. It must also have been more significant in the past for the Konso, for it is significant that the two highest priests of the *xelta* institution, who are never allowed to see each other, live in the two easternmost villages that exist in northeast Konso.

³¹ By the way, there is an institution that counteracts the Konso's bad habit of beating their women. If the beating occurs outside the house, the woman tries to escape inwards over the threshold (*gulenda*) of the house. If she succeeds, the man must stop the fight. If the dispute arises inside the house, she must try to escape to the outside. The threshold is the limit.

The Konso villages are almost always divided into an upper and a lower village. In addition to this dichotomy, there are often other subdivisions into three or four village parts. In connection with the division of the village, we only received information about a ball game, called *guraila*, to which the two parts of the village often challenge each other. It must not be played during the so-called *sorora* period, which runs from sowing to harvest. The ball is made from the root of the *shelqahitta* tree and is an irregular ball of about 10 cm in diameter. The *shelqahitta* is almost the only tree that grows in all the villages and on the terraces, and its leaves are eaten as a kind of cabbage. The ball is thrown high and all players try to catch it. As soon as one has caught it, the others try to snatch it away from him, so that they form a ball of people scuffling about. Whoever finally holds the ball in his hand is considered the winner. When one half of the village has won the ball five times, a certain dance starts, which the other half of the village has to sit down and watch. When the dance is over, the game begins anew. If one party wins several times in a row, the game usually turns into a brawl. Undoubtedly, the division of the village into two creates a dualism that challenges the village. The fact that the two halves are turned into competitors is an important element.

There are many ceremonies connected with the work in the fields. In particular, the officials of the *xelta* institution appear to be totally responsible for the prosperity of the crop. Also Kalla, the king of the Konso, has mainly priestly functions related to the cultivation of the fields. No one in his district will till or harvest the fields until Kalla has been the first to do this field work. It is sufficient that Kalla only carries out these activities symbolically – as in our case, for example, when a minister breaks ground on a new building.

Every year, the officials of each village who are responsible for the sowing gather at Kalla. In Godja, for example, a *poqalla* priest by the name of Charauto holds this office. All these priests from the different villages bring millet and barley with them. Then Kalla consecrates the fruits by pressing them together with the fat from a sheep's tail. After this festival, Charauto plants the fruit on his *olahitta* poles in the village of Godja, where it [the fruit] rises magnificently. The *olahitta* poles are placed in the *arkatta* of the house and the small, more symbolic garden, which is no more than 0.2 m wide and deep and in which Charauto plants millet and barley, and which corresponds to the miniature gardens that are present in every homestead and which must undoubtedly be considered together with the Adonis gardens that are very common in the Orient.

This (Adonis) garden is called *arkatta ailin* (from *ailin* = dig). There is a small celebration held annually at the end of the ceremony described above. For this purpose a sacrificial priest (*poqalla*), who must belong to the same clan as the owner of the farm, comes and slaughters a sheep. The priest dribbles the green stomach contents of the sheep onto this tiny piece of land, sows the first millet and pours beer on it. For this action, he receives the right hind leg of the sheep. Ev-

everything else is eaten. When the millet rises, it must not be stirred (see Mannhardt 1877:279 f.; Dostal 1957).

There is also a ceremony at the *arkatta ailin* for the central pole of the house. One hangs the fat of a sacrificed sheep on this central pole and prays for the long life of this pole. The Faraita (1) girls then hang this fat, which has hung on the central pole and gradually dried, around their necks when, for a year before the great *gadabaha* festival, they walk through the village every day very early in the morning and before sunset, singing and dancing in the squares.

Bammalle also has very similar functions for his district. He holds an eight-day festival for his district in the *mora* square near his homestead, during which he kills three male animals raised in a stable – a bull, a sheep and a billy goat – at the *olahitta* poles in his homestead. At the end of the feast, Bammalle makes the first sowing and only then may they [the people of the district] sow.

The clan Kerdita has the priestly office of fending off the locusts. Every member of this clan can catch a grasshopper and say a prayer about it. Then he lets the locust fly again, and all the locusts fly on.

The fields are private property, as is to be expected with the dense population. The eldest son inherits many more fields than the second, and the second inherits more than the third. Girls, on the other hand, do not inherit land. If a man dies childless, only a male relative of the same clan may inherit.

Even during the fallow period, the fields remain private property. The cattle graze along roadsides, in the bush, which belongs to everyone, and in the lowlands. The whole lowland at the Woito belongs to the Kolmi, who – as a branch of the Konso – have far greater livestock wealth than the other Konso; 100–150 head of cattle are said to be no rarity there. In the Konso villages in the highlands, on the other hand, a man who has ten cows and just as many sheep and goats is considered rich.

Some cattle, including dairy cows, are raised indoors. They have other cattle in the so-called *fora*, i.e. in the grazing grounds of the lowlands, and they keep other cattle in the village, but drive them to pasture daily. The male animals kept indoors are intended for certain sacrifices.

To each well (*ela*) belongs a cow (according to others, a bull and a heifer), but they are invisible during the day. At night, they come out of the well and graze. The cow is called *okkatta ela* and is taken very seriously. God is said to have put it/them in the well. But what this cow or pair of cattle really is, either the informants did not know or they did not want to tell.

The women can milk all the animals. They only use calabashes for milking. Clay pots are or were forbidden, for the custom is getting more and more out of practice. However, even here among the Konso, a woman is not allowed to step over the rope with which a sheep or goat is tied. The woman becomes ill or does not have any more child. There is no medicine against it, and the animal with which the accident happened is sold outside of Konso. However, these provisions



Image 54: Stone house in the Fora in southeast Konso

do not apply to young girls, as long as they are not married. According to other sources, both is also particularly strictly forbidden for her; her first child after her marriage would die.

Oddly enough, the Konso often express themselves so biblically when they talk about their food rites. They often say that they only eat animals with cloven hooves. I would like to assume, however, that they have adopted this from the Amhara and their knowledge of the Bible. for they eat not only all kinds of antelope but also rhinoceros and even hippopotamus, which is otherwise especially frowned upon in southern Ethiopia. They do not eat elephant, crocodile and snake.

There is the office of the milk taster, called *abba kilan*. There is one for the Galgussa and one for the Hirba in each village. He only comes into action when a cow gives her first milk after calving, or when there is milk to drink at feasts. He has a special vessel called *kasar* from which he takes the milk into his mouth before spitting it on his breast. He anoints the *kasar* vessel with butter beforehand.

The Borana came to Idigle every eight years to ceremonially receive a phallic headdress (*kalacha*) for their chief (*qallu*) from Djarso.³² The Borana came, old and young men, with two donkeys, a large ox and several sheep and desired entrance. But this was denied to them by the Konso, who blocked the gate. Borana and Konso then stood back to back, and the Borana tried to push the Konso

³² Djarso is also a *poqalla* priest, to whom the easternmost Konso village of Idigle belonged.

into the village. This was successful – it had to be like this and was agreed upon beforehand – and they got what they wanted. This custom is similar to that of the peoples west of the Woito, where an important insignia or cattle for certain ceremonies has to be fetched from a neighbouring people (see Jensen 1959:270, 319).

The meaning of the so-called *kataita* has not become quite clear to us. It is a special sanctuary which, like the *misgatta* (sanctuary on the *mora daura*) is found in every village. Often there are even two of the shrines in one village, as for example in Buso. We were told about an annual ceremony in various villages, in which the Faraita of the village take part. Since the form of the *kataita* is different in each village, the descriptions of the ceremony also differ. Common to all of them is the indication that after the harvest has been brought in or near the *kataita*, a new fire has to be drilled by the Faraita and maintained for several days – according to some, nine days, to others, fourteen. The inhabitants of the village provide themselves with new fire and feed the boys with specially prepared millet. The fire may only be fed with the wood of the *kataita* itself. In Godja, for example, where the *kataita* had the form of a narrow oval hut, five metres long, the Faraita burned the old wood from inside the hut but without destroying the hut. At the end of the ceremony, the same Faraita must fetch new wood and lean it against the outside of the hut. In Mattara, we learned that this new wood came from a sacred grove from which firewood was otherwise never allowed to be taken. Once, we received the information that, on certain days, the boys had the right to feed themselves in the village by stealing food (perhaps other things as well).

On the occasion of this feast, in which the drilling of the fire seems to be the main thing, a bull is sacrificed by the *abba mora* of the square where the ceremony takes place and is eaten by the Faraita. It is difficult to get a picture from the events that leads to an understanding of the ceremony. It is probably a cultic representation of the myth of how the fire came to the people, if the assumption that the lighting of the new fire is the main act of the ceremony is correct.

The installation of a new village chief was described to me in Buso. The celebration of taking over the office and the name of the deceased father is always only considered when the son has celebrated the feast of the dead for his father. The date for this is a question of wealth, for the cost of entertaining a mourners' congregation that is quite large in this case is considerable. If the son is rich enough, he can organize the feast relatively quickly after [his father's] death. Usually there is a lack of sufficient livestock and vegetable food, so that in Buso, for example, the former Aidiya has been dead for over a year without the festival having taken place, so the son does not yet bear his father's name and jewellery.

For the feast, the new Aidiya wears a rhinoceros horn and a lion skin decoration on his head; he dresses in the fur of a jackal-like animal (*bukitta*), his forehead smeared with the excrement of a giant snake. On the last day he receives his fa-

ther's bracelets with the blessings of the old people and can kill animals from then on.

As a badge they have a 1.5-metre-long stick, which they usually keep in a very small pile hut near their homestead, which a weaver is not allowed to approach. In the spring, when the main ceremony takes place, the eighteen Galgussa priests (if Galgussa is Gada, otherwise of course the eighteen Hirba priests) gather in front of the house of the priest who is running the office. During the ceremony, the men wear a black dot on their foreheads. They lay all their sticks on the ground and pray for rain. Then they anoint the sticks with butter and ritually spit beer on them, which must be donated by the person holding the office in the year in question. Then, each one takes up his staff again and gives it to the rain priest for safekeeping in the little hut. An animal is not killed on this occasion.

There are still certain regulations for these priests that informants have identified as particularly harsh. During the year in which the priest is in charge of the ministry – and is usually also responsible for the house where the drums are kept – he may not slaughter any sheep or even eat sheep meat lest a great misfortune should befall him and his family. He may also not make a new field hoe or buy a pot.³³

But they have many ways of asking God for rain. I once saw a simple form in the case of a very old man who stood on a terrace during the rain and shook out his cotton cloth with his hands. He prayed to God that he would shake the cloud for a long time so that much rain would come to the earth.

In some villages in east Konso, it is customary for a large rain ceremony to be held by the leaders of the two *xelta* groups, Hirba and Galgussa. The Galgussa leader must climb the holy tree that stands on the *mora* square. Then the Hirba priest first says a prayer up to the Galgussa priest, and the latter then repeats the formula. Climbing the tree means that the Galgussa priest is closer to God. In Gandima, the man who climbs into the tree has sandals made of elephant skin, which he uses only for this purpose. The rain ceremonies in Dureti, which are held annually at a menhir on a *mora* square, the so-called *gidoma* stone, are also considered very effective in Konso.

In the village of Mattara in northwest Konso, I learned the following sequence for the rain ceremony. On a certain day before the beginning of the rainy season, the men of the village go to the nearby River Garaliso, which forms the border with northeast Konso. The people from east Konso go to the river at the same time. Everyone stands on his side of the river, and some men then go into the riverbed and spray water to the other side, so that a few drops fall on the land. Then, the people of Mattara go to the square *yaugamma*, and the *abba mora* kills a black sheep or a black goat. According to others, however, the colour of the

³³ It later occurred to me that this regulation might have been due to the castes that were occupied with the making of pots and the iron tips for the hoe. Both are despised craftsmen's castes, with whom he should not come into contact during his time in office.

sacrificial animal is determined by the *suaita*. The *abba mora* then lays two or three pieces of meat on the *olahitta* pole. The rest will be jointly consumed by all those present.

Molle, the *abba mora* of this place, is a descendant of the founder of Mattara. He is, without doubt, the traditional village chief. What led to his deposition and the appointment of *grazmach* Shola, who belongs to the weaver caste, was not known because of the Konso's secrecy in these matters. He himself has since lived with the neighbouring Gato tribe, and only comes over occasionally to hold ceremonies. One of his women lives in Mattara with her son Kashmita.

The Konso also have leather masks. The pictured mask was made of hare leather and was supposed to be painted to represent a hyena, although no resemblance to this animal could be found. They seem to be more for the amusement of the people. At least that seemed to be the case on the day of our departure in Godja.

Oral traditions

There is undoubtedly a primal relationship between the culture of the Old Testament and the cultures of northeast Africa. I have published elsewhere (Jensen 1960) a paper on this subject. It would probably be very wrong to attribute the occurrence of a typical Old Testament motif among the Konso to this primordial kinship. The stories from the Old Testament, which recur very frequently in northeast Africa, are most likely due to the activities of wandering Muslim priests, as we encountered a man belonging to the congregation of Sheik Hussein in Konso as early as 1935 (see Jensen 1936).

Stories about Kalla (Mattara)

Kalla came from Gondar. When a Kalla has died, the death is kept secret for nine years. It was not like this before. When the first Kalla was buried, one man carried the body on his shoulders, handed it over to another man and so on until all nine clans had had a turn. At last the Kalla was carried by an important man of the Gerditta clan. He laid it on a stone in Kalla's sacred grove. This stone is called *kormadjo* Kalla (place of Kalla) and can still be seen there today. Then all who were present looked at the square, but God covered the whole mountain in a cloud, and when they could look again, the body was gone. No one knew where God took the body. This is different today, and it [the change] came about in the following way, through a woman.

The Kalla used not to sleep at night. If he wanted to be with his wife, he did so during the day. But at night he made a fire in his house, and God came to visit him. The woman said to him: "Look, other people sleep at night and work during the day. We have to sleep together at night too!" He said: "If I do that too, God can no longer come to me and speak to me!" The woman said: "Well, let's keep it the way it is." But she thought secretly: "I want to listen to what he says to God!" In the evening she went behind the big wooden tub used for beer preparation and waited. Kalla made a fire and after some time God came. God said: "There's a bad smell here! Someone has to be here!" But Kalla said: "No, there's no one in the house, we speak undisturbed." But God said: "But I smell it, and whether it be a man or a woman, the person should die at once. Then the woman died, but nothing

of her body was found. When this Kalla died, he was buried like his predecessors, but clouds did not come and the body lay there. Then the people prayed that God would take their dead king. Finally, God heard them and sent the clouds and took away the body, but he left the little finger of the right hand on the spot. People did not notice and went home.

One day the king's servant drove the cattle into the bush and up the hill where the *kormadjo* Kalla is located. Then he noticed that all the cattle gathered around the stone and began to moan and complain. He went through the cattle to the stone and saw the little finger. He recognized that it was from the last deceased Kalla and brought it to the new king. He called all the old men together and they gave their advice, saying: "God did not accept the body! It's better to put the finger back on the spot and bury Kalla in the earth from now on, but for nine years we keep his death a secret!"³⁴

The servant brought the finger back to the spot, dug a small hole with his hand and buried the little finger in it. The servant was from the clan Gerditta. Since then his descendants have been the priests of Kalla, and when a Kalla is buried, this priest first scratches the ground with his hands where the grave is to be made. Then all nine clans come in turn for eight days and work on the grave. Since then, it has been handled in such a way that the death is kept secret for eight years and the funeral ceremonies take place in the ninth year.

Kalla's mother died a year ago. At her burial, the priest also first makes a hole with his hand at the place where the grave is to be made; he then instructs all nine clans to work on the grave for eight days each. Then she is buried and the drum is beaten and the Dance of Death is danced on the *mora* near Kalla's farmhouse. She must be mourned for one and a half years, and under no circumstances may anyone dance. Even a *xelta* festival, if one falls in this time, must take place without dancing.

Because the first Kalla had a golden bracelet on his right forearm, every new Kalla has a mark on his right forearm. The first Kalla had *mashila* in his right hand and a bee in his left. When a new Kalla is born, he has either *mashila* in his right hand or a bee in his left, or both if he is very lucky or neither if he is very unlucky. Depending on the length of his reign there is a lot of *mashila* or a lot of honey or there is a general lack.

If a Kalla holds the stone that the leather workers use to scrape the hides, it is a sign that he is not a real Kalla but a king of the *xauda*; he will not be king.

³⁴ When I asked them, they said that the nine fingers that God had taken to Himself were the model for the nine years.

The visit to God

A man and a woman had nine sons and nine daughters. Then they became very arrogant, and God let the nine sons and the nine daughters and, finally, the husband die. All their livestock died too. Only the mother was left. She lamented and cried out: "I want to ask God why he has taken nineteen people and all my livestock from me!" The entrance to her house was to the south, and she turned to the east and went and went until she finally met a woman. The woman asked: "Where is the way to God?" The other woman said: "Just keep walking in the same direction." After some time, she met another woman who told her the same thing. Finally, she met a man, told him everything and asked how she could get to God. He told her to stay. Then he had her prepare beer, and both drank it. Then he instructed her to lie down and put the big beer tub over her; he told her not to be afraid, that God would come with thunder and lightning. When God came to the cabin with thunder and lightning, she was not afraid. She heard God tell the man that there was a bad smell and that someone had to be there. The man then said that a woman was there and told God about the whole sad fate of the woman. Then he freed the woman from the beer tub, and she faced God. She told of her misfortune. God put nine pieces of his excrement in her hand and warned her not to lose these pieces but to hold on to them. Then he told them to go to a mountain nearby; God himself went to another mountain. Then her husband and the eighteen children came before her, but she did not speak to them. The next morning, after she had slept in the man's house again, she went up the mountain again at God's command and saw a lot of people who had already died. When she returned to God, she said that she wanted to go home immediately. She held the eighteen pieces of excrement firmly in her hand, and God advised her: "Throw the excrement into your house and do not speak to anyone about what you have seen. Just say you went to God." When she returned home, she did what God had told her to do. She became the wife of her husband's younger brother. When the neighbours came and asked where she had been for so long, she followed God's advice and said only that she had been with God. In her new marriage, she again had nine sons and nine daughters. They all grew up and prospered well. Now she was a very old woman. One day she called all the people together and said: "Now I am old. God has said that I must not talk about it with anyone, but now that I am old, I can do so." She told of her experience with God that time. When it ended, she was dead.

The rich man and the poor man (Mattara)

There was a man who could do anything. He had much fruit in his fields and had many cattle. At the same time, there lived another man who was poor; nothing worked out for him, his fields did not grow any fruit and he had no livestock.

One night – it was planting time – the man stood under a tree because rain was coming. A woman came down from heaven with the rain. She was wearing a black sheepskin on her shoulder. He saw her sprinkle the rich man's field with *mashila*, which she held in her right hand. He jumped out and caught her. He called her to account for her actions. So she spread *mashila* on his field and asked if he had any other fields. He had her spread *mashila* over all his fields. Then she escaped to heaven. Then the poor man got rich. He had much fruit in the fields and bought many cattle. Then he became arrogant and treated everyone badly. He was not afraid of the hyena himself. He caused trouble for all the people he dealt with. Then all the people asked God: "This man gives us a lot of trouble. Free us from him!" Then his cattle died, his fields no longer bore fruit and he became as poor as before.

Children that became animals (Gamole)

A man and a woman came down from heaven and stood together and they got married. The woman bore nine children. God always came to them from heaven and saw them. When she had given birth to nine children, God came and asked: "How many have you given birth to?" She said "five" and hid four from him; and God said: "Why do you lie to me and hide four children? Now the four children whom you wanted to hide from me shall be turned into beasts: one into a lion, the other into a leopard, the third into a buffalo and the fourth into a mouse."

The sheep of God

A sheep went into a man's fields every day and ate the fruit. No matter how many times he chased it away, it always came back. He went to *suaita* and threw the coffee beans. Then *suaita* told him that the sheep belonged to God and to no man. He should catch it, take it home and kill it. But it was important that not a drop of blood or marrow from the bones fall to the ground.

The man did as he was told. He killed the sheep in the beer trough, so that not a drop of blood could fall to the ground. Then he cooked the meat and ate it very carefully, so that no marrow fell from the bones to the ground. Then he wanted to go to the field with his wife and warned his children not to go near the pot. After the parents had left, the children went to the pot and took out bones. They ate the marrow and dropped some on the ground. They tried to pick it up with their fingers, but it kept growing. The whole house and the whole farmstead were destroyed, and a small pond was formed on the spot, which lies to the left of the road to Fasha. The parents came to the place where the house had stood before and saw that the sheep had destroyed all their property.

The three wise men (Mattara)

There were three men; they were different ages. One of them had become a Gurra in the meantime and had given up his rank to the second. He had meanwhile become Orshada and had given up his rank to the third, who was Gada. One day, all three of them drove their cattle to water. The Gurra said: "I am the oldest and therefore my cattle drink first." The youngest one said: "I am Gada, so my cattle drink first." The Orshada sided with the Gurra. Then a dispute arose. They could not agree and decided to go to the king. When they came before the king, they said: "We want to talk secret things to you." The king said: "It's good. Take a seat only in the guest cabin until the food is prepared." He gave a servant the order to slaughter a goat and prepare *kitta* (flat bread).

When the meal was ready, the king invited them into his hut and tasted the food. Then he said: "Do not be disturbed and take a firm grip. I have taken *kosso* and therefore have to go out several times." But outside, he heard what the men inside were saying. The Gurra said: "This is a goat whose mother has died. She drank milk with the dogs." The Orshada said: "The *kitta* is made of *mashila* which grew on a grave." The Gada finally said: "The father of this king is a brave man who has never been defeated in war." The king heard. He secretly asked his servant if it was right about the goat. The servant confirmed it. He also learned that the *mashila* had really grown on a grave. He then went to his mother and asked her if it was true what was said about his father, and his mother confirmed this too. Then he thought what wise people they were to know all this. He thought they could become dangerous to him and aspire to become king themselves.

At the same time, the men inside the room guessed his thoughts. The Gurra said: "This king has no good thoughts. He obeyed, and we said things about his food that could upset him. We can't get justice here. Let's just get out of here fast."

But the king had nine sons. Three of them were in the field and returned home in the evening and had their supper. The king asked the other six to guard the two paths leading to the king's farm and, if three people came, to kill them; but if one, two, four or five people came, they should let them go.

When the three men left the king's court, Gurra said: "It is possible that the king has decided to kill us. I did not see the six sons again, while only three had their supper. That is why we want to go separately. Let the Gada go one way and the Orshada and me the other." The king's sons, who were hiding, saw only one man and then two men coming along the road and let them go unharmed. But the king said to his three sons who were having supper: "Why are you sitting here and not helping your brothers? You too, go and guard the path!" When the three brothers came – it had become dark in the meantime – those who guarded the way thought "there are three men" and they killed them. When day broke, they saw that they had slain their own brothers.

The monkey and the elephant

The monkey was trying to steal honey from a pot of bees when the elephant came by. The elephant asked him why he was stealing honey that belonged to humans. The monkey pretended to act as a servant of the people and to be taking the honey for them. Then the elephant said: "Why do you want to be a servant of men? Come down and be my servant!" The monkey followed him and was his servant from then on.

One day the monkey said to the elephant: "Why do you never have a child like the other animals?" The elephant said: "This is God's will. If I find a male elephant, that's it." The monkey said: "I want to get a lion to make you a baby." When the elephant agreed, he fetched a big monkey to impregnate the elephant. Then the elephant went to the soothsayer and asked: "Where shall I give birth?" The soothsayer said: "You must go to a place near a lake." When the time was right, the elephant and his servant went close to a lake. She gave birth to two children, which the monkey took and immediately threw into the water. He hid himself in the afterbirth and said: "I am your child!"

Then the elephant raised the monkey, but he grew and did not grow and remained small. Then the elephant went back to the fortune teller and told him the case. He said: "Hit him with the stick. If it is your child, it will come and drink milk, but if not, it will run away." When the elephant did so, the monkey ran and drank the milk. But the child grew and did not grow. Then the elephant decided that he would take the child to the fortune teller and ask what it was all about. The monkey noticed this and said: "I have diarrhoea. Take me to a big tree." When the elephant did so, the monkey quickly climbed a large tree and jumped from tree to tree. The elephant ran and ran and saw many monkeys in the trees and asked them: "Where is my child? Where is my child? It had a red butt." So the monkeys said: "We all do." Then the elephant went back to the fortune teller and lamented her suffering. He said: "If you want to find the monkey that annoyed you, you must invite all the monkeys, treat them to honey and light a big fire. Finally, you must ask them all to jump over the fire. One of them will plunge in, and that's the one that bothered you."

The elephant proceeded to do so, and all the monkeys jumped over the fire except for one, who fell in. She caught it and tied it firmly to her house and went to the market. Then a hyena came and asked: "Who tied you up here?" "Oh," said the monkey, "we have a big market today and I am smarter than everybody else and I always get a lot of meat, and that's why my people tied me up here. If you let yourself be tied up here in my place, I will go to the market and bring you a lot of meat." The hyena accepted the suggestion and let herself be tied up. In the meantime, the elephant had gathered all the other elephants at the market. She had told them her story and said: "Now let us go to my house and kill and consume the monkey." The other elephants were satisfied and all went with her to her home.

Then they saw that a hyena was tied up instead of the monkey and they asked where the monkey was. The hyena told her story and how she had come to be tied up. Then the elephant got angry and said: "Now you have to pay for the monkey. Why did you let him go?" And she killed the hyena.

This story was told by a man to justify why monkey and hyena were in the same clan. The Saudata clan does indeed have totemistic relationships with the monkey and the elephant, and with locusts. About this and its connection with the Saudata clan, he knew nothing to report.

The lion and the hyena (Gamole)

Lion and hyena were friends. They had carried off a lot of cattle and decided to take turns herding them. When the hyena was the shepherd, it ate a weak cow. When the lion was the shepherd, he ate two strong bulls. So it went on until there were only five cattle left. And the hyena said to the lion: "Where are all our cattle? I have only eaten two weak cows and now there are only five cattle left!" Then the lion said: "You have to look down and count the legs!" Then there were twenty animals and the hyena was satisfied. But the lion ate again two strong bulls, so that only three animals were left. Then the hyena counted the legs and now there were only twelve, and the hyena said: "There are only twelve and yesterday there were twenty." The lion replied: "Let us call the wild animals as judges." They called all the animals together, but respectfully all the animals left the chairman's place free for the lion. The lion majestically took his place, and the hyena was at the very back of the meeting. "Now you can bring your suit!" said the lion. The hyena told the whole story. And the lion said: "Good. I suggest the following judgement: of the three remaining animals, the hyena gets the weak cow and I get the two strong bulls." All animals found this judgement very just.

The hyena moved with his cow out of the way and saw Karata (the *kara* of the Tsamako). Karata was tied with ropes. The hyena asked: "Why are you tied up?" Karata said: "People tied me up because I didn't want to eat all the meat, but my stomach and my head are so small. In a moment, they'll come back with a huge pile of meat for me to eat!" The hyena said: "Nothing easier than to remedy it! You tie me up in your place! I can cope with that!"

Karata agreed and swung himself onto a tree. When the people came, they saw the hyena tied up instead of Karata, whom they had tied up there to kill him. They beat the hyena with clubs until it was dead and took the cow with them.

The origin of death (Arfeide)

In the beginning people did not die. God sent the frog to earth as a messenger and told him that man should die from then on but should always rise again from death,

just like the moon should disappear from then on and come again and again, so giving the division of the month. When the frog came to the people, however, he explained it differently: "The person should die and not come back. But the moon should go and appear again." Man was very angry about this and said: "Your message is wrong! Out of rage at this, he chopped off the frog's tail, which he still had then." But still, it has stayed that way ever since.

The origin of the war and the *xelta* groups (Narrator: Galaida from Buso)

There used to be peace among nations. There was only one game where you threw mud balls, which could not hurt anyone, at each other. At that time, the Konso all did the *xelta* festival together and at intervals of eighteen years. Once they were playing again and one man had the clever idea of sticking a stone in his mud ball; he hit another man on the forehead with it so that the blood came out. Then the party of the man who had been struck made sharpened sticks like spears but without iron points, and they threw them and wounded many. Since then, there has been a state of war between the different districts of the Konso land. Then they said: "It is better that we all celebrate the *xelta* festival for ourselves." So Abba Roba celebrated for himself and organized the festival every eight years; Fasha celebrated for itself and did it every ten years, and west Konso did it every five years. Only east Konso stayed with the eighteen years.

But the peace was disturbed and the villages in east Konso also fought each other: Gamole with Godja and Buso with Gandima. Only Lehaidi did not make war with anyone, because the inhabitants of Lehaidi were like priests. But the *xelta* festival was completely disturbed by the war. Then the people of Lehaidi said: "Let us at least keep peace during the *xelta* festival!" And so it has happened since then that every eighteen years, when the *xelta* was stable, there was complete peace between the villages.

The borrowed spear and the swallowed stone

A man wanted to hunt so borrowed a spear from his friend. He encountered an elephant and threw the spear at it. The spear became stuck, and the elephant escaped into the bush. When the man came home, the friend demanded his spear back. He offered him another spear and money, but the man insisted that he wanted his spear back. So he had to go into the bush and search until he found the spear in the forest.

Some time later he played the board game with his friend. Then the little son of the friend came along and swallowed a stone. Now the man said that he wanted to have his stone back and would not accept any replacement. Finally, the case

came before Djarso. They both told their story in detail. The friend said: "I cannot kill my son to get the stone out again." The Djarso decided that he had to kill his son so that the other could get the stone out of his stomach. So the man was avenged after the friend had insisted so relentlessly on getting his spear back.

The emergence of the division of labour (Gamole)

In earlier times, men and women's activities were completely equal. They both ground grain and fetched water. The woman had the vagina under her arm and the man had the penis on his index finger. Then the woman became pregnant with twins – a son and a daughter. But they were not born under the arm, but made the other way in the womb of the mother. Menstruation was due to the fact that the woman had given birth to the twins in immense pain because they made their way together. The son had his penis where people have it today and the daughter also had a vagina where women have it today. Since then, the division of labour between the sexes has been established as it is today.

How death came into the world

People did not use to die; they got older and older. The very old people then came to the younger ones and wanted to get food from them. The younger ones were dissatisfied with this and said: "From now on, we will no longer feed you!" Then the old men said: "Because you have done this, you shall not reach old age as we have, but die sooner." Thus death came into the world.

The sharing of the spoils

A lion and nine hyenas went hunting together and captured ten head of cattle. And the lion said: "I must have nine of them, and so we are ten together, and you must have one, so that you are ten together. Then it is just. The hyenas did not dare to contradict this and moved home with one piece of cattle."

When the father of the hyenas heard about the unjust distribution, he became terribly angry and said: "This must be reversed, and each of you must get a piece of cattle."

So he got up and went to the lion. When he came there, the lion sat up straight and ate the nine captured animals. The lion looked at him fearsomely and asked: "What do you want?" "My friend," said the hyena, "I just wanted to welcome you and that's all!"

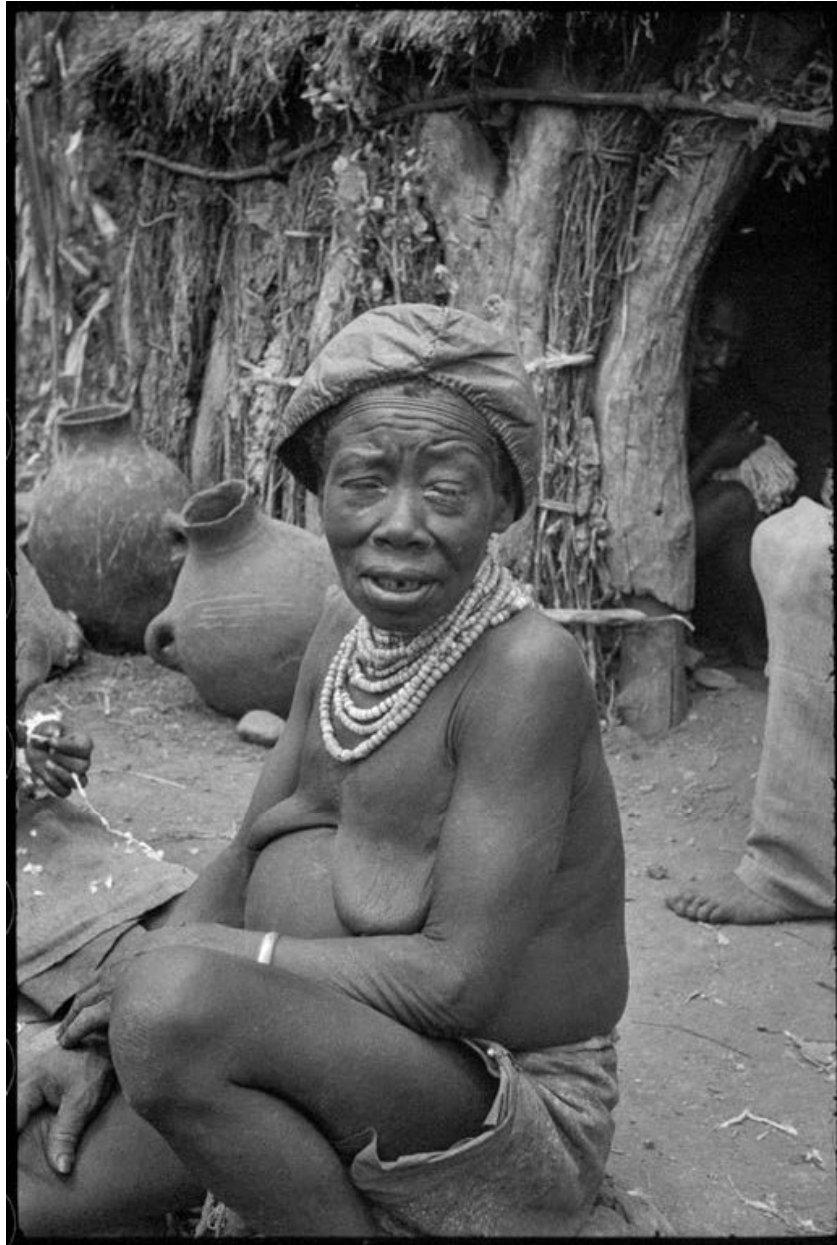


Image 55: Woman with typical leather cap

From the early days of the Konso (Buso)

A man named Didiba and a woman came down from heaven and landed in the lowlands. They got married and had four children: a son, a daughter and again a son and a daughter. When the son reached marriageable age, he asked the father who he should marry. He said: "You shall marry your next younger sister." The son said: "She is from my clan and I cannot marry her." The father said: "It doesn't matter. Do only as I told you."

The other son also received the same answer. Then all the animals came to Didiba and asked him what they should eat. He said to the elephant: "You shall

eat the grass and the fruit of the trees.” And to the lion he said: “You shall hunt the other animals.” To the hyena he said: “You shall eat all animals!”

But all clans are descended from the four children of Didiba: first Argamaida and then Saudata, then Kerdita, Tigisseita, Dogomalita, Elaita, Mahaleta, Ishalaita and Basanta.³⁵

Then a famine came over the country and all people went to Gauwada. At that time Kalla came and burned the whole country. But it was the custom that the land should belong to him as far as the fire continued to burn without being extinguished. Only one mountain, the mountain of Bammalle was excluded from the fire. When Bammalle came on it, he burned down the mountain. That is why Bammalle is a king only for himself and Kalla is not subject to him.

When the famine was over, the people came back and Didiba claimed the land. He argued with Kalla about it and the two wanted to submit to a judgement in Duro, where they wanted the earth to ask questions and the earth itself to answer. But Kalla used a ruse and hid a man underground. When he asked the earth if it [the land] belonged to him, the man said: “Yes!” But he kept silent to Didiba. Then Didiba went to Gardulla (today king in Gidole). But that the earth actually still belongs to Didiba and Kalla is only an appointed administrator can be seen from the fact that the earth is called *didibaja*.

The Argamaida clan (Mattara)

Kalebaha was the first man of Argamaida.³⁶ At that time, God was still living on earth and heaven was very close to earth. Then God went away into heaven and departed with heaven.

Kalebaha lamented that he was now left alone on earth. But God loved Kalebaha very much and said to him: “I will leave the hawk here; he shall be your friend. I will always give you rain if you keep peace with each other. The camel is also your friend and you should not eat it.”³⁷ When the Argamaida ask for rain, they turn to the blue of the sky, which is also Argamaida. They also call the falcon Argamaida; they are happy when he eats their flesh.

Kalebaha had three sons. One was Ototomali, who became the founder of Argamaida; the second was called Affarta and became the founder of Ishlaita; the third was called Orgeta and became the founder of Tigisseita. Therefore, these clans cannot marry each other. Today, however, they have recently begun to take no notice of the ban.

³⁵ By the way, the order of the clans is always enumerated differently.

³⁶ In eastern Konso, they say it was Bammalle.

³⁷ Probably Borana influence, as the Konso have no camels at all.

The evil stepmother and the thunder (Gamole)

A man had two wives and a daughter from each. Later, he was divorced from the second wife, but her child remained with the stepmother. She treated the two children very differently. She always gave her own child delicious dishes, but only gave barley to the stepchild. Now barley may not taste good, but it makes you strong. The father checked from time to time if the child was getting proper food, but the stepdaughter was always the stronger of the two girls so he did not notice anything.

Once the stepmother had prepared a delicious meal and wanted to give it only to her daughter. So she said: "Whoever returns here first from fetching water shall get the food." Then she gave her daughter a strong calabash but gave her stepdaughter a calabash with small holes in the bottom. The daughter quickly returned from fetching water, but the stepdaughter struggled in vain to get water into her calabash. Night fell and she climbed up a tree to spend the night there.



Image 56: Women and girls carrying water

In the night, all the wild animals came to drink water. They did not notice anything. But when the lion came, he smelled that a person was near. He spotted the girl up in the tree and said: "You shall come down and be my wife!" She replied: "No, you should come up here instead!" Then the lion threatened that he would jump and then she would be killed immediately. Then she came down.

The lion said: "You are my wife and you must carry me home!" He sat on her shoulders, and she carried him to his home in front of a big rock. The lion said some words in lion language and the rock opened up. He offered her meat from dik-dik, but she turned him down. Then he offered her beef, and she ate it.

The next morning the lion went out and said he would not be back until late. But before that he closed the rock again so that the girl remained locked up. The next day the other sister drove the cattle out and sat on the rock and urinated. Then the girl under the rock said: "This is urine from my father's house." The girl up on the rock heard it and reported it at home. Then a son of a neighbour went to the place with the cattle and urinated on the rocks as well. The stepdaughter said again under the rock: "This is the urine from our neighbour's house." When the boy came home and reported what he had heard, the girl's father went to *suaita* and told him the whole incident. Then the *suaita* gave him medicine and told him the words he had to speak to make the rock open. The father now went to the rock and opened it with the help of *suaita*'s medicine. He took the girl home with him.

Immediately afterwards, the lion came and found the rock open and his wife gone. He followed her trail and came to her father's house. He said: "How can you take my wife away?" But the father slayed the lion. Then they pulled off his fur and stretched it out to dry. When the fur was dry, all the pegs with which it was attached could be easily pulled out except for one, which was so firmly anchored that nobody could loosen it. Finally, the stepmother stepped on the fur and pulled the stick. Immediately it came out, and the fur rose to the sky under a loud thunderous noise. Since then, the thunder is up in heaven and is as strong as the roar of the lion.

The daughter of the rich man and the daughter of the poor man (Gamole)

A rich man had a daughter and a poor man also had a daughter. The girls tended the cattle together. Once, when they drove the cattle to the river for watering, the rich man's daughter said: "First of all, take off all my jewellery, I want to wash my body first and then my jewellery." The poor man's daughter did so. But when the rich man's daughter wanted to wash herself, she pushed her into the water, where she drowned. Then she put on the jewellery of the rich girl and drove the cattle into her own father's house. But she herself covered her face and went into the rich man's house, saying that she was ill. The rich man and his wife thought she was their daughter. They put her to bed and nursed her and fed her with delicious things. The next day a servant of the rich man went to the river to fetch water. Then the murdered girl under the water said: "The poor man's daughter pushed me into the water, and my parents are still taking care of this child and feeding it with delicious things." When the servant came home and told the parents, they went to

the *suaita*. He gave them a medicine with which they could get their child out of the water again. After they had succeeded, they went home and took the *shamma* off the face of the strange child. Then they killed her in front of the house.

The Butota snake

A man tended his flock. Then a snake came and bit the man and killed him. Then she escaped and came to another shepherd. The first man's relatives discovered that the snake had killed him and followed her trail. When the serpent saw itself persecuted, it asked the other shepherd: "Please, hide me, I have done an injustice!" "What wrong have you done?" asked the shepherd. "I bit a man. Where should I hide?" the snake replied. The shepherd said: "I want to put grass on you." "No," said the snake, "hide me in your pants." The shepherd proceeded to do so and tied his trousers.

The people who had followed the trail of the serpent came to the place where the shepherd was; there, the trail disappeared. They asked the shepherd: "Where's the snake?" Then he said: "She has gone further." So the people also went on, and when they were gone, the shepherd said to the serpent: "Now come out!" But the snake said: "No! I don't want to! I want to bite you, because I want your penis!" "No!" said the man, "I helped you. It's not right. We should search for a judge and ask him."

So they went in search of a judge and met a donkey. The man said to the donkey: "You shall be our judge. This animal bit a man and I hid it and lied to save his life. Then I told it to go away now, but it wants my penis now." Then the donkey said: "Listen! Every time a man has a donkey, he loads it until it is no longer needed. Then he sends him into the bush and leaves him to the hyenas. That's why I don't want to be a judge of people, because they are worth nothing."

The man continued to walk along the road and they met a camel. They said: "You shall be our judge." "What should I judge?" asked the camel. So they told him their case. The camel said: "There is nothing to boast about in people. They load the camel until it is no longer needed and then they send it into the bush and leave it to the wild animals. I may not be a judge of people because they are worth nothing."

Then the snake said: "I have received my verdict. I can bite you now." "No!" said the man, "We shall find a third judge." So he went on, and they met a little monkey and told him to come down from the tree and judge. "What do you want me to fix?" asked the monkey. That's when he told him about the case. "Is this true?" the monkey asked the serpent, and the serpent said, "Yes." And the monkey said: "If I am to judge, you must first come out." Then the snake came out. Then the monkey said secretly to the man: "You have a mace and you have a spear. Now make your judgement." Then the man beat the snake to death.

Appendix

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List of illustrations

Preface

- Image 1: Monuments to the dead in Kolmi. On the left an elephant, 1955,
© Frobenius Institute, reg. no. FoA 27-KB079–23.a. 4
- Image 2: At work with the natives in camp Maddera (Jensen on the right,
Haberland on the left), 1951 © Frobenius Institute, reg. no. FoA 23-Pa53–13.a . . . 6

Editor's preface

- Image 1: Map of the 1950–1952 and 1954–1955 expeditions, Jensen 1959,
appendix, map 1 14
- Image 2: Village Buso. The men's house at the *mora* place, where the expedition
members stayed in 1935, © Frobenius Institute, reg. no. FoA 23-Pa64–14.a. . . . 15
- Image 3: Market scene. Front right, translator Bakalle Heye, 1955, © Frobenius
Institute, reg. no. FoA 27-KB044–08 17
- Image 4: In camp Godja with Galaida from Buso, 1951, © Frobenius Institute,
reg. no. FoA 23-Pa82–25a 18
- Image 5: At work with the natives. In camp Godja, 1951, © Frobenius Institute,
reg. no. FoA 23-Je12–11. 19

The Konso

- Image 1: View from the heights above Duro to the Dalbena valley, 1951
© Frobenius Institute, reg. no. FoA 23-Ha105–10. 30
- Image 2: Terraces near Gandima village, 1955 © Frobenius Institute, reg. no.
FoA 27-MF541–06 31
- Image 3: 'Box fields' near Fasha village, 1955 © Frobenius Institute, reg. no.
FoA 27-KB064–25 32
- Image 4: The dam (Garmoti, in the *fora* east of Idigle), 1955 © Frobenius
Institute, reg. no. FoA 27-KB042–14 33
- Image 5: Village complex. View from the eastern end of the village Godja to the
'lower village'. In the background on the right the holy grove, 1951 © Frobenius
Institute, reg. no. FoA 23-Pa80–32 35
- Image 6: *Poqalla* homestead at the entrance of Godja. Dwelling hut and *olahitta*
pile bundle, 1951 © Frobenius Institute, reg. no. FoA 23-Pa70–26 36
- Image 7: Market scene. In Dokattu, 1951 © Frobenius Institute, reg. no. FoA
23-Je11–34. 37
- Image 8: Leather containers (*ogole*), 1955 © Frobenius Institute, reg. no. FoA
27-MF518–06 38
- Image 9: The people of Buso look at the photos taken in their village in 1935,
1951 © Frobenius Institute, reg. no. FoA 23-Pa64–15.a 39
- Image 10: The people of Buso look at the photos taken in their village in 1935,
1951 © Frobenius Institute, reg. no. FoA 23-Pa64–29.a 40

Image 11: View from Bammalle Hill to Buso, 1951 © Frobenius Institute, reg. no. FoA 23-Ha114-12.	41
Image 12: A small part of the village Idigle, 1951 © Frobenius Institute, reg. no. FoA 23-Pa61-14	42
Image 13: Lukama, a <i>xauda</i> , who holds an unpleasant office as a deputy in charge of matters concerning the Amhara, such as the collection of taxes, etc. and member of the weaver caste, 1951 © Frobenius Institute, reg. no. FoA 23-Pa63-16.a.	43
Image 14: Hand-drawn map of the Konso area with places of research © Frobenius Institute, reg. no. EH-537-015	46
Image 15: The present king Kalla, 1955 © Frobenius Institute, reg. no. FoA 27-KB044-02.a.	47
Image 16: The ‘queen’ of the Konso. The wife of Kalla, whom a number of villages in northeast Konso consider as their king, 1951 © Frobenius Institute, reg. no. FoA 23-Pa60-31	48
Image 17: Main informant Girgitta, 1955 © Frobenius Institute, reg. no. FoA 27-MF522-01	49
Image 18: Lamitta, an informant of Jensen from the village Buso. Already an informant in 1934/1935, 1951 © Frobenius Institute, reg. no. FoA 23-Pa63-17.a	50
Image 19: Galaida, dignitary from the village of Buso, was also an informant for the 1934/ 35 expedition, 1951 © Frobenius Institute, reg. no. FoA 23-Pa82-38.a	51
Image 20: <i>Mora</i> square in Gandima village, 1955 © Frobenius Institute, reg. no. FoA 27-KB042-38	59
Image 21: <i>Mora</i> place in the village (Idigle), directly at the east entrance, 1951 © Frobenius Institute, reg. no. FoA 23-Pa61-35.	62
Image 22: The men’s house (in Idigle). Support posts made of monoliths, 1951 © Frobenius Institute, reg. no. FoA 23-Pa61-07.	63
Image 23: Inside the village (Idigle). The path runs at the level of the surrounding wall, which drops a few metres to the left here to the large meeting place in front of the village, 1951 © Frobenius Institute, reg. no. FoA 23-Pa61-15	64
Image 24: Dancers in the camp Godja, 1951 © Frobenius Institute, reg. no. FoA 23-Pa69-12.	69
Image 25: Old man performs dances and pantomime, 1951 © Frobenius Institute, reg. no. FoA 23-Pa69-35	70
Image 26: Group of men at the market in Doho, 1951 © Frobenius Institute, reg. no. FoA 23-Pa56-25.a.	74
Image 27: <i>Xauda</i> with the female costume that men wear in Duro at certain <i>xelta</i> festivals, 1955 © Frobenius Institute, reg. no. FoA 27-MF517-07	77
Image 28: <i>Grazmach</i> Shola, older brother of Lukama, <i>balabat</i> of the village of Mattara, which mainly contained <i>xauda</i> . The entrustment of two <i>xauda</i> with these offices is unusual, 1951 © Frobenius Institute, reg. no. FoA 23-Pa53-21.a	79
Image 29: Woman and girl kneading the porridge (for beer preparation), 1951 © Frobenius Institute, reg. no. FoA 23-Pa63-10.a.	82

Image 30: House of a <i>poqalla</i> priest in Fasha. Cabin and storage hut. The decorated clay roof top, ostrich eggs and the placing of bones, grasses, etc. above the hut entrance are privileges of the <i>poqalla</i> priests, 1951 © Frobenius Institute, reg. no. FoA 23-Pa73-15	83
Image 31: Dignitary from Fasha with the forehead ornament called <i>kalacha</i> . In southwest Konso, only a certain man from the Orshada age group is allowed to wear the <i>kalacha</i> – the only one who is circumcised. He wears the jewellery for ten years until it is the turn of the next age group to enter the Orshada class, 1951 © Frobenius Institute, reg. no. FoA 23-Je12-26.	86
Image 32: Village Fasha. Holy place at the <i>sugenda</i> gate, 1951 © Frobenius Institute, reg. no. FoA 23-Pa78-08	88
Image 33: <i>Mora daura</i> , the holiest place of the village, in Fasha. In the middle, the tree with two <i>olahitta</i> poles, surrounded by a stone base, which is common on almost all <i>mora</i> places in Fasha district. The three monoliths serve the memory of outstanding ancestors, 1951 © Frobenius Institute, reg. no. FoA 23-Pa73-12	89
Image 34: Geldima village, 1955 © Frobenius Institute, reg. no. FoA 27-KB040-37.	94
Image 35: View from the upper village in Gamole, 1951 © Frobenius Institute, reg. no. FoA 23-Pa81-17	95
Image 36: Village Gamole. The wall that separates the upper village from the lower village. Path on the much higher inner side of the wall. On the right, the men's house of the <i>mora</i> square on the northeastern edge of the upper village, 1951 © Frobenius Institute, reg. no. FoA 23-Pa81-35	96
Image 37: Inside the village Burkedaya, 1951 © Frobenius Institute, reg. no. FoA 23-Wd127-08	97
Image 38: Drawing of the Bammalle, 1935 by Alf Bayrle © Frobenius Institute, reg. no. EBA-B 01927.	98
Image 39: The present Bammalle, 1951 © Frobenius Institute, reg. no. FoA 23-Pa60-09.	99
Image 40: Weaver from Mattara with loom, 1951 © Frobenius Institute, reg. no. FoA 23-Pa55-36.a	104
Image 41: Balgudo, the <i>balabat</i> of Godja, 1951 © Frobenius Institute, reg. no. FoA 23-Pa62-34.a	105
Image 42: Pottery woman at work, 1951 © Frobenius Institute, reg. no. FoA 23-Pa76-38.a.	106
Image 43: Market in Bakaule, 1951 © Frobenius Institute, reg. no. FoA 23-Pa62-19.a.	108
Image 44: The harvested cotton is spread out to dry on the <i>mora</i> square (in Buso), 1951 © Frobenius Institute, reg. no. FoA 23-Pa65-07	110
Image 45: Coring the cotton with the rolling stick on a flat stone, 1951 © Frobenius Institute, reg. no. FoA 23-Pa59-33.	111
Image 46: Spinning Konso man, 1951 © Frobenius Institute, reg. no. FoA 23-Pa63-29.a.	112

Image 47: Weaver of Mattara at work on the tread loom, 1951 © Frobenius Institute, reg. no. FoA 23-Pa55-25.a	113
Image 48: Borre, the current Hirle, with the Hirle staff, 1955 © Frobenius Institute, reg. no. FoA 27-MF513-01	117
Image 49: Groups of people at the <i>mora</i> place in Buso, 1951 © Frobenius Institute, reg. no. FoA 23-Ha111-09	122
Image 50: <i>Mora</i> square at the northern entrance of the village (Buso) with men's house, 1951 © Frobenius Institute, reg. no. FoA 23-Ha114-03.	123
Image 51: Entrance to the homestead (of the Kalla) seen from inside, 1951 © Frobenius Institute, reg. no. FoA 23-Pa66-17.	130
Image 52: (In the homestead of the Kalla) storage huts, 1951 © Frobenius Institute, reg. no. FoA 23-Pa66-13	131
Image 53: Group of stelae near the village Matshalle, 1955 © Frobenius Institute, reg. no. FoA 27-KB043-34	133
Image 54: Stone house in the <i>fora</i> in southeast Konso, 1955 © Frobenius Institute, reg. no. FoA 27-KB079-09.a	141
Image 55: Woman with typical leather cap, 1951 © Frobenius Institute, reg. no. FoA 23-Pa63-38.a	154
Image 56: Women and girls carrying water, 1955 © Frobenius Institute, reg. no. FoA 27-MF515-08	156

Glossary

(all terms, unless otherwise indicated, are in Konso language)

<i>abba ayana</i>	spirit speaking through the <i>kallicha</i> in trance
<i>abba ela</i>	owner of a well
<i>abba gadana</i>	supreme leader with mainly priestly functions in northeast Konso
<i>abba kilan</i>	office of the milk taster
<i>abba mora</i>	person entitled to dispose of the highest fairground (<i>mora</i>)
<i>abba roba</i>	father of rain
<i>abba timba</i>	father of the drum
<i>abo aye</i>	literally: father mother; the two deities (heaven and earth)
<i>adayana</i>	literally: law of the fathers; stone in the middle of the <i>dammalle</i> square
<i>ädenta</i>	Konso farmers
<i>aftari maramme</i>	sacrifice by someone who is possessed by the spirit of <i>maramme</i>
<i>agamda</i>	<i>carissa edulis</i> , wild edible fruit tree; its wood is used to make jewellery
<i>agamsa</i>	Oromo for <i>agamda</i>
<i>ailin</i>	(to) dig
<i>aläta</i>	corpse hut, which will be destroyed after the burial
<i>arammo</i>	square where the first <i>xelta</i> festival takes places for some Konso
<i>aramo</i>	gathering place for <i>shawalta</i>
<i>arkatta</i>	see <i>arkatta ailin</i>
<i>arkatta ailin</i>	small garden where a ceremony takes place
<i>aroresa</i>	Oromo for <i>daita</i>
<i>arpa</i>	elephant
<i>bakarnäshe</i>	ceremony after which the husband can have intercourse with his unclean wife again
<i>bakasha</i>	bird with red feathers which appears only seasonally in Konso
<i>bericha</i>	according to Jensen self-term of the <i>xauda</i> , it is however of Borana origin
<i>bito</i>	earth
<i>bogolko</i>	chief of the Tsamako
<i>bona</i>	the period of time in each year from harvesting to sowing
<i>bota</i>	place for <i>xelta</i> ceremonies in Southeast Konso
<i>bukitta</i>	a jackal-like animal
<i>bulgu</i>	a man-eating creature with a pair of eyes on the front and back of the head (Oromo)
<i>chachate</i>	wrong god
<i>chaddin</i>	east
<i>chalada</i>	place where the circumcision of Hirle, the chief priest of the Hirba group, takes place

<i>chelta</i>	<i>xelta</i> system in Fasha
<i>dabeno</i>	name for a Hirba <i>sorogitta</i> in Fasha
<i>dahaita</i>	three thin sticks about two metres long from the wood of the <i>daita</i> tree; the skin of the hare is attached at the ends
<i>daita</i>	<i>grewia velutina</i> , tree used for making <i>dahaita dammalle</i>
<i>dakaila</i>	age group in the <i>xelta</i> system in northwest Konso
<i>dammalle</i>	highest fairground in northeast Konso (for Galgussa)
<i>daterero</i>	place for <i>xelta</i> festival in Arfaide
<i>daura</i>	forbidden in the sense of taboo
<i>dejazmach</i>	a military title used by district administrators and the like during the imperial regime, comparable with colonel
<i>didibaja</i>	earth
<i>diga</i>	square which is outside the village and is included in festivities
<i>digmalda</i>	unlucky person; opposite of <i>dobitolaida</i>
<i>disi arkita</i>	south and right side
<i>disi bitita</i>	north and left side
<i>djarso</i>	hereditary title of a <i>poqalla</i> priest
<i>dobito</i>	luck
<i>dobitolaida</i>	lucky person
<i>doile mora</i>	square in Idigle
<i>doraita</i>	locust
<i>edule</i>	ceremony around February in northwest Konso in which all Xela, men and boys as well as girls, camp together at a river and cut their hair, which is thrown into the river
<i>ekerta</i>	<i>olea europaea subsp. Africana</i> , wild olive tree used for <i>gumma</i> sticks
<i>ela</i>	well
<i>fitaurari</i>	Amharic military title; comparable with major
<i>fora</i>	cattle camp in the grazing area
<i>gadabaha</i>	biggest festival during <i>xelta</i> festivities in northeast Konso
<i>gaiyaha</i>	<i>mora</i> square that belongs to the Ishalaita
<i>galota</i>	most beautiful cow or ox from a lion or man killer which wears a tooth around its neck
<i>garda</i>	eldest son
<i>gidoma</i>	dance square of the Doho; a menhir on a <i>mora</i> square
<i>grazmach</i>	a military title used by district administrators and the like during the imperial regime, comparable with lieutenant
<i>gudumaida</i>	a kind of scapegoat
<i>gulenda</i>	threshold of a house
<i>gumanta</i>	dik-dik antelope
<i>gumma</i>	phallus-shaped stick made from the wood of the <i>ekerta</i> tree used by the members of the age group Gada when dancing
<i>gunita</i>	<i>justicia ladanoides</i>

<i>gunja</i>	name and title for a Melgussa <i>sorogitta</i> in Fasha
<i>guraila</i>	popular ball game
<i>gurra</i>	title and name of an office in southwest Konso
<i>haimolala</i>	women's dance festival, which is celebrated by those women whose men have the rank of Gada
<i>hansabita</i>	blossom to wear in the hair, by means of which someone could attract the rain
<i>harda</i>	artificial pond
<i>harmita</i>	medicine man mainly responsible for wounds and internal pain
<i>harriyada</i>	part of a <i>xelta</i> class, Oromo term
<i>hemitta</i>	marriage
<i>irmale</i>	name in the village of Fasha for the Galgussa <i>mursia</i>
<i>jila</i>	age grade system among the Oromo
<i>kaara</i>	communal hunt within the <i>xelta</i> system
<i>kahillo</i>	square where second <i>xelta</i> festival takes place in northwest Konso
<i>kahurra</i>	clothes which are worn by a buried man
<i>kala</i>	jackal
<i>kalacha</i>	phallic headband which is a sign of special rank in Fasha, southwest and northeast Konso
<i>kallicha</i>	a special medicine man
<i>kalu</i>	chieftain's name in Borana
<i>kanjazmach</i>	Amharic military title; comparable with captain
<i>kara</i>	squirrel (Tsamako)
<i>karata</i>	squirrel
<i>kasar</i>	a special vessel for tasting milk
<i>kataita</i>	multiform sanctuary
<i>kemaida ganda</i>	elder of a sub-village (at least in Idigle)
<i>kilana</i>	ritual
<i>kitta</i>	flat bread (Amharic)
<i>korbaida</i>	goat
<i>korbaida waqa</i>	hare
<i>kormadjo Kalla</i>	place of Kalla
<i>koskorta</i>	guinea fowl
<i>kosso</i>	<i>hagenia abyssinica</i> , tapeworm remedy (Amharic)
<i>laha waqa</i>	sheep of God
<i>lama</i>	two (Oromo)
<i>lamitta</i>	a <i>lamitta</i> son is the eldest son of a second wife, who also inherits the <i>poqalla</i> dignity after the death of his father
<i>latta</i>	visible sky
<i>lehanda</i>	a festival one year before the great eighteen-year celebration at the <i>dammalle</i> square where the highest priests are circumcised

<i>lukalitta</i>	headdress made out of dry ensete leaves, which is decorated all around with white hen feathers
<i>manni</i>	endogamous caste of craftsmen among the Ari
<i>maramme</i>	Maria
<i>mashila</i>	millet (Amharic)
<i>misgatta</i>	special sanctuary on <i>mora daura</i>
<i>moqanda</i>	tubular bones from a hare
<i>mora</i>	assembly place
<i>mora daura</i>	holiest place outside the village
<i>mora kusitta</i>	smaller public square
<i>murra</i>	circumcision
<i>mursia</i>	important office in relation to the <i>xelta</i> system in southwest Konso
<i>musha</i>	name in the village of Fasha for a Hirba <i>mursia</i>
<i>obbruu</i>	Oromo term for <i>ädenta</i>
<i>ogole</i>	measure at the Konso markets which is made of stiff cowhide
<i>okkatta ela</i>	cow of a well; it is invisible during the day, at night it comes out of the well and grazes
<i>olahitta</i>	mast erected at a <i>diga</i> square
<i>oritta</i>	spirits that cause illnesses
<i>oroda</i>	archer
<i>oshile</i>	people who marry although their age grade does not allow it yet
<i>poqalla</i>	sacrificial priest and the owner of the <i>kataita</i> ; hereditary nobility
<i>poqalteta</i>	wife of a <i>poqalla</i>
<i>qallu</i>	chief among the Borana
<i>qanota</i>	ceremony in northwest Konso before which women are not allowed to have children; the <i>qanota</i> feast takes place half a year after the <i>edule</i> feast
<i>qoruba</i>	hereditary name or title of Abba Roba
<i>rakko</i>	storage hut
<i>sadata</i>	soul
<i>sagar</i>	dik-dik antelope (Somali)
<i>sagari</i>	dik-dik antelope (Harari)
<i>sagarita</i>	hare
<i>sagerra</i>	dik-dik antelope (Danakil)
<i>shawalta</i>	first <i>xelta</i> festival
<i>shurrogitta</i>	important office in relation to the <i>xelta</i> system in southwest Konso
<i>shamma</i>	white toga-like shawl made from cotton (Amharic)
<i>shelqahitta</i>	<i>moringa stenopetala</i> , a tree, from its roots a ball is made for <i>guraila</i>
<i>soge</i>	name for a Galgussa <i>sorogitta</i> in Fasha
<i>sorogitta</i>	important office in relation to the <i>xelta</i> system in southwest Konso
<i>sorora</i>	period from sowing to harvesting with special rules, rainy season

<i>suaita</i>	the man who understands the <i>oritta</i> and to whom you turn when you are ill; hereditary office
<i>sugenda</i>	sheep; name of a gate in Fasha at which the <i>sorogitta</i> takes the highest oath
<i>takitta</i>	belt, made of hare fur
<i>tarra</i>	hare (Oromo)
<i>tedemo</i>	name in the village of Fasha for a Melgussa <i>mursia</i>
<i>ulea</i>	tonewood
<i>waakka</i>	memorial statues that mark graves of notable persons
<i>waq</i>	god and heaven (Oromo)
<i>waqa</i>	god
<i>waqa bora</i>	black god
<i>waqo burdji</i>	spirits that came from Burdji
<i>xalala</i>	<i>cissus rotundifolia</i>
<i>xara</i>	gate or door
<i>xauda</i>	weavers, an endogamous caste
<i>xelta</i>	age/generation system of the Konso
<i>yareda</i>	nest of leaves used by the Fareita girls as headwear
<i>yaugamma</i>	square which is visited by the people of Mattara during a rain ceremony
<i>yuba</i>	a kind of medicine man among the Borana

Index of names

Abaya	lake located in the Main Ethiopian Rift, east of the Guge Mountains and near the town of Arba Minch
Abba Roba	village in the southeast of Konso
Abebbe	<i>grazmach</i> of the district Fasha
Addis Ababa	capital city of Ethiopia
Affarta	first man of the clan Ishalaita; buried near Tishmale
Aidiya	name of the head of the Galgussa in Buso
Ailo	man, who came from Burdji with the clan Dogomalita and name of his descendants
Agitsha	name of the head of the Hirba in Buso
Alaida	son of Kaesa
Amatto	<i>abba mora</i> of Ishalaita and the living descendant of Affarta
Amhara	ethnic group in north Ethiopia
Arfaide	a village in west Konso
Argaila	age group in the <i>xelta</i> system in northwest Konso
Argamaida	Konso clan
Ari	ethnic group in south Ethiopia
Aylota	place on the eastern slope of the Gumaide Mountains where Konso was created
Badingalto	Konso village located around the hill of Bammalle
Bakaule	oldest Konso town
Balgudo	village chief of Godja
Bammalle	<i>poqalla</i> priest in Dokattu
Banna	ethnic group in south Ethiopia
Barbahaida	one of two generation grades which divide all northwest Konso
Bardubi	Konso month name
Barita	Tsamako clan
Basanta	Konso clan
Baya	mountain, where Djarso lived; about 700 m east of the village of Idigle
Bisho	father of Girgitta
Borana	Oromo group in south Ethiopia
Boringa	Konso month name
Borre	a man, who was the deputy of Hirle
Burdji	ethnic group in south Ethiopia
Burkedaya	village with market, located around the hill of Bammalle
Buso	a village, friendly relationship with Gandima; located around the hill of Bambale
Charauto	a <i>poqalla</i> priest from Godja

Chelita	first class in the <i>xelta</i> system in southeast Konso
Chencha	town in the Gamo highlands
Chew Bahir	southernmost and lowest (573 m) lake of the northeastern Rift Valley
Daba	a village; not represented in the <i>xelta</i> festival with the rest of north-east Konso
Dakaila	name of Konso age class
Dalbena	a river in Konso
Darra	Konso village
Dauruahellu	a spirit which headed the <i>xelta</i> system
Debana	a village, which has a friendly relationship with Godja
Dela	Konso month name
Didiba	first man who came into the country; is now king in Gidole
Dinaila	age group in the <i>xelta</i> system in southeast Konso
Djarso	Konso district and name of a former <i>bogolla</i> priest
Dogomalita	Konso clan
Doho	a high priest of the Galgussa group, who lives in the village of Dureti
Dokattu	village located around the hill of Bammalle
Dorse	a sub-group of the Gamo
Dulai	Konso name for the Woito River
Dureti	village where Doho, a high priest of the Galgussa group, lives; located around the hill of Bammalle
Duro	Konso village with market
Elaita	Konso clan
Esi	mountain in Borana
Faraita	class in the <i>xelta</i> system in northeast and northwest Konso and name for young men (and sometimes women), who did not celebrate the first <i>xelta</i> festival in southwest and southeast Konso
Fasha	Konso village with market and a district
Foritta	class in the <i>xelta</i> system in southeast Konso
Foro	Konso village
Fuduga	man capable of healing who lives in Gandima
Fullo	head of the <i>xauda</i> in northeast Konso; the <i>xauda</i> leaders in the individual villages are under his authority
Gada	class in the <i>xelta</i> system in northeast Konso (Oromo term)
Galaida	man and informant (already in 1935) from Buso
Galgussa	Konso moiety
Galmalle	hereditary name of Djarso, a <i>bogolla</i> priest
Gamo-Gofa	former province in south Ethiopia
Gamole	a village; not represented in the <i>xelta</i> festival with other northeast Konso
Gandima	Konso village, friendly relationship with Buso, located around the hill of Bammalle

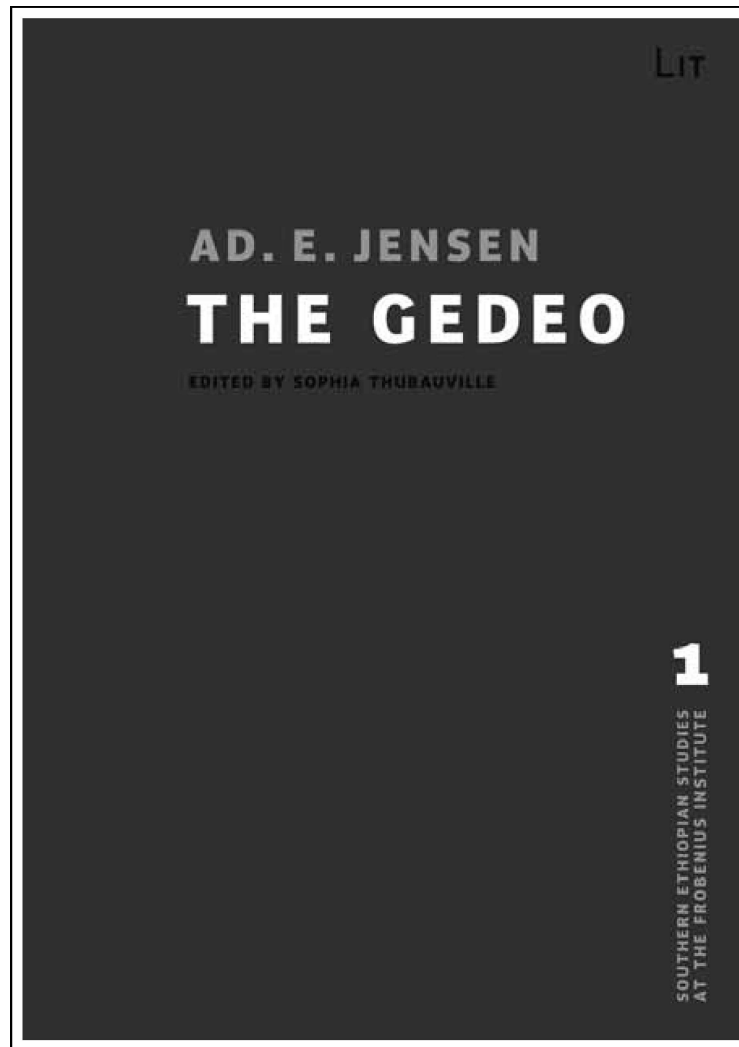
Gantsha	man which belonged to the weaver caste (<i>xauda</i>) and was Barbahaida
Garaliso	a river in Konso
Gardola	age group in the <i>xelta</i> system in northwest Konso
Gardulla	name province during the time of research with Gidole as capital
Garmola	age group in the <i>xelta</i> system in northwest Konso
Gato	village of the ethnic group Kusume
Gaudala	age group in the <i>xelta</i> system in northwest Konso
Gauwada	ethnic group in south Ethiopia
Gedeo	ethnic group in south Ethiopia
Geldima	a village; the inhabitants of it, together with Lehaidi and Idigle, are involved in the burial of a deceased Djarso
Geli	heavenly girl
Gidole	a village in Dirashe; the seat of the former provincial governor of Gamo-Gofa
Gildidja	Amharic name for the head of the Galgussa in Buso
Girgitta Bisho	informant from Idigle
Godja	a village, friendly relationship with Debana not represented in the <i>xelta</i> festival with other northeast Konso
Gombichu	part of the Tulama Oromo
Gora	ethnic group; call themselves Karkare
Gordala	name of Konso age class
Gumaide	place name in north Konso
Gunja	name of the Melgussa <i>sorogitta</i> in Fasha and his title
Gurasha	personal name of a <i>suaita</i> in Buso
Curra	class in the <i>xelta</i> system in northeast Konso
Haditsho	endogamous caste of craftsmen among the Sidama
Haile Selassie	emperor of Ethiopia (1930–1974)
Hammar	ethnic group in south Ethiopia
Harda	Konso month name
Hirba	Konso generation grade
Hirle	highest priest of the Hirba
Hollo	Hirba <i>poqalla</i> who lives in Dokattu
Hulme	Konso village located around the hill of Bammalle
Idigle	a village in the east of Konso, where Hirle lives; often named after Djarso
Irgatsha	oldest son of Gantsha and brother of Lukama and Shola
Ishalaita	Konso clan
Kadasha	age group in the <i>xelta</i> system in southeast Konso
Kaesa	deceased office holder
Kaffa	ethnic group in south Ethiopia
Kailola	age group in the <i>xelta</i> system in northwest Konso
Kairanguba	age group in the <i>xelta</i> system in northwest Konso

Kala	girl of the Kerdita clan; had a fight with her parents that ended with the parents chasing her away; she ran into the forest and became a jackal
Kalbea	first man and founder of the clan Argamaida
Kalebahaida	one of two generation sets which divide all northwest Konso
Kalibaha	first man of Argamaida
Kalla	<i>poqalla</i> priest and king of the northern Konso
Kallala	highest priest of the Galgussa
Karata	name of central Konso
Karati	see Karata
Karkare	own name of the Gora
Kasarguba	age group in the <i>xelta</i> system in Konso
Kasarla	age group in the <i>xelta</i> system in southeast Konso
Kasarmala	age group in the <i>xelta</i> system in southeast Konso
Kashmita	son of Shola
Kassala	town and state in eastern Sudan
Kassarguba	age group in the <i>xelta</i> system in northwest Konso
Katala	age group in the <i>xelta</i> system in northwest Konso
Kerdita	Konso clan
Kishu	Konso month name
Koira	ethnic group in south Ethiopia
Kolmi	town; was formerly the <i>fora</i> of Fasha, a branch of the Konso and name of a district
Konso	ethnic group in southern Ethiopia
Kordofan	former province of central Sudan
Kormale	village near Abba Roba
Kuile	a village located around the hill of Bammalle
Kundjara	a village which is a pure pottery settlement
Lamitta	man and informant from Buso
Languira	mountain where Djarso lives; located in the north of Baya
Lehaidi	a village in the east of Konso land where Kallala lives
Liben	a place in Somali region, where the Borana come from
Lila	head of the <i>xauda</i> in Mattara
Loxoba	first man of Basanta
Lukama	deputy in charge of matters concerning the Amhara, such as the collection of taxes, etc. and member of the weaver caste
Maale	ethnic group in south Ethiopia
Macala	a village; not represented in the <i>xelta</i> festival with other northeast Konso
Magaula	age group in the <i>xelta</i> system in southeast Konso
Mahaleta	Konso clan
Masai	ethnic group in Kenya and Tanzania

Mattara	village in northwest Konso
Melgussa	third division of <i>xelta</i> classes in southwestern Konso
Molle	the <i>abba mora</i> of Mattara
Murranno	Konso month name
Nagule	a village; not represented in the <i>xelta</i> festival with other northeast Konso
Nuba	ethnic group in central Sudan
Oiba	Konso month name
Oibatale	a part of the village Idigle
Olanta	Konso village
Olasha	Faraita in Tishmale
Olindala	Konso month name
Olxo Lasha	Konso month name
Ondjalo	epic first weaver
Oraila	age group in the <i>xelta</i> system in northwest Konso
Orgeta	son of Kalebaha and founder of Tigisseita
Orkasaq	age group in the <i>xelta</i> system in Konso
Orkasha	age group in the <i>xelta</i> system in southeast Konso
Ormasha	age group in the <i>xelta</i> system in Konso
Oroda	small hordes of hunters who lived among the Konso until the arrival of the Amhara
Oromo	ethnic group in Ethiopia
Orshada	class in the <i>xelta</i> system in northeast and southwest Konso and in Fasha
Orshitta	Orshada in southeast Konso
Ototomali	founder of Argamaida and son of Kalebaha
Pangwe	earlier term for the Fang, an ethnic group in Cameroon
Pelalo	Konso month name
Qabela	age group in the <i>xelta</i> system in northwest Konso
Qolulu	class in the <i>xelta</i> system in northeast Konso
Qufa	leader of the southern Konso district, counterpart of Kalla
Roba	eldest son of Abba Roba
Sagale	a village; not represented in the <i>xelta</i> festival with other northeast Konso
Sagan	river, which borders the Konso territory and a valley
Sagano Gamma	Konso month name
Saganota	sub-clan of Kerdita
Sandawe	ethnic group in central Tanzania
Saudata	Konso clan, which has totemistic relationships with monkey, elephant and locust
Sawkame	a village which is a pure pottery settlement
Shake	<i>abba mora</i> at the time of research

Shirido	<i>grazmach</i> , local village chief
Shola	<i>grazmach</i> in Mattara and the older brother of Lukama
Sesaysha	Konso month name
Sheik Hussein	religious order
Shirido	the <i>poqalla</i> of Darra village at the time of research
Shoa-Oromo	a branch of the Oromo people
Sidama	ethnic group in south Ethiopia
Somali	ethnic group in east Ethiopia, north Kenya and Somalia
Tadessa	<i>fitaurari</i> and the governor of Konso appointed by the Amhara
Teltele	small town in Borana
Tigisseita	Konso clan
Tishmale	a village in northwest Konso
Tola	Konso month name
Tsamako	ethnic group in south Ethiopia
Tulai	Konso name for the Woito River
Turufa	age group in the <i>xelta</i> system in northwest Konso
Wando	head of the branch of the Dogomalita clan that lives in Gamole
Wayyoo	endogamous group of hunters living among the Borana
Woito	river which borders the Konso territory
Wolaita	ethnic group in south Ethiopia
Xela	class in the <i>xelta</i> system in northeast and northwest Konso
Yanta	plain, located on the caravan route to Bakaule

Southern Ethiopian Studies at the Frobenius Institute
edited by Sophia Thubauville



Adolf Ellegard Jensen

The Gedeo

With a preface by Getachew Senishaw. Edited by Sophia Thubauville

In 1955, nearly twenty years after publishing *Im Lande des Gada* (*In the Land of Gada*), Jensen revisited the Gedeo of southern Ethiopia. Here, published for the first time, is the classic ethnography that Jensen wrote following that fieldwork. Divided into chapters on the country and its people, social life, the age groups and the dual division, the political order, and religious and spiritual life, and illustrated with 33 historical photographs from the archives of the Frobenius Institute, the book includes a preface and introduction by Getachew Senishaw.

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