



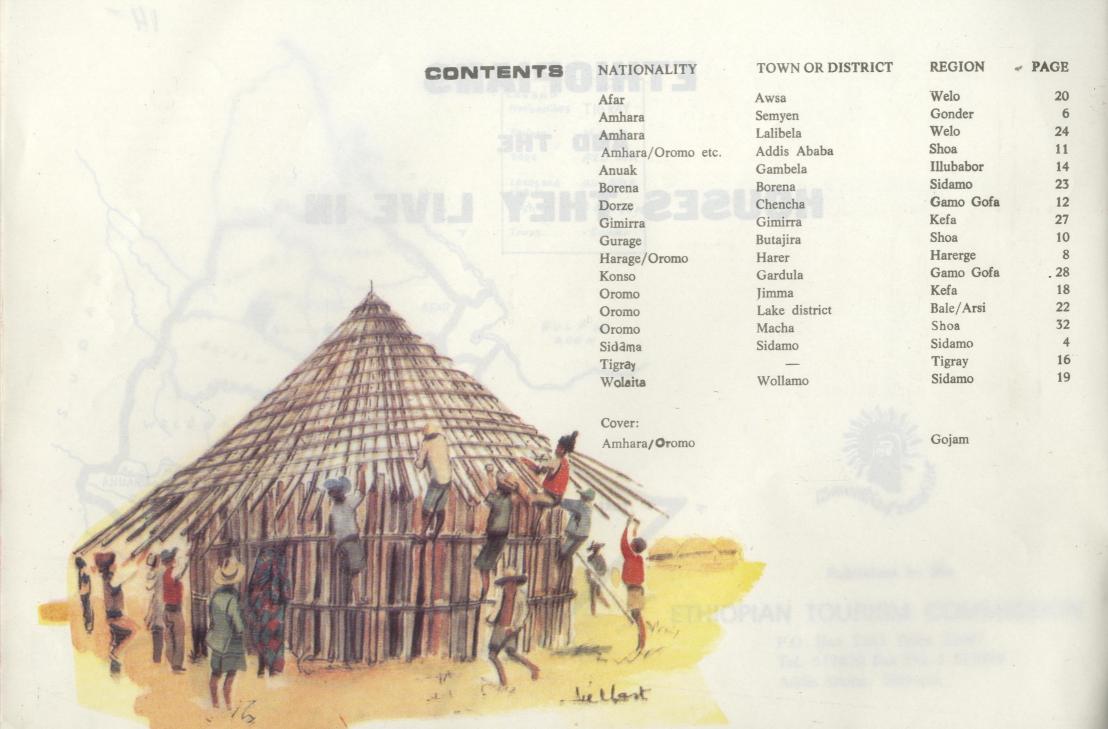
ETHIOPIANS

AND THE

HOUSES THEY LIVE IN

text and illustrations

JILL LAST



INTRODUCTION

to buy trucks, etc. They learned

Ethiopia is not only large in area, about the size of France, Germany and Spain combined, its altitudinal range is from a hundred metres below sea level—one of the hottest spots on earth—to over four and a half thousand, the summit of Africa's fourth highest mountain. This altitude range is divided into three zones: daga, woina daga, and kolla, corresponding to highlands, midlands and lowlands.

The highlands are mainly inhabited by Christian people who, with teams of oxen, plough the stony hillsides in the north and the richer arable valleys and plateaulands in the northwest. The population is not dense and the settlements tend to be scattered all over the landscape. Vast, deep gorges separate one plateau area from another, causing considerable social isolation to the Tigray and Amhara people who live here. Here is where t'eff is grown—the cereal most favoured by the highlanders. The keeping of cattle is secondary to these farmers.

Dropping from the 2,500 - 3,500 metre daga, we find very different cultural modes. At 1,500 - 2,500 metres lie the 'horticultural' areas, where the language base is often Cushitic as opposed to the northern Semitic (Gurage is the exception). This is the ensete area—one of the few plant cultures in East Africa—rolling green country with bamboo and acacia stands, homesteads clustering together, and well-tended and manured smallholdings. Here the land is extremely fertile and the population density is very high. Ancient methods of land allocation have for the most part prevented individual exploitation. This is the country of the Dorze, the Gurage and the Sidama. Some cattle are kept but are secondary to the main occupation.

Lower still, is the area of the pastoralists—the true cattle people. This is grass savanna and desert, and about twenty percent of the people who live here are nomadic or seminomadic. Vast areas of otherwise unproductive wastelands are ranged by the herding cultures; peoples like the Arsi,

the Borena, the Afar, the Somali or the Nuer, to whom cattle are the source of power, prestige and security. These people are mainly Moslem and have been for several centuries, and their political structure has of necessity been based on bond friendship ties. The so-called 'pure' pastoralists who inhabit the inhospitable desert country of the Afar Triangle herd mainly camels and goats and subsist almost exclusively on a diet of milk, butter and meat. In a slightly less harsh environment you find the mixed cultivators, herding cattle and camels but also growing sugar and cotton crops. These are the Konso, the Harer Kottu, and the Anuak of Gambela, etc.

These are broad sweeping categories, intended only to give a general picture of the extraordinary diversity of the land and its peoples. There are in fact an astonishing eighty-three languages and two hundred dialects spoken by Ethiopians. Each group tends to have some slight cultural difference even from its nearest neighbours. Their customs, and indeed their whole manner of living, their homes and their diet have evolved over the generations, using local materials to advantage and trading to acquire occasional 'imported' goods. The people have prevailed, in spite of periodic famine, war and disease, and are now preparing to take a massive step forward in the time scale and adapt to 20th century technology.

It is vital to remember and understand the past, to take into consideration present cultural modes in order to transfer traditional goals and methods to modern concepts without destroying useful values, confidence and individuality. "Tribalism" per se must constitute a threat to development, but tolerance for ethnic differences, and the respect of one group for another with different customs, helps people to adapt to necessary changes and accept the idea that a part of their autonomy must be sacrificed to the building of the nation as a whole. Aware and proud of their differences, Ethiopia's people can work together towards a better life in the future.

SIDAMA



Sidamo Region, stretching from Lake Abaya to Lake Awassa, is in the deep south and the name instantly conjures up a picture of green coffee-growing country. The huge shady forest trees dense on the mountain slopes, and the brighter green of the ubiquitous ensete plant which surrounds every smallholding, fades gradually to the brown and sand of semi-desert near the Kenya border. Ensete actually exists as a wild plant throughout tropical Africa but the sixty-eight cultivated varieties grow exclusively in Ethiopia. Ensete is a root tuber, the same sort of thing as a yam, and gives a higher and more dependable yield than any other crop, in addition to the edible root from which the bread is made, the leaf, fibre and bark each has its uses. The people who cultivate it have developed a character for meticulousness, hard work and cooperation with each other.

The Sidama are divided into six groups and countless subgroups with sufficient confusion among the various names to baffle even the most erudite of scholars. However, the need for cooperation in achieving a goal is well-understood, and most of them inherit an intuition of the survival value of working together (even if they do not go as far as the Borena, who never fight or argue among themselves). The men build the huts and grow vegetables with the wives' help, and the women market and clean and cook.

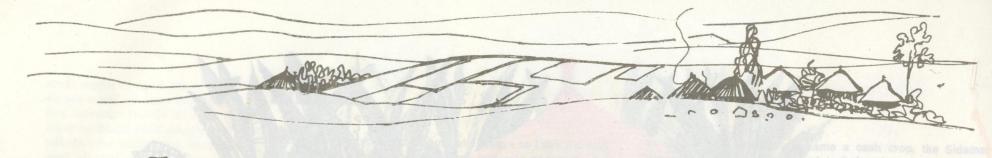
The Sidama provide a perfect example of the transition from tribal and semi-peasant systems to more inclusive national and economic ones. It was, in fact, coffee which changed things. After Menilik's conquest in 1893, he divided the land between his officers and soldiers, virtually reducing the people to serfs. They suffered from corrupt local administrators and the worst kind of absentee landlordism. But,

as wild coffee gradually became a cash crop, the Sidama moved out of their traditional isolation into the marketing system which is a part of the national infrastructure. They formed their now well-known associations — the very first one formed was actually for building their beautiful bamboo woven houses, and the system was only later used for eliminating the profit-making middlemen from the coffee trade. The Sidama organized themselves, each member investing the share of capital needed to buy trucks, etc. They learned marketing, borrowing and book-keeping, and cooperation with the central government. Through their own efforts they now play a major role in Ethiopia's coffee export trade.

A fascinating people, they are nominally Christian, but some of the old pagan practices linger on; a belief in the Eye and Sacred Trees. Pythons are supposed to be a reincarnation and are kept in the houses and fed on meat. Their reputation as house guards is quite considerable. The people wear cotton these days, only boys and the very poor still wear skins, and the charming Sidamo brimmed fur hat which can also be used to drink from. Women complete their ensemble with copper bracelets and earrings, the man a copper collar.

As for their houses — the beehive-shaped *tukul* is known as the 'Ethiopian house' in many parts of the world, having been constructed by Sidama workmen on site at the Canada Expo, the IATA Conference in Athens and the Japan Expo, where it was admired by visitors from all parts of the world. Bamboo is the material used for the framework and is covered with grass and ensete leaves as the rainy season approaches. A small front porch shades the entrance. Inside, the family have the right side and the calves the left. Furniture is simple wooden bedsteads and stools. Near the main hut, a fence of woven bamboo or euphorbia surrounds the vegetable plot.







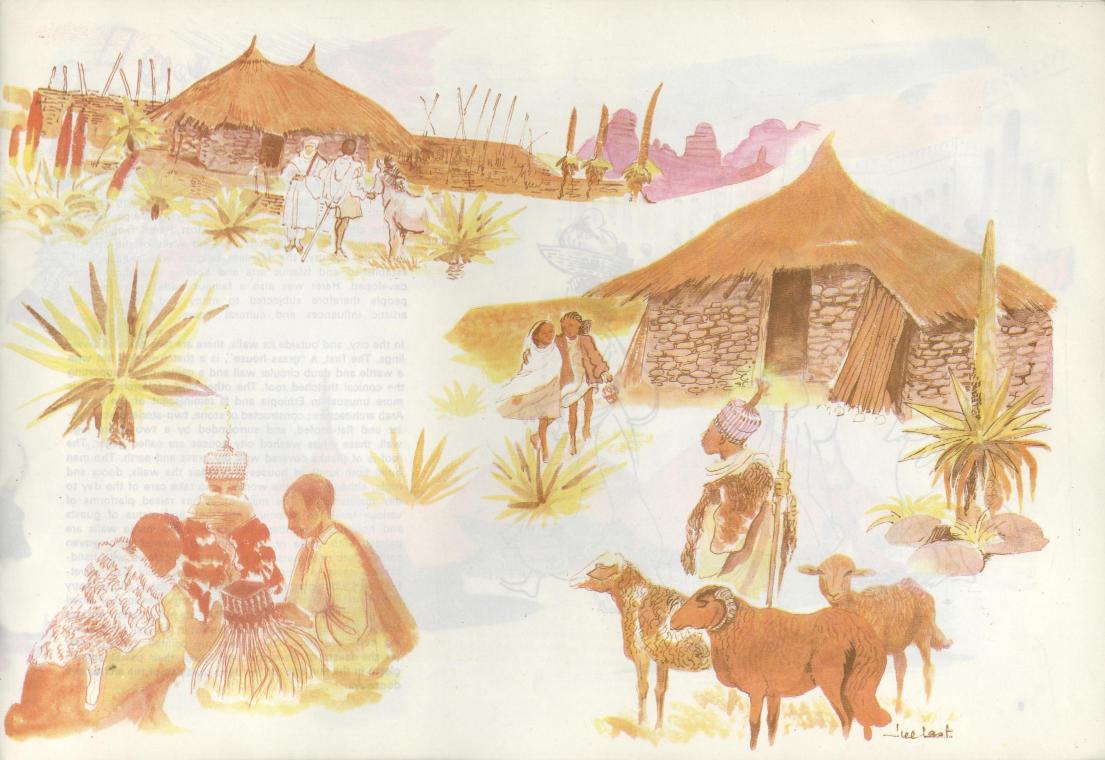
AMHARA

Although Ethiopia lies near the equator, its plateaulands are high. And although the sun blazes through the rarer atmosphere, the air is nippy. At night or on a cloudy day it is positively cold. The highlanders who spend their lives farming these chilly heights wear wooly hats, and heavy wool rugs under their sheepskin capes. The traditional economy is one of mixed agriculture, but with animal husbandry taking second place to crop production. The people do virtually no handicrafts; there is a minimal manuring of fields, dung being used as fuel; but irrigation and terracing of the steep slopes are widely used.

Despite the drawbacks of their dramatic mountainous terrain, they manage to make a living from the fertile soil of the plateau valleys, while their sheep graze the thyme-scented high moorland grasses. Long known as 'Abyssinians.' the Amhara of the highlands speak Amharic and practise the Christian faith, evidenced in numerous small round scattered churches, whose olive and cedar groves dot the immensity of the plateau. Barley and oats are the high altitude crops, with t'eff (the preferred staple) a little lower down. Agriculture and the demand for building timber long ago cleared areas which were once forested. Eucalyptus plantations are now replacing some of the old forest. There are few true

villages; market towns and regional capitals constitute what urban element there is, and the rest of the populace live in scattered settlements half a mile or so apart. Ten to fifty of these homesteads make up a hamlet.

The houses themselves are simple enough. Consisting of a circular wall of thin poles stuck in the ground, with cross withies laced to them, and then plastered with a mixture of mud, dung and t'eff straw (chicka) which is applied in lavers. When it hardens, it provides a weather proof barrier which lasts, with a little patching after the rains, for many years. The conical roof is supported by four or five poles, commonly eucalyptus. Many houses are stone-built, specially in the mountains. There are small storage areas for cooking utensils. and the main area serves as sleeping and living quarters. Most of them are thatched and these 'sar bets.' for extra warmth, are quite small but nonetheless manage to accommodate quite a few people: the farmer, his wife and unmarried children, and for a short time even married children until they have their own house. There are no windows or chimneys, the smoke escapes through the thatch drifting up on the breeze into the clear blue of the sky. As incomes rise, the tendency is for 'sar bets' to be replaced by rectangular 'corcoro bets' with tin roofs.





HARER

The group of people which founded the city of Harer is described as an "indigenous urban complex", and is apparently without parallel. Though the neighbouring Oromos call them Adari, the people call themselves Hararge, "people of the city" (Ge meaning 'city'). Most Hareri families still live within the five-hundred year old walls of the city. In the 15th century, the Moslem religion was already well-established and Islamic arts and Koranic education highly developed. Harer was also a famous trade centre, and its people therefore subjected to many and varied outside artistic influences and cultural mores.

In the city, and outside its walls, there are two types of dwellings. The first, a "grass-house", is a thatch-roofed hut with a wattle and daub circular wall and a centre pillar supporting the conical thatched roof. The other kind of Hareri house is more unusual in Ethiopia and is reminiscent of the coastal Arab architecture: constructed of stone, two-storied, rectangular and flat-roofed, and surrounded by a two metre high wall, these white-washed city houses are called gegar. The roof is of planks covered with dry grass and earth. The men build both kinds of houses and repair the walls, doors and roofs, although it is the women who take care of the day to day maintenance. The main room has raised platforms of various levels to determine the rank and status of guests and household members. In this area the inside walls are painted with ochre or red earth and covered with woven cotton cloth or carpets and elaborately decorated with handcrafted items, a fitting backdrop to the gaily clad velvettrousered women who make them. Bowls, dishes and basketry are hung in stylized fashion: the large ceremonial bowl is at the top of the front wall, beneath are hung 'lemat' baskets and so on. About eleven niches are set in the wall for displaying cups and pots. The houses are painted twice a year for the feasts of Ramadan and Arafa, their pastel colours gleam in the sun against the deep shadows of the arches and doorways.



GURAGE

The Gurage people occupy the southernmost areas of the central plateau, mainly beautiful semi-mountainous country, with highland forest and green valleys and plains where the Ghibie and Gogeb rivers flow. They live in small densely-settled villages, and cultivate the ensete as their main subsistence crop, and their entire lives revolve round its annual cycle. They are basically Sidamo stock but were intermingled from time to time with Semitic peoples from the north, and intermarriage produced today's Gurages.

Their society is one in which there is little specialization by class or sex in the performance of everyday tasks and no stigma is attached to any kind of work, though the hunters and artisans belong to a separate group which has for a long time been associated with the Gurage. Generally known as watta, or by the Gurage themselves, as fuga, these people have adopted Gurage language and customs not only as gobetweens to the spiritual world, but as technicians and house builders. It is they who construct the akbs, the centre mainstay of the house, and skillfully fit together the rafters and beams.

The houses are circular, with beautifully thatched steep roofs generally with a pot at the apex. Each stands in its own immaculately clean compound: a dirty one is described as being "like that of a dead man, idleness is a sin, work is the key to success, failure to improve one's land is purely bad farming and can by no means be blamed on the spirits. The manual skills of the Gurage, their gift for organization and their adaptability have long since been recognized and stand them in good stead as modernization supplants some of the traditional ways of life.

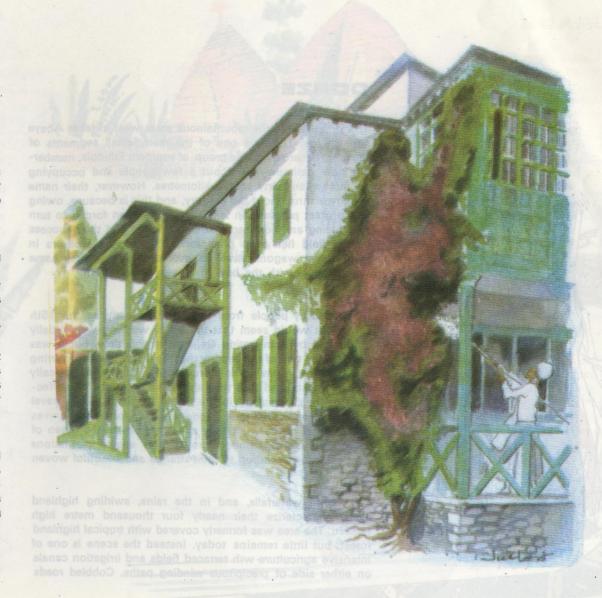


ADDIS ABABA

Addis Ababa is a city which, despite its comparative youth, (est. 1887) boasts an extraordinarily wide range of architectural styles, influenced by the numerous foreign nationals Indians, Arabs and craftsmen from Aden, who have resided here from time to time. Greek masons and Italian engineers and architects came later; a German was responsible for some of the heavier dark stone utility buildings; and the French made buildings with plenty of factory-cast iron decoration) like the splendid Addis Ababa railway station.

What is loosely known as "Addis Ababa style" was developing towards the turn of the century. The Ethiopian aristocracy, including the emperor Menilik himself, tended to go in for combined houses and reception halls — rooms sometimes large enough to seat some thousands of guests. The dwelling houses themselves leaned towards the fanciful, with heavy masonry on the ground floor topped with a froth of glass and carved wooden balconies on the upper story. The first sawmill was operated by a Swiss, which is why the verandahs richly decorated in fretwork seem reminiscent of a Swiss chalet. Fanciful roof shapes in thatch or 'corcoro' (the latter available after 1904 when the railway reached Dire Dawa) completed the fairy tale image.

Since then, modern apartment and office blocks have altered the skyline considerably. Hundreds of western-style villas are tucked in to tree-lined gardens—modern comfort, yes—but these newer buildings do not merit the label "Addis Ababa style" and examples of the older houses are being preserved and restored for posterity.





DORZE

The Dorze live in the mountainous areas west of lakes Abaya and Chamo. They are one of the many small segments of the great Ometo language group of southern Ethiopia, numbering now perhaps only about a few people and occupying no more than thirty square kilometres. However, their name is known throughout the country, and this is because, owing to the great pressure on land, they have been forced to turn to weaving and commerce to earn a living and their success in this field has been phenomenal. Wandering weavers in mule-drawn wagons travel all over the country, their name synonymous with the best in woven cotton cloth.

Dominated by people from the north as early as the 15th century, it would seem that the art of weaving was initially introduced by immigrating Gojjamis at this time, but it was not until the turn of the century that the Dorze gave up warring and turned to weaving as a way of life. They were basically agriculturalists, and thus they always retain a touching affection for their homeland in the Gamu highlands. They travel widely to marker with their goods and even form communities in the larger centres, but they always return to the green of the barley fields, bamboo groves and ensete plantations which are the backdrop to their strange and beautiful woven houses,

Rivers and waterfalls, and in the rains, swirling highland mists, characterize their nearly four thousand metre high plateau. The area was formerly covered with tropical highland forest, but little remains today. Instead the scene is one of intensive agriculture with terraced fields and irrigation canals on either side of precipitous winding paths. Cobbled roads

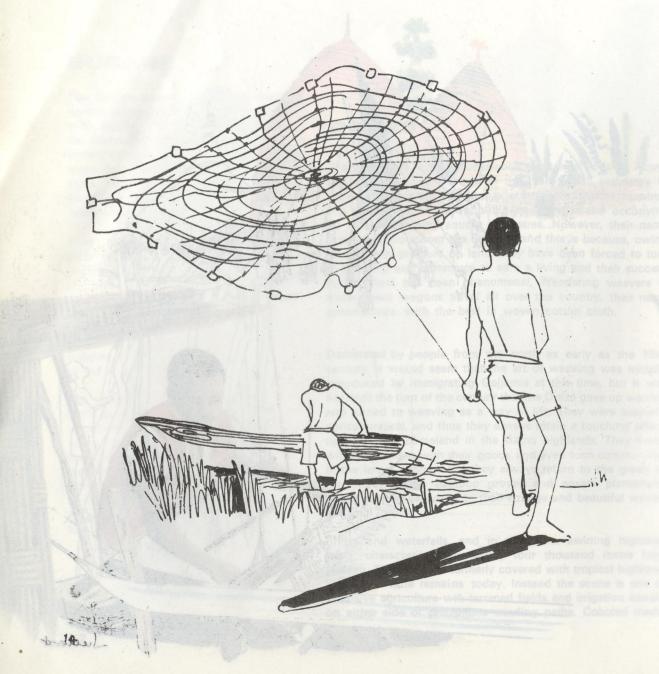
and megalithic meeting places complete the picture. Land is so scarce that the fields must be heavily manured with dung and tree leaves and the crops rotated each year.

Each house has its own small garden surrounded by ensete, beds of spices and cabbage, and tobacco (for the Dorze are passionate smokers.) The main house is a tall (up to five metres) bee-hive snaped building with an aristocratic 'nose' which, furnished with two benches, forms a reception room for guests. To enter it is to "experience a special sense of ease and pleasure". It is built by a skilled and experienced carpenter. The bamboo is cut (but only on moonlit nights) and split. The harder uprights are put with convex and concave surfaces alternately to give greater flexibility at the top; the weft splints always face with the silican shiny surface outwards which gives the glinting texture.

Scaffolding is erected in the form of platforms made of poles stuck through the house, forming a handy ladder on the outside. Thatching is done with slate-shaped bamboo leaves with grass on top, and a jolly final topknot of bamboo string.

When a Dorze house starts to rot or gets eaten by termites, the house is dug up. Bamboo is sewn round it to keep it in shape, and everyone rushes to help carry it: with poles poked horizontally through it, and the women with their backs against the wall grasping the lower edges, and the children holding poles to prevent it toppling, and everybody cheerfully singing, it is taken to its new site—a little less tall than before. A house lasts for about forty years and is then abandonned—lying as a stark memorial to the life that it sheltered until the rains and the earth consume it.



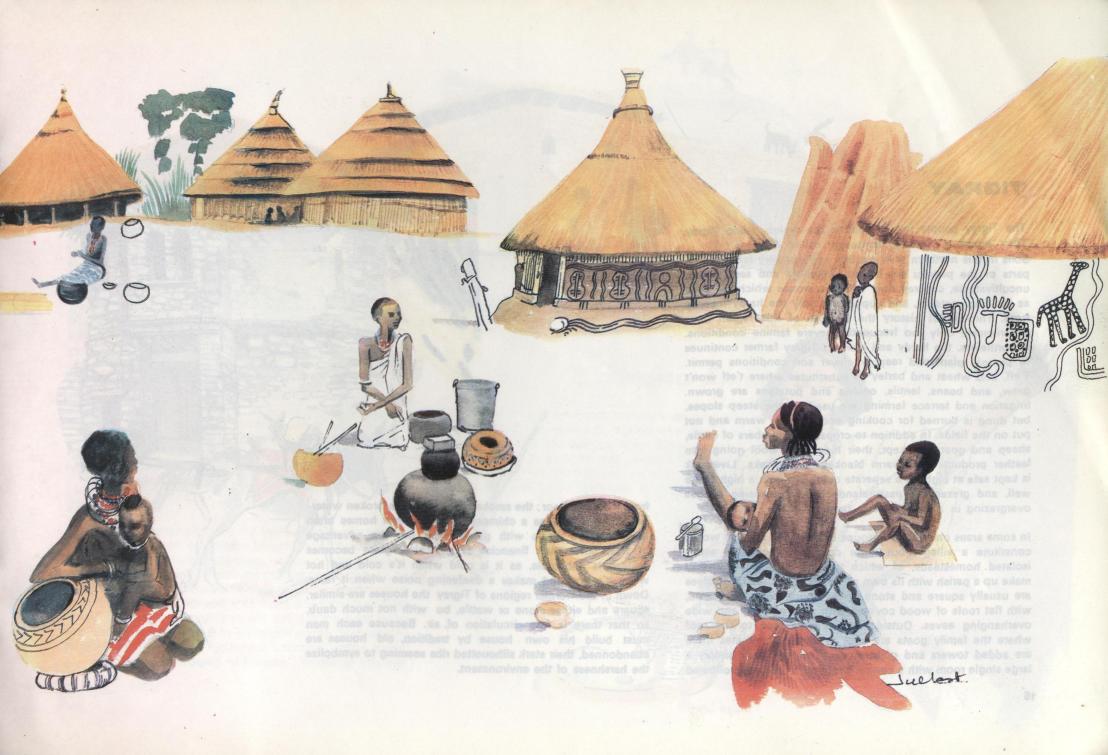


ANUAK

In south-western Ethiopia, on the border of Sudan, the land is flat and dissected by numerous rivers and streams, the greatest of which is the Baro. The Anuak people, numbering about five thousand, who live here in one to two thousand separate villages, classify their land in three ways: bap. flat treeless cotton soil alternating between flood and drought: rup, the true savanna with acacia woodland; and lul, broad leaved shady forest. There are no villages in bap country. The people all live close to the forest and river, moving to drier sites when the river floods. Long-horned cattle are kept on the grasslands, away from the river and forest because of tsetse. The Anuak in any case, are not really "cattle people". they talk of themselves as "bead people". Beads are a sign of wealth and are worn in profusion. Decoration is a part of life, pots and calabashes are covered with encised designs. and even some of the house walls carry bold murals. The Anuak are assiduous gardeners, growing millet, maize and tobacco. The shy Masengo peoples live in association with them and are the hunters and gatherers.

The Anuak traditionally install a headman, usually a rich man who, from the time of his election, is kept under constant pressure to part with his wealth, until finally he gives away all that he has. Obviously a democratic people, they still love the ceremonial beating of drums, the pomp and processions attendant on a ruler. However, this does not mean to say that they obey him unless they have a mind to. The saying goes: "Among the Anuak the tail wags the dog".

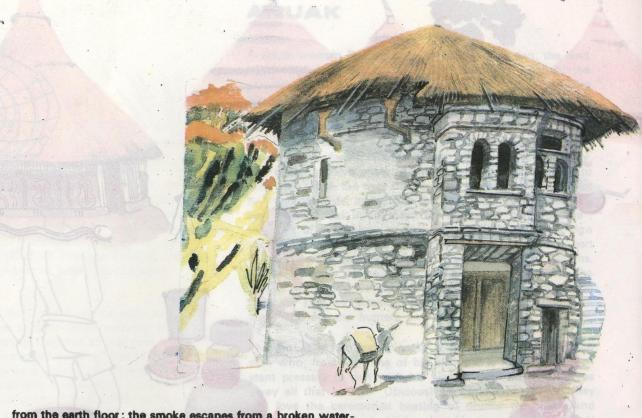
Villages, no longer stockaded as in the old days, have spacious immaculately clean yards, where pounding of grain and brewing of liquor takes place. The round thatched houses often have many-tiered roofs for better protection against tropical downpours and blazing sun. Doorways are little and and low as the houses are used mainly for sleeping, all other activities taking place out of doors.



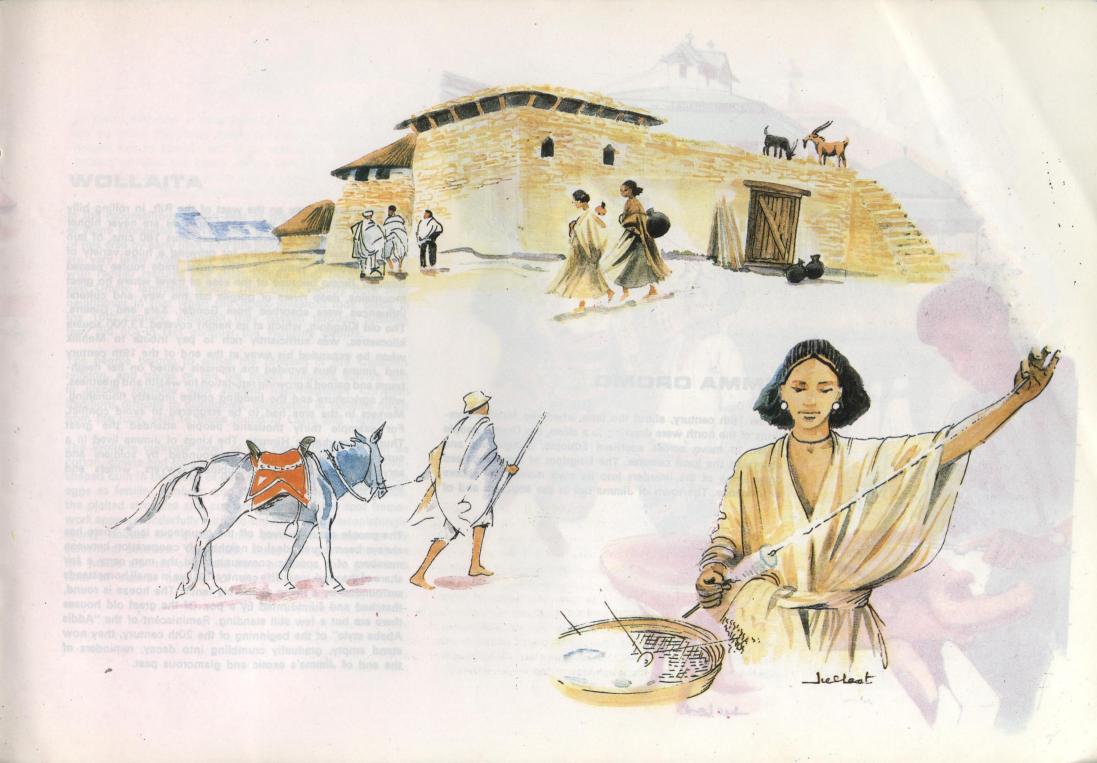
TIGRAY

The Tigray people inhabit mainly the region called Tigray. They speak a Semitic language called Tigrigna. Soils in this northern area are thin and not very fertile; large parts of the plateau are barren, waterless and semi-desert, uncultivatable, covered only with the stones which are used as building material, and supporting only the hardy incense trees. Throughout history the peoples of this region have experienced, only too frequently, severe famine conditions. Nevertheless, the hardy and resilient Tigray farmer continues to plough, plant and reap wherever soil conditions permit. T'eff, and wheat and barley as substitutes where t'eff won't grow, and beans, lentils, onions and potatoes are grown. Irrigation and terrace farming are used on the steep slopes, but dung is burned for cooking and keeping warm and not put on the fields. In addition to crops, vast numbers of cattle, sheep and goats are kept, their hides and wool going into leather products and warm blankets and cloaks. Livestock is kept safe at night in a separate courtyard with a high stone wall, and grazes the pasturelands by day, causing serious overgrazing in a land already barren.

In some areas one can see groups of buildings such as would constitute a village, but more commonly scattered semi-isolated homesteads, of which two or three hundred may make up a parish with its own church. The houses themselves are usually square and stone built, though some are round, with flat roofs of wood covered with sods of earth and wide overhanging eaves. Outside, stone steps lead to the roof where the family goats are kept at night. Sometimes there are added towers and grain stores. The interior is simply a large single room with a central post and a fireplace hollowed



from the earth floor; the smoke escapes from a broken waterpot which serves as a chimney. More modern homes often have 'corcoro' roofs with gable ends, but the advantage of this, other than financial as thatching grass becomes scarcer, is debatable, as it is cold when it's cold and hot when it's hot, and makes a deafening noise when it rains. Down in the warmer regions of Tigray the houses are similar, square and either stone or wattle, bu with not much daub, so that there is free circulation of air. Because each man must build his own house by tradition, old houses are abandonned, their stark silhouetted ribs seeming to symbolize the harshness of the environment.





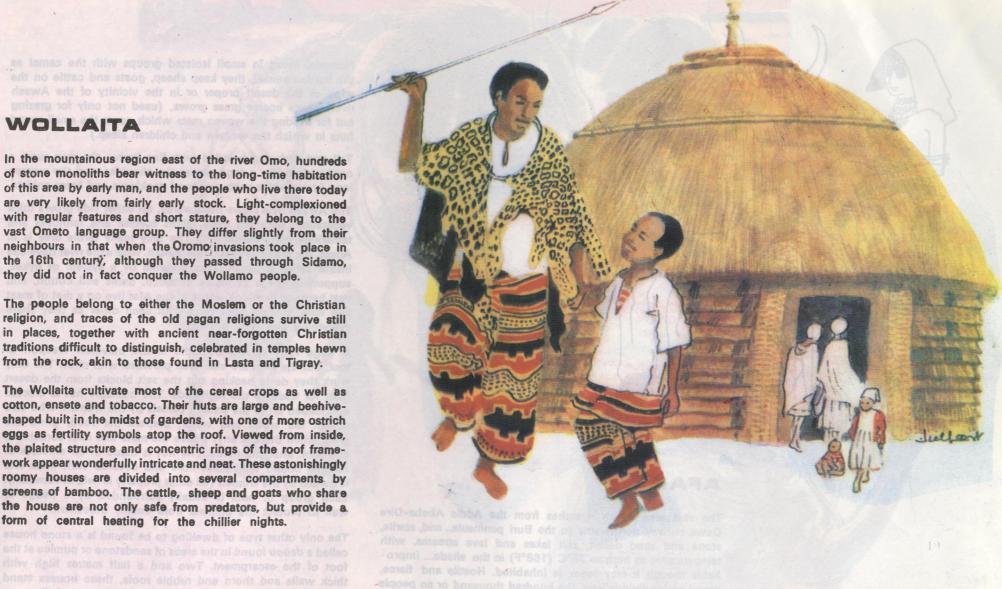
the Ethiopian plateau on the west of the Rift, in rolling hilly country (woina daga) where temperatures are never higher that 85° and there is never any frost, plus 160 cms. of rain a year - marvellous country for growing a huge variety of grains, legumes, yams, etc. The great trade routes passed through Jimma because of the ease of travel where no great mountains, deep rivers or gorges bar the way, and cultural influences were absorbed from Gonder, Kefa and Gimirra. The old Kingdom, which at its height covered 13,000 square kilometres, was sufficiently rich to pay tribute to Menilik when he expanded his sway at the end of the 19th century and Jimma thus avoided the reprisals visited on her neighbours and gained a growing reputation for wealth and greatness. with agriculture and the budding coffee industry flourishing. Markets in the area had to be staggered to avoid conflict. For example thirty thousand people attended the great Thursday market at Hirmata. The kings of Jimma lived in a sumptuous palace at Jiren, surrounded by soldiers and servants, eunuchs and concubines, lawvers, writers and musicians.

The people naturally lived off the bounteous land. There has always been a great deal of neighbourly cooperation between members of a specific community and the men carry a fair share of the work load. The country folk live in small homesteads surrounded by a living euphorbia fence. The house is round, thatched and surmounted by a pot. Of the great old houses there are but a few still standing. Reminiscent of the "Addis Ababa style" of the beginning of the 20th century, they now stand empty, gradually crumbling into decay, reminders of the end of Jimma's exotic and glamorous past.

In the mountainous region east of the river Omo, hundreds of stone monoliths bear witness to the long-time habitation of this area by early man, and the people who live there today are very likely from fairly early stock. Light-complexioned with regular features and short stature, they belong to the vast Ometo language group. They differ slightly from their neighbours in that when the Oromo invasions took place in the 16th century, although they passed through Sidamo. they did not in fact conquer the Wollamo people.

The people belong to either the Moslem or the Christian religion, and traces of the old pagan religions survive still in places, together with ancient near-forgotten Christian traditions difficult to distinguish, celebrated in temples hewn from the rock, akin to those found in Lasta and Tigray.

The Wollaita cultivate most of the cereal crops as well as cotton, ensete and tobacco. Their huts are large and beehiveshaped built in the midst of gardens, with one of more ostrich eggs as fertility symbols atop the roof. Viewed from inside. the plaited structure and concentric rings of the roof framework appear wonderfully intricate and neat. These astonishingly roomy houses are divided into several compartments by screens of bamboo. The cattle, sheep and goats who share the house are not only safe from predators, but provide a form of central heating for the chillier nights.





AFAR

The vast area which stretches from the Addis Ababa-Dire Dawa railway nerthwards to the Buri peninsula, arid, sterile, stone and sand desert, salt lakes and lava streams, with temperatures as high as 75°C (168°F) in the shade... improbable though it may seem, is inhabited. Hostile and fierce, proud and individualistic, the hundred thousand or so people who wrest a living from this challenging and inhospitable wilderness are the Afar (sometimes called the Danakil).

Nomads, living in small isolated groups with the camel as the burden animal, they keep sheep, goats and cattle on the edge of the desert proper or in the vicinity of the Awash river, where coarse grass grows, (used not only for grazing but for making the woven mats which cover the small round huts in which the women and children sleep.)

Tall and dark and bearded with fine limbs, the men wear a cotton cloth like a toga across the shoulder, and the women long brown skirts with gay bead necklaces and brass anklets.

The Awash river flows northwards, on either side grows thick vegetation, with tall trees, giant acacias and mimosas and tamarinds thirty metres tall. The only really fertile area is in Aussa, the previous seat of the Sultan, where the river develops into a series of small lakes irrigated by a system of dykes, supporting crops of maize, tobacco, dates and cotton, and vast herds of livestock. Most of the Afar live on a diet of meat and milk, sharing their food with each other as they share everything else they possess.

A huge forty centimetre knife is the universal weapon or tool, but the men are also well provided with rifles. The only work they do is hacking out the salt blocks from the desert floor for trade to the highlands. The nomadic hut is erected and loaded on to the patient camels by the women, who also collect the wood and water, prepare the food, grind the grain when there is any, weave the mats and milk containers, and look after the herds. The hut is made of an armiture of boughs bound with palm fibre and covered with mats and is owned by the woman (all other property is held in common). Each group of huts is usually surrounded by a hedge or wall to protect the animals from enemy tribesmen.

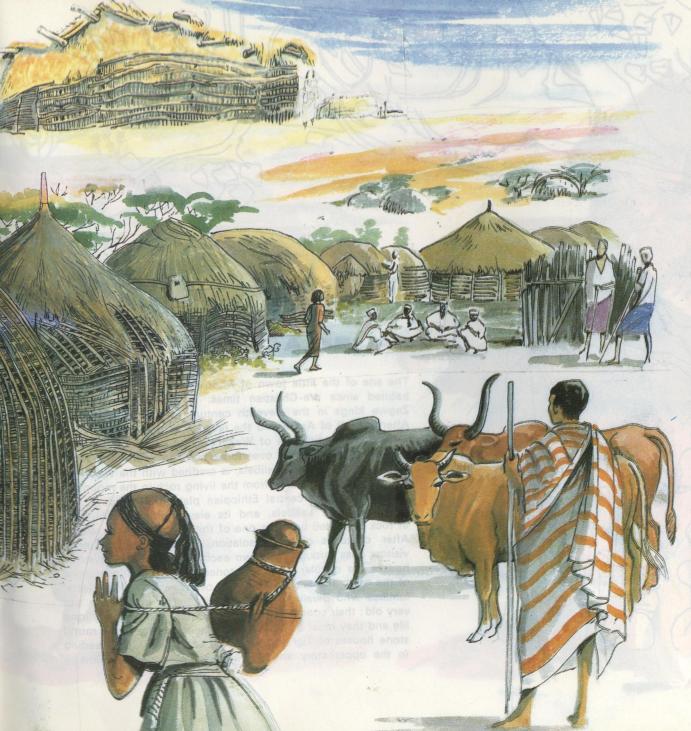
The only other type of dwelling to be found is a stone house called a dabou found in the areas of sandstone or pumice at the foot of the escarpment. Two and a half metres high with thick walls and thorn and rubble roofs, these houses stand empty, like sentinels in the landscape, when the tribesmen move out to the far grazing.





a man's life is divided into age sets of a given number of years, sons normally following their fathers two sets behind. The group is governed by men in the third set aged 16 — 24 years who hand over power after eight years. The people vary quite a lot in physical type, some being brown and others more copper-coloured, but on the whole they tend to be tall and rather handsome. The men wear the typical Ethiopian white toga called a waya, and the women often still wear leather, decorating the skins with embroidered beadwork, and wear lavish bead, copper and heavy brass jewellery.

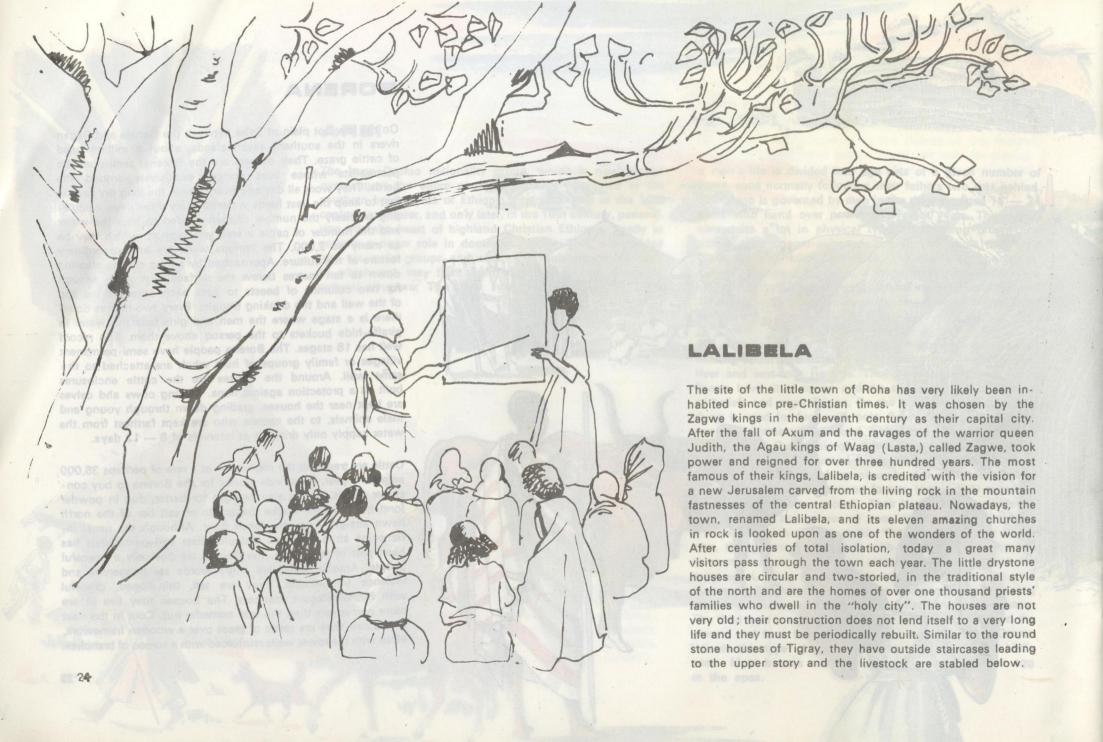
The Arsi Oromo are one of the most southern groups, extending south into Bale on both sides of the Wabi Shebelle river and east into Harerge. They are true herdsmen. Their beasts have ritual status and are surrounded by all manner of beliefs and superstitions. On the more practical side, cow dung is used for fuel, milk pots, floors, walls: and the diet consists of meat, milk, blood, butter and cheese as well as a basic bread. Ownership of cattle is a status symbol — a man who owns over a thousand being entitled to wear a crown. Deep in the Oromo subconscious is also an inbred love of mountains, running water and forests (particularly sycamore trees, which are often sacred). Their homes are usually found near a stream and groves of trees, "villages" consisting of a large collection of homesteads. The houses are built by the men, though the women help with the thatching. There are three main types of dwelling (mana): the first two are the more usual, being circular, with or without a verandah, and their main difference is in the shape of the roof, the one being steep and concave, and the other much flatter with an overhang. The third type is also round, but the rafters are planted in the ground and form both the walls and the roof. Other Oromo ridicule this type of hut, saying that the Arsi live in bird's nests. Most houses are finished with a pot or ostrich egg at the apex.



BORENA

On the low hot plain of Saba between the Genale and Sagan rivers in the southern savannalands, about a million head of cattle graze. Their owners are the Borena, semi-nomadic pastoralists whose lives revolve exclusively around the herds. They work all day and every day in the long dry season just to keep the vast herds watered every three days, calculating precisely the number of men needed to haul the water and the number of cattle a well will support, which may be as many as 2,500. The famous wells are an extraordinary feature of the culture. Approached by a long cutting slanting down to ten metres below the surface, just wide enough for two columns of beasts to pass each other, is the top of the well and the drinking troughs. Every two metres down there is a stage where the men and girls toss the water in giraffe-hide buckets to the person above them. The record well has 18 stages. The Borena people have semi-permanent villages or family groups of huts whih are attached to the same well. Around the houses are the cattle enclosures built as a protection against lions. Milking cows and calves are kept near the houses, grading down through young and male animals, to the camels who are kept farthest from the water supply only drinking at intervals of 8 - 12 days.

Cattle are traded in the markets — at a rate of perhaps 35,000 animals a year, to provide money for the Borena to buy consumer goods. Salt is also brought for barter, dug in powder form from craters, unlike the amole or salt bar of the north hewn straight from the desert floor. Although the usual internecine strife between agriculturalists and pastoralists has been part of their lives, the Borena are basically a peaceful people. Among themselve angry words are dangerous and violence unthinkable. They are tall, thin-lipped, graceful with formal elegant manners. The houses they live in are more permanent than the true nomadic hut. Cool in the heat of the day, they are made of grass over a wooden framework, often with the lower walls reinforced with a screen of branches.







GIMIRRA

The virtual eclipse of this ancient African culture is one of the most tragic stories in Ethiopia's long history. The Gimirra lived in semi-isolation in the heavily-forested rainy Kefa highlands. Once they were a large kingdom of industrious cultivators, known in the 15th century to the ancient world also as "great warriors and more esteemed than any of the black nations". But, from that day to the mid twentieth century they have been persecuted, sold into slavery by the thousands, tortured, mutilated and hunted down like animals in the forests, many groups suffering extinction in consequence. This is the first generation to have lived in a world free from feat.

Their name means "honey collector" or "tree climber" and they once inhabited a land rich in wildlife, cultivated fields and an abundance of honey. Thereafter little is known of them, as those who survived had forgotten their heritage. They appear to have provided a vital source of slaves for the great neighbouring kingdom of Kefa who sold them fo Europe and Arabia. Today as they climb back to life, they are gradually losing the marks of distrust branded on them by decades of brutality. They are quite musical and whistiling is one of their more cheerful pastimes. The great forests are depleted by farmers and coffee merchants, but ensete, teff, barley and millet are growing in their place, and each homestead has its characteristic elevated field-watching hut. Cattle are kept (red being the favoured colour, although speckled give more milk). Adriculture is once again widely practised bees have a special significance. Hunters take buffalo, leopard, percupine, forest hog, duiker and even elephant. The villages are strikingly picturesque. Euphorbia abyssinica used as a hedge lines the pathways and the same wood is used for the rafters of the houses, which are quite small comparatively and the entrance very low. The thatched roofs are steeper than most and have a distinctly oriental look. Perhaps the most interesting thing about them is their mural decoration, a unique remnant of their lost culture. Walls are flattened and covered with mortar, which is modeled in light relief in simple designs with the triangle motif, and coloured in orange or vermillion, charcoal and cinders.





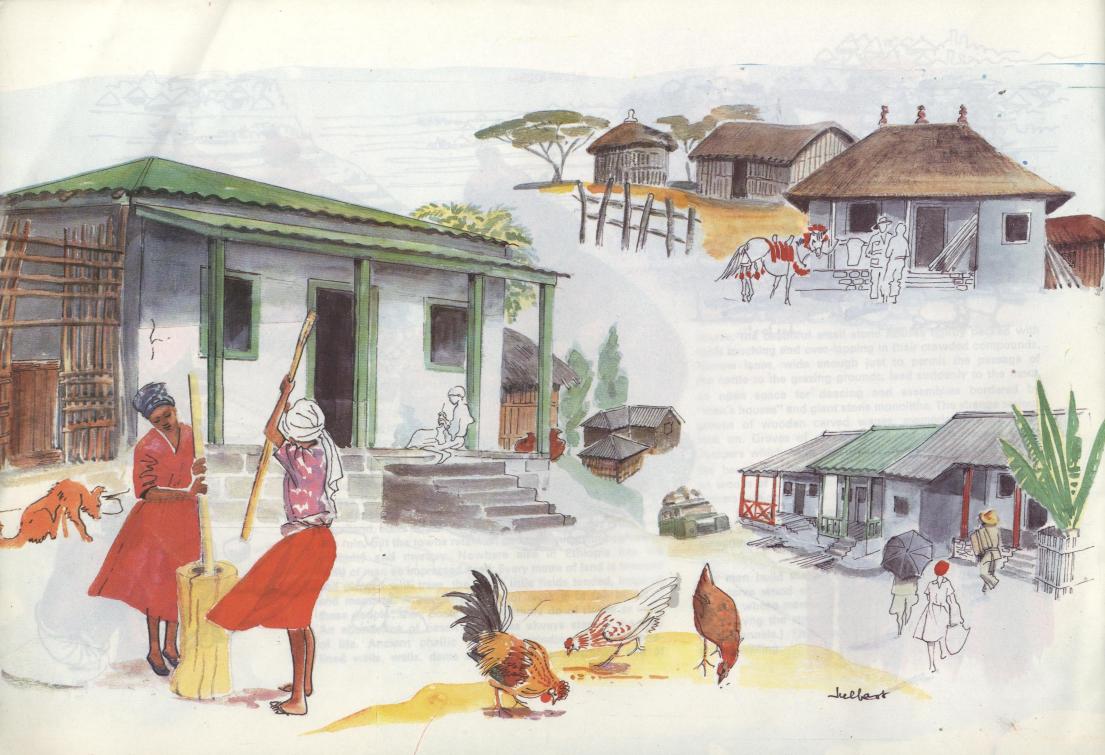
KONSO

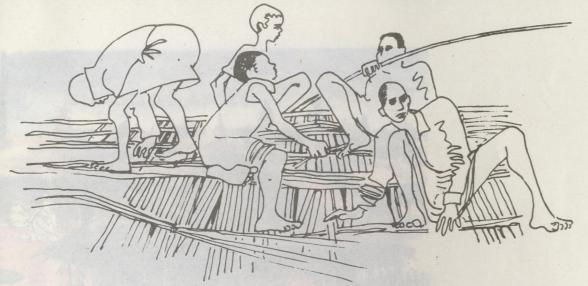
The Konso do not remember where they came from, they feel that they have always lived in their tiny hilly territory in the far southwest of Ethiopia. Their African ancestors probably arrived there about five thousand years ago bringing with them the prevalent stone culture and agricultural techniques which are still evident today. About 60,000 people are confined to a homeland of considerably less than a thousand square kilometres. Surrounded by neighbours, they tilled their fields and evolved their remarkable culture in virtual isolation. Except for trading with the Borena for salt, or cowrie shells, outside influence has virtually passed them by. They always fiercely defended their territory. Each town is walled and double-walled with stone and surrounded by dense woodland, walls now no longer needed are gradually crumbling into ruin, but the towns retain an overwhelming atmosphere of antiquity and mystery. Nowhere else in Ethiopia has the hand of man so impressed itself. Every metre of land is terraced and planted with trees, the fertile little fields tended, irrigated and manured. A passionate love of work is in the blood of these people; they boast of it as others do of riches or rank. An abundance of basalt stone has always steered the way of life. Ancient phallic emblems, grinding stones, stonelined wells, walls, dams and huge water reservoirs, and of

course, the beautiful small stone houses tightly packed with roofs touching and over-lapping in their crowded compounds. Narrow lanes, wide enough just to permit the passage of the cattle to the grazing grounds, lead suddenly to the mora, an open space for dancing and assemblies bordered by "men's houses" and giant stone monoliths. The strange serious groups of wooden carved wagas, memorials to the dead, look on. Groves of graceful trees dot the landscape, often Junipers which have ritual significance as well as providing the beams for house construction. The Konso are experts on woods of all kinds and know the durability of the massive timbers which keep a house standing for eighty years or more. Inside each house there is a short wooden entrance tunnel causing the visitor to enter on hands and knees, and permitting the occupant to decide whether it is friend or foe.

The men build the houses, and they also spin and weave, and carve wood and ivory. (There is an association called Harriya whose members cooperate in all the heavy work such as cleaning the streets, maintaining the terracing and irrigation channels.) The women do gardening and surprisingly stone walling.







Nowadays, corrugated iron is growing in favour as a roofing material as the price of thatching grass rises and skilled thatchers become harder to find. Thus, although the country-side is still dotted with the ubiquitous round "tukuls", they must gradually give way to the oblong or square house which is more practical for roofing with tin.

Occasionally, one sees brand new square thatched houses—thatch having several advantages over tin for those who can afford it. Villages on the main roads are easily accessible for deliverys of iron sheets, but the farmer in his isolated homestead may well have transport problems.

The "chika" walls of the house are made by erecting a framework of split eucalyptus poles on a stone or cement foundation. Then the roof is put on and the chika mortaris applied. It is made of a mixture of red soil, sandy clay and short t'eff straw, trodden with water in a hole in the ground. The first layer is applied on both sides and as it dries and cracks a second layer is added. A final layer containing more straw dries smooth, and provided the overhang is sufficient the chika lasts for many years without repair.



MACHA DROMO

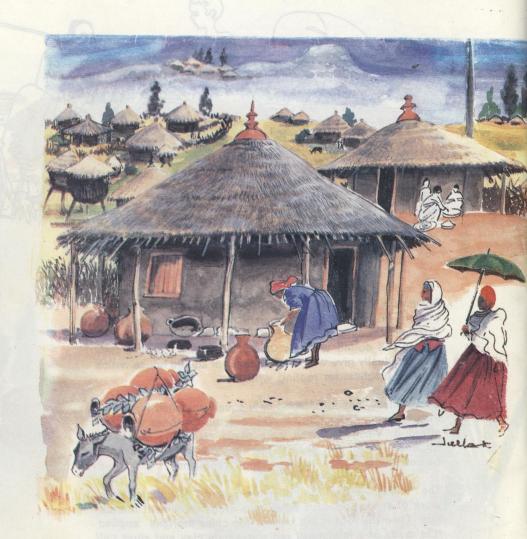
The people of the Oromo nationality have spread over a large part of southern and central Ethiopia. In Shoa, Bale, Kefa, Illubabor and almost all of Wollega, live the Macha groups, mixed agriculturalist pastoralist peoples.

Before the turn of the century, constant internecine strife was the order of the day, with each group battling each other for territory, cattle or revenge. Gradually, beginning with those who dwell west of the Gibe river the people were pacified. Those who inhabit the area between the Gibe and Didessa rivers who were virtually cut off from the central administration by vast gorges and rushing rivers have only recently changed their customs with the advent of a coffee-based economy and the rural feeder roads which go with it finally bringing them out of their cultural isolation.

The whole area is split by gorges and dissected by numerous rivers, and in consequence enjoys a great range of altitudes. In the highland dega there is plenty of rain, and wheat and barley are grown; t'eff is the main crop of the woyna dega; and lower still in the hot kolla regions the peasants grow maize, sorghum and ensete.

The scattered homesteads of the farmers resemble small villages dotting the landscape: the main house being surrounded by other houses of the family and the typical thatched roofed grain stores called "gotara". The whole is surrounded by a thick acacia thorn fence. Outside there is a moveable cattle kraal — the so-called 'shifting - stable' method being employed to maintain soil fertility, whereby the enclosure is moved from time to time permitting accumulation and distribution of manure on the land.

Although circular, thatched, and walled with 'chika', the huts are somewhat different to those "tukuls" typical of the northern plateau. One aspect is the stretching of the eaves which are supported on poles, forming a small verandah, where firewood and calves can be kept. The interior is more often partitioned, at least into two rooms, sometimes more.



The central part forms the main circular room with fireplace and sleeping platform of chika. The second room encircles the main room and is divided and used as a bedroom for husband and wife, for storage and for the kitchen. Spices and stimulants are grown in the little garden which surrounds the house.

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